

Richard Y. Stevens, J.D.
Chair, Board of Trustees
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

Cc: Board of Trustees, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Dear Mr. Stevens:

The 482 members of the faculty of UNC-Chapel Hill who have signed this letter object in the most strenuous terms to the withholding of tenure from Nikole Hannah-Jones in conjunction with her proposed appointment to a tenured full professorship as a Knight Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. We urge the Board to correct this situation by voting this week to approve her appointment as full professor **with tenure** to the Knight Chair.

As is clear from the broad criticism they have received and continue to receive as well as the future consequences they will provoke, the Board's actions to date are unacceptable in an institution that has been and strives to remain an internationally distinguished university and source of benefit to its state.

The history of this case is well known. Following enthusiastic endorsement by faculty in the School and review by a standing, university-wide committee on such matters, the Provost reviewed the appointment and forwarded it to the Board, thereby formally proposing it to the Board for approval. Rather than describe grounds for denying the proposed tenure, the Board has, so far, not acted on the proposal, effectively rejecting it.

The Board's denial by inaction constitutes a reversal of a proper, extensively documented and considered proposed appointment by the University and its Faculty, a reversal without offered justification and without apparent grounds. This intrusion of the Board into decisions properly the purview of the Faculty puts at risk the bedrock assumptions of academic freedom and free intellectual inquiry and integrity. These assumptions are the base for the long, superb reputation of UNC-Chapel Hill and of the pre-eminence of US colleges and universities worldwide. It cannot stand.

A defense of the Board's action has included some criticisms by other historians of Ms. Hannah-Jones' 1619 Project, in spite of the Pulitzer Prize it received. Criticism of colleagues' work is at the heart of scholarly discourse and a crucial feature of progress, not legitimate grounds for rejection or dismissal. As the University's Department of History wrote in a letter of June 22:

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 ... [and] 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.

In addition to the intrusion into the affairs of the University Faculty, additional features of the Board's actions call for critical attention and review:

- The Board's denial of Hannah-Jones exemplifies a cultural, political and racial climate that questions the scholarship, accomplishments, and personhood of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). BIPOC faculty and staff are now even more concerned about the university's ability to address racial equity. Indeed, several prominent BIPOC women faculty and administrators have accepted positions at other institutions. Their consideration

of these positions may have predated the Board's actions but their decisions to leave did not. Reports from the Carolina Black Faculty and Staff Caucus indicate many more are seeking positions elsewhere. This climate that is averse to BIPOC groups also discourages other faculty, staff, and students from coming to the University – or remaining.

- The Board of Governors contemporaneously rejected the [reappointment of Eric Muller](#) to chair the board of UNC Press even though he was unanimously re-elected by that board. Muller had spoken out on campus issues, including the 2018 removal of the confederate monument and the current actions concerning Ms. Hannah-Jones. The actions of both Boards along with the recent history around the confederate monument and the secretly arranged \$2.5 million gift to the Sons of the Confederacy cast a shadow over all academic processes and activities at UNC-Chapel Hill, including the imminent search for a Provost.
- The Board's actions threaten the value of the University, its students' degrees and faculty and staff appointments. As an example of the wide criticism received, [23 Knight Chairs in Journalism](#) at other universities wrote the following in a May 20 statement to the Board:
Hannah-Jones ... has equivalent academic credentials to the prior two chairs at the school. Both received tenure upon appointment. The unequal treatment is clear in this case... The trustees of the University of North Carolina should be ashamed of their decision and should move quickly to accept the recommendation of the school's faculty, Dean and Provost and approve Hannah-Jones' application for tenure.

The President of the Student Body, Lamar Richards, put it well: "...a dynamic, forward-facing strategic plan one day, a new Chief Diversity Officer the next, and maybe the changing of a few building names the day after ... do not and will not ultimately make a difference if racial oppression continues to flow through our university. To pursue or hope for 'reform' from this university is akin to requesting a bandage for a racial wound that is far too deep."

UNC-Chapel Hill has tried for years to cooperate with the Board of Governors and Board of Trustees in hopes of compromises that would preserve campus values and resources. The case of Nikole Hannah-Jones and the refusal to approve the reappointment of Eric Muller to chair the board of the UNC Press indicate the stance of reason and compromise has not been reciprocated.

