



June 22, 2021

To Members of the UNC Board of Trustees:

As historians and members of the UNC academic community, we are gravely concerned by the extraordinary delay and obstruction in consideration of Nikole Hannah-Jones for a tenured appointment in the UNC School of Journalism. A distinguished alumna of UNC, Hannah-Jones earned a Pulitzer Prize for her outstanding journalism and was recognized with a MacArthur “genius” fellowship. She co-founded the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting, dedicated to increasing the ranks of investigative reporters of color. Yet despite the recommendation of professors at UNC’s School of Journalism and the University’s provost, the Board of Trustees failed to consider her case for tenure.

Along with a wide range of other faculty members, students, and alumni, inside and outside of UNC, we object to the interference in academic freedom and self-governance exhibited in this case. Faculty and academic administrators must govern the tenure process if academic integrity is to be upheld. The Trustees’ inaction in this case threatens to plunge the University back to the damaging era of the Speaker Ban controversy of the mid-1960s, when political concerns overrode the values of free speech and intellectual inquiry.

The destructive consequences of the Board’s inaction are already apparent in the recent decisions by distinguished faculty of color to leave UNC or refuse to join it, based on the Board’s perceived double standard and political bias in its treatment of Ms. Hannah-Jones. These include the impending departure of our own esteemed colleague, Professor Malinda Maynor Lowery, for a chaired professorship at Emory University. The impact of the Trustees’ decision is therefore likely to nullify all the University’s efforts to recruit a more diverse faculty and student body, supposedly a major institutional priority. Instead, it is likely to create a highly toxic worldwide reputation for UNC among *all* students and scholars who value a demonstrable commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion.

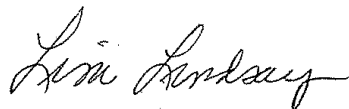
Additionally, *as professional historians*, we have informed perspectives on Ms. Hannah-Jones’s signature work, The 1619 Project. There is a legitimate and ongoing professional debate about the merits of some details of the 1619 Project document, but even the professional historians who have been most critical of some of Ms. Hannah-Jones’s assertions in The 1619 Project have affirmed its rigor and academic integrity and supported her qualification for tenure. Debates over

the interpretation of evidence and the relative significance of various historical phenomena are intrinsic to the historical profession. As historians, we are especially sensitive to the obligation to revise narratives about the past as new evidence comes to light and as new perspectives illuminate formerly neglected issues. The historian who offers a sweeping reinterpretation of a large subject may generate argumentation and critique, but at the same time, this forces an entire field to question its standard assumptions and to engage in productive debate.

The 1619 Project upends comforting myths and redirects attention to the central role that racism has played in the ongoing American story. It has been an essential work during an unprecedented moment of reckoning in American history. The breathtaking intellectual ambition of The 1619 Project is inspiring; the range and quality of the arguments developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones and her collaborators were not only worthy of the Pulitzer but deserving of her tenured appointment at a prestigious school of journalism.

We urgently call on the Board of Trustees to set aside partisan agendas and respect the processes of shared governance and academic freedom by immediately offering Nikole Hannah-Jones the appointment with tenure originally recommended by our faculty colleagues and provost.

Sincerely, and on behalf of my Department of History colleagues,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa A. Lindsay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Lisa A. Lindsay
Professor and Chair, Department of History

Cc: Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz
Chair of the Faculty Mimi Chapman