

1619 Project lead writer Nikole Hannah-Jones paid \$25,000 for virtual lecture

Trévon Austin
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New York Times journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, lead author of the *Times's* “1619 Project,” was paid \$25,000 for an online Zoom lecture given to the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication.

Through a Freedom of Information request, the right-wing news outlet Campus Reform obtained documentation detailing Hannah-Jones’s terms of compensation for the February 19 lecture. Additionally, the documents revealed that Hannah-Jones was partnered with the Lavin Agency, a talent agency that is “the world’s largest intellectual talent agency, representing leading thinkers for speaking engagements, personal appearances, consulting, and endorsements,” according to its website. Hannah-Jones’s relationship with the agency suggests she regularly schedules events and is paid for them.

Part of the agreement between Hannah-Jones and the University of Oregon dictated that the lecture, titled “1619 and the Legacy That Built a Nation,” could not be recorded and redistributed. However, a promotional flyer advertised a discussion on “the lasting legacy of Black enslavement on the nation—specifically, how Black Americans pushed for the democracy we have today.”

News of the lecture came days after Hulu announced that it partnered with production studio Lionsgate and billionaire Oprah Winfrey to create a docuseries based on the 1619 Project. In a statement, Hulu said the project was a “landmark undertaking...of the brutal racism that endures in so many aspects of American life today.”

When the 1619 Project was initially released in August 2019, Hannah-Jones’s lead essay declared that race was the primary division in society and black people were the sole progressive force in US history. She denounced the country’s revolutionary founding in

1776 and claimed that the United States truly began when the first African slaves were sold to English colonists in 1619. Racism, she said, “runs in the very DNA of this country.”

Soon after the project’s launch, the *Times* had turned 1619 into a marketable brand, and schools planned to adopt its lead arguments in their curriculums. The *World Socialist Web Site* intervened against the 1619 Project and exposed its reactionary politics and predication in historical falsification. However, the project remains a profitable venture for Hannah-Jones and the *Times*.

Hannah Jones argues that the overriding social category in the world is race. But being paid \$25,000 for a lecture she did not even physically attend is a “privilege” that separates her from the majority of African Americans in the United States, who are overwhelmingly members of the working class. What Hannah-Jones can make in one lecture is almost the same as a worker making \$15 an hour takes home in a year after taxes.

In a related development, Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (BLM) co-founder Patrisse Khan-Cullors purchased four high-end properties in the US worth \$3.2 million, according to a recent report in the *New York Post*. She was also seen with her spouse in the Bahamas, viewing property at an exclusive resort where celebrities such as Tiger Woods and Justin Timberlake own homes.

In 2016, Cullors married Janaya Khan, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto, and purchased a \$510,000 home in a Los Angeles suburb. Two years later, Cullors purchased a four-bedroom home for \$590,000 in southern Los Angeles. Last year, Cullors and her spouse acquired a “custom ranch” in Georgia featuring a private hangar and community runway for small

airplanes.

In January, the pair got their hands on a \$1.4 million homestead a short drive from Malibu, one of the most affluent communities in the US. The property was advertised as featuring bamboo floors and “soaring ceilings, skylights and plenty of windows” with canyon views. The 2,400-square-foot property includes a three-bedroom and two-bath main house and a separate one-bedroom/one-bath apartment for long-term guests.

Just three weeks ago, Samaria Rice and Lisa Simpson, respective mothers of Tamir Rice and Richard Rishner, accused Cullors of profiting from the deaths of their children and other black people murdered by police. The pair criticized BLM for raising over \$90 million in 2020 but doing little to help families impacted by police violence.

Khan and Cullors created the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted for the killing of Trayvon Martin. Since then, BLM has promoted racialist politics and raised substantial sums of money from large corporations like Google, Amazon, and Facebook. After BLM’s 2020 financial report was released, Cullors was accused of misappropriating funds by grassroots members of her organization.

In response to the allegations, she claimed that there were misunderstandings about BLM’s finances and that the organization was “scraping for money” in the past few years. If BLM truly was low on funds, Cullors purchasing luxury properties certainly did not help.

The wealth and privilege of the leading proponents of racialism demonstrate the reactionary character of identity politics. It is entirely divorced from the real concerns and experiences of the working class. Fearful of a unified workers’ movement, the ruling class seeks to sow artificial racial divisions among workers through the promotion of identity politics. Additionally, middle class layers seeking a bigger slice of the pie see identity as a means of advancing their own wealth and social position.

The American ruling class is terrified of the growth of a working-class movement. The fight against police violence, racism, and poverty can only be waged through the building of a socialist movement, independent of the capitalist parties, that unifies workers on their common class interests.



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