The Board now has the opportunity to reverse these patterns that have damaged UNC-Chapel Hill.

The Board of Trustees must take immediate action to approve the highly deserved and duly proposed appointment as full professor with tenure of Nikole Hannah-Jones as Knight Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media.

Sincerely,

482 Members of the Faculty of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (alphabetically by last name)

Linda Adair, Professor, Department of Nutrition

Adaora A. Adimora, Professor, Departments of Medicine and Epidemiology.

Deb Aikat, Associate Professor, School of Media and Journalism

Ifeoma Ajunwa, Associate Professor, School of Law

Travis Albritton, Associate Professor, School of Social Work

Barbara Ambros, Professor, Department of Religious Studies

Kenneth Andrews, Mason Distinguished Professor, Department of Sociology

Javier A. Arce-Nazario, Associate Professor, Department of Geography

Yaakov Ariel, Professor, Department of Religious Studies

Jennifer E. Arnold, Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

Gary N. Asher, Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine

Magdalene Assimon, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine

Karen Auerbach, Amb. Eizenstat Scholar in Jewish History, Department of History

Christy Avery, Associate Professor Epidemiology

Florence E. Babb, Harrington Distinguished Professor, Department of Anthropology
Robert Babcock, Alumni Distinguished Professor, Department of Classics
Bill Balthrop, Professor, Department of Communication
Navin Bapat, Dowd Professor - Study of Peace & War, Department of Political Science
Emily Baragwanath, Associate Professor, Department of Classics
Anna Bardone-Cone, Bowman and Gordon Gray Distinguished Term Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Ralph Baric, Kenan Distinguished Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Deborah Barrett, Clinical Associate Professor, School of Social Work
Clare L. Barrington, Professor, Department of Health Behavior
Patricia Basta, Assistant Professor, Department of Epidemio
Daniel Bauer, Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Karl Bauman, Professor Emeritus, Department of Health Behavior
Frank R. Baumgartner, Richard J. Richardson Distinguished Professor, Department of Political Science
Victoria L. Bautch, Distinguished Professor, Department of Biology
Melinda Beck, Professor, Department of Nutrition
Misha Becker, Professor, Department of Linguistics
Sylvia Becker-Dreps, Associate Professor, Departments of Family Medicine and Epidemiology
Trude Bennett, Associate Professor Emerita, Department of Maternal and Child Health
Jeannette T. Bensen, Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Peggy Bentley, Carla Smith Chamblee Distinguished Professor, Department of Nutrition
Tracy Bersley, Assistant Professor, Department of Dramatic Art
Neil Bilotta, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
Stephen Birdsall, Professor Emeritus, Department of Geography
Carole Blair, Professor, Department of Communication
Sarah E. Bledsoe, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
Mellicent O'Brien Blythe, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
Charlotte Boettiger, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Tara Bohley, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
Cheryl Mason Bolick, Associate Professor, School of Education
Jessica A. Boon, Associate Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Karen M Booth, Associate Professor, Department of Women's and Gender Studies
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Jane Brown, James L. Knight Professor Emeritus, Hussman School of Journalism and Media
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W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Umstead Distinguished Professor, Department of History
John Bruno, Professor, Department of Biology
Chad Bryant, Associate Professor, Department of History
Mara Buchbinder, Professor, Department of Social Medicine
Melissa Bullard, Professor, Department of History
Gabriel Bump, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature
Christina Burch, Professor, Department of Biology
Jamie Burgess-Flowers, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
Emily Burrill, Associate Professor, Department of History and Women and Gender Studies
Emily Burrill, Associate Professor, Departments of History and Women's and Gender Studies
Ximena Bustamante-Marin, Assistant Professor, Department of Nutrition
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Neal Caren, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
Erica Richman Carroll, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
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Lora Cohen-Vogel, Distinguished Professor, School of Education
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Evan Feldman, Professor, Department of Music

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Aimee M. McHale, Assistant Professor, Program in Public Health Leadership
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China Medel, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication
Joseph Megel, Artist in Residence, Department of Communication
Benjamin Mason Meier, Zachary Taylor Smith Distinguished Professor, Department of Public Policy
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Katie A Meyer, Assistant Professor, Department of Nutrition
Townsend Middleton, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology.
Hugo Mendez, Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Charles Mitchell, Professor, Department of Biology
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Deepanjan Mukhopadhyay, Professor of the Practice, Department of Art & Art History
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Alan Nelson, Professor, Department of Philosophy
Christopher T. Nelson, Professor, Department of Anthropology
Ram Neta, Professor, Department of Philosophy
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Shu Wen Ng, Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition.

