



Statement Regarding Denial of Tenure Consideration for Nikole Hannah-Jones

June 23, 2021

We, the staff of the Center for the Study of the American South, *Southern Cultures* quarterly, and the Southern Oral History Program write to join the many voices expressing dismay with the Board of Trustees' failure to consider Nikole Hannah-Jones's case for a hire with tenure.

This irregular decision is a body blow to academic freedom and it is the latest signal that Carolina does not value Black excellence. As this embarrassing story circulates, hiring and retaining Black and other diverse faculty and recruiting and retaining Black students and staff will be more difficult. Further, it adds to the already undervalued labor of the Black faculty, staff, and students, who are exceptionally burdened to accomplish the university's mission on a campus where only eight Black women hold the rank of Professor.

For almost thirty years, the Center has supported rigorous scholarship, critical conversations, and creative expressions for a diverse and changing South. Our university home, too, has embraced change. Like any other body of knowledge, what we think we know about the world around us changes in light of new evidence, new voices, and new modes of thought. We welcome Nikole Hannah-Jones as a partner in our crucial work to elevate UNC's reputation as a home for the most innovative research on the region, the nation, and the world.

Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project brings important new voices and perspectives into our historical conversation. But it also reflects the current interpretation of journalists, historians, and other scholars: it is impossible to understand America without understanding enslavement. Unfortunately, in refusing to assess her eligibility for tenure, the Board showed a commitment not only to a fading vision of the past but also to an unwarranted fear of scholarly argument. Let's invite her to campus, with tenure, and participate in this discussion.

Finally, we add that we know that the attention paid to Nikole Hannah-Jones's case may mask the tireless work of exhausted BIPOC faculty, staff, and students. We hope that this failure of leadership will remind us all of the work to be done to support everyone affected by white supremacy's tenacious grasp on what has the potential to be a great university.

Signed,

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