



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 17, 2020

New York Times Corrects “1619 Project,” Destroying Its Central Thesis

Last August, the *New York Times* launched its “[1619 Project](#),” an attempt to reframe American history as being almost solely about slavery and racism. This is no exaggeration. “Out of slavery — and the anti-black racism it required — grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional,” *New York Times* magazine editor-in-chief Jake Silverstein wrote in a [December essay](#) explaining the rationale behind the project.



Now the paper has been forced to issue a small [correction](#) to its lead essay in the project. [That essay](#), by Nikole Hannah-Jones, asserted that “one of the primary reasons” the 13 colonies declared their independence from Great Britain was to preserve the institution of slavery. It has now been modified to read as follows (change italicized): “Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons *some* of the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery.”

Silverstein, who penned the “clarification” notice, added defensively, “We stand behind the basic point” of the essay.

This is the same Silverstein who in December [dismissed](#) criticism of the project, and specifically Hannah-Jones’ essay, from five eminent historians, saying, “We don’t believe that the request for corrections to The 1619 Project is warranted.”

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What changed his mind? The most likely cause is a [March 6 Politico column](#) by Northwestern University history professor Leslie Harris, who served as a fact-checker on the 1619 Project. Harris claims she “vigorously disputed” Hannah-Jones’ assertion that “the protection of slavery” was a significant issue in the Revolution, but the *Times* published the false statement anyway. She bluntly states that while she is sympathetic toward the objectives of the 1619 Project, “the United States was not, in fact, founded to protect slavery.”

“Slavery in the Colonies,” she writes, “faced no immediate threat from Great Britain, so colonists wouldn’t have needed to secede to protect it.” Further:

Far from being fought to preserve slavery, the Revolutionary War became a primary disrupter of slavery in the North American Colonies. Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation, a British military strategy designed to unsettle the Southern Colonies by inviting enslaved people to flee to British lines, propelled hundreds of enslaved people off plantations and turned some Southerners to the patriot side. It also led most of the 13 Colonies to arm and employ free and enslaved black people, with the promise of freedom to those who served in their armies. While neither side fully kept its promises, thousands of enslaved people were freed as a result of these policies.



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The ideals gaining force during the Revolutionary era also inspired Northern states from Vermont to Pennsylvania to pass laws gradually ending slavery.

The World Socialist Web Site, of all places, offered an [excellent takedown](#) of Silverstein's "clarification." "The *Times* editor," wrote Tom Mackaman, "is attempting to palm off a minor change in wording as a sufficient correction of a historically untenable rendering of the American Revolution."

"Protecting slavery could not have been a significant cause of the American Revolution, because, far from posing a threat to slavery, the British Empire controlled the slave trade and profited immensely from its commerce in people, as well as from its Caribbean plantations which remained loyal during the war for independence," he explained. Furthermore, Lord Dunmore's proclamation "explicitly preserved slavery among loyal British subjects."

Mackaman faults the 1619 Project for its obsession with slavery, noting that the causes of the Revolution cannot be boiled down to a single issue and that the "Revolution ultimately led to the destruction of slavery ... an institution that had existed since the ancient world, and in the new world for 350 years."

The *Times'* ahistorical project would be bad enough if it were only read by the paper's subscribers. Unfortunately, it has also been turned into a curriculum that is being used in public schools across the nation, and thus the "correction may be too little, too late for thousands of students," observes the [Daily Signal](#). With many of those students now getting an unexpected break from school because of the coronavirus, the website suggests that parents take the "opportunity to talk with their children about the 1619 Project's claims and to find alternatives."

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