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Santiago Olivella, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
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Andrew Olshan, Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Elizabeth Olson, Professor, Department of Geography.
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Theresa Palmer, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
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Patricia Parker, Associate Professor, Department of Communication
Jonathan Parr, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
Eileen R. Carlton Parsons, Professor, School of Education
Keith Payne, Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Lisa Pearce, Professor, Department of Sociology
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Mark Peifer, Hooker Distinguished Professor, Department of Biology
Susan D. Pennybacker, Distinguished Professor, Department of History
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Tony Perucci, Associate Professor, Department of Communication
Audrey Pettifor, Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Erica Pettigrew, Assistant Professor, Department of Family Medicine
John Pickles, Patterson Professor, Department of Geography
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Edward V. Rankus, Associate Professor, Department of Communication
Peter Redfield, Professor, Department of Anthropology
David Reeve, Distinguished Professor, Department of Philosophy
Jason Reed, Associate Professor, Department of Biology
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Gwendolyn Schwinke, Assistant Professor, Department of Dramatic Art
Iqbal Sevea, Associate Professor, Department of History
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Chris Shea, Associate Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management
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June Stevens, Professor, Department of Nutrition
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William Sturkey, Associate Professor, Department of History
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Tricia Sullivan, Associate Professor, Department of Public Policy
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Jim Thomas, Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology
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Karl Umble, Associate Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management
Gabriela Valdivia, Professor, Department of Geography
Herica Valladares, Assistant Professor, Department of Classics
Sarah Verbiest, Clinical Associate Professor, School of Social Work.
Lynne Vernon-Feagans, Professor Emerita, School of Education
Adam Versényi, Professor and Chair, Department of Dramatic Art
Robin Visser, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies
Lisa Vizer, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine
Rebecca L. Walker, Professor, Department of Social Medicine
Lynne Walter, Adjunct Instructor, School of Social Work
Daniel Wallace, Distinguished Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature
Heather Wasser, Assistant Professor, Department of Nutrition
Harry L. Watson, Atlanta Distinguished Professor in Southern Culture, Department of History
Morris Weinberger, Professor and Chair, Department of Health Policy and Management
Jen Weinberg-Wolf, Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy
Sam Weir, Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine
Sharon S Weir, Research Assistant Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Deborah M. Weissman, Ivey Distinguished Professor, School of Law
Ellen R. Welch, Associate Professor, Department of Romance Studies
Daniel Westreich, Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Brett Whalen, Professor, Department of History
Stephanie B Wheeler, Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management
Eric A. Whitsel, Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Margaret Wiener, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology
Lindsay Wilson, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine
Erica H. Wise, Professor Emerita, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
F. Charles Wiss, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
Brent Wissick, Professor, Department of Music
Susan Wolf, Edna J. Koury Distinguished Professor, Department of Philosophy
Jessica Wolfe, Marcel Bataillon Professor, Departments of English and Comparative Literature, Classics, and Romance Studies
Richard Wolfenden, Alumni Distinguished Professor, Department of Biochemistry
Mollie Wood, Assistant Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Alex Worsnip, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy
Mark Wightman, Professor Emeritus, Department of Chemistry
Gesche Würfel, Teaching Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Art History
Claudia Yaghoobi, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies
Nadia Yaqub, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies
Karin Yeatts, Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Kristin Young, Assistant Professor, Department of Epidemiology
Ciara Zachary, Assistant Professor, Department of Health Policy and Management

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Catherine Zimmer, Professor, Odum Institute and Department of Sociology
Ronni Zuckerman, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
Lillian Zwemer, Assistant Professor, Department of Biology