

ISOJ 2020: Day 4, Keynote Session

Covering race from 1619-present

- **Keynote speaker:** [Nikole Hannah-Jones](#), reporter, New York Times Magazine
 - **Chair:** [Jeff Jarvis](#), director, Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism, CUNY's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism
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Rosental Alves Good Morning, America. So keeping up with my traditional Hollywood-inspired salutation, I should say "good morning, world," because we have people from all over the world at ISOJ Online.

We have just had a fascinating academic discussion on the topic of gender, media and politics in the digital age. If you missed that, it's already available on YouTube. Before we begin our keynote session of the day, I would like to remind you all that panels, keynote sessions and workshops will all be interpreted to Spanish. If you would like to join and watch in Spanish, you have to click the interpretation globe in the meeting options down below at the window of Zoom, and select Spanish language.

Please also note that we are live streaming on ISOJ and Knight Center YouTube channels. So in case you have any issues with Zoom, you can go to ISOJ.org because we have banners there with links to YouTube. Please remember to follow and use the hashtag #ISOJ2020 to stay connected with the conference on social media.

I also want to take a moment to give an incredibly huge thank you to our our sponsors, Knight Foundation, Google News Initiative, Microsoft, Univision, JSK fellowships at Stanford, the Trust Project and the Moody College of Communication of the University of Texas at Austin.

And now I would like to introduce you to my friend Jeff Jarvis, who is going to moderate this session with Nikole Hannah-Jones, the Pulitzer winner, and she has been our hero all this time with the coverage of racial issues, etc.. And so, Jeff, take over.

Jeff Jarvis Thank you, my friend Rosental. I want to start by just saying thank you to Rosental, and congratulations Rosental and the entire team on creating a phenomenal ISOJ. With no Perugia and no ISOJ, it was a very sad time for us in journalism with the pandemic. And you made it happen, and it's miraculous. So thank you.

Thank you also for inviting me to moderate this session with Nikole Hannah-Jones. As I told you, I'm not worthy. Nikole, you are a hero of mine, a journalistic hero. For your courage, your insight, your vision, your innovation, your determination, your generosity, and, of course, your reporting and your writing. And so I'm honored to be part of this discussion with you today. As is the case with people who are as accomplished as Nikole, they need no introduction. But for the sake of introduction, of course, Nikole won the Pulitzer Prize for her phenomenal essay and phenomenal project, The 1619 Project. The jury said it was a sweeping, provocative and personal essay for the groundbreaking 1619 project. She received the MacArthur grant for coverage of the persistence of racial segregation, particularly in education. She's a newspaper person in her blood from the

Raleigh News and Observer, of the Portland Oregonian, ProPublica, and, of course, New York Times and New York Times Magazine. So, Nikole, thank you for being here.

Nikole Hannah-Jones Thank you, Jeff, and it's always weird. I don't think I should be anybody's hero, but I appreciate that introduction.

Jeff Jarvis No, I mean it because I am jealous of my students at Newark who have you as a model to aspire to, and I think that's really important. Let me start with the students, if I may. I've been reading their definitions of journalism for my hypnotizing and brainwashing of them coming up next month. And they often use the phrase, "we write the first draft of history." And that's made me think about that, especially in the context of your work. The problem with that phrase, it strikes me, is that it means we journalists ignore history, and we think that everything is new and that qualifies it as news. So that's our turf. You did the opposite. In The 1619 Project, you taught a tremendous historical lesson. But more important, you recast history with a different lens and used history to do that and recast the entire American experience thus. So the first question I have for you is what should the journalist's relationship to history be?

Nikole Hannah-Jones That's a great question. I don't think that anyone would know my name if I wasn't in love with history, and if I didn't spend a great deal of my journalism, not just The 1619 Project, but everything that I write, I try to build that historical architecture into the story. So our relationship, the history as journalists is we might be writing the first draft of how historians one day will study our moment, but we are not writing the first draft of history. And we should be studying history constantly. If our role is to explain society to itself, to help the public understand why things are as they are, then we have to at the same time tell how we got here. Because nothing that we see, or experience, or that's happening in any aspect of our lives is occurring in a vacuum. It's all occurring because a lot of things happened before, and I think that history is critical. I think all good journalists read history, or should.

Jeff Jarvis Or should. But I think part of the the moral of The 1619 project is that we didn't.

Nikole Hannah-Jones Yeah, true.

Jeff Jarvis So you cover education, but it strikes me that, of course, you've never just covered education. You've covered inequity around education. But you did present a model of how to go about a beat through that lens and with that perspective. So I wonder if you were advising other journalists in other beats in other areas on how to bring that same lens and that same coverage to economics, and health, and environment, and politics, especially now, especially as the inequities, which have always been there, are becoming more blaringly obvious in the pandemic, how would you advise them to recast their beats and how they go about their work?

Nikole Hannah-Jones I've always said that if you're not writing about racial inequality, it doesn't matter what beat you're on, you're not fully covering your beat. I mean, it is so foundational to our political, cultural, social systems that if you're covering the economy and not the way that Black people's experience of the economy is completely different from nearly every other group. If you're covering education, if you're covering politics, you have to have some expertise and understanding of how the racial dynamics and racial inequality works. For most of my career, I was not a race beat reporter, but I covered race on every beat that I had. It wouldn't matter what beat you put me on, I could cover race and felt that we had to.

So, you know, we don't treat covering racial inequality as an expertise in this country unless that is your specific beat. But as I was saying when I was talking to the Education Writers Association yesterday, if you gain expertise in testing because you're an education reporter, how can you not also gain expertise in racial inequality?

So it has to be part of your beat if you want to cover them fully. I was determined that when I was writing about racial inequality, it wasn't just going to be a catalog of disparities. We all know that racial disparities exist. We all know that anything you can measure, Black and indigenous people are at the bottom. But how, and why, and who's making decisions right now that maintain that inequality? These are all necessary if we are to truly cover our society. Because as The 1619 Project argues, slavery and anti-Black racism is as foundational in American institution as anything else, and so if you're not writing about those things, you're not actually truly covering our country.

Jeff Jarvis Yesterday, you retweeted, and I'm grateful you did, a paper by Jordan Taylor that looked at the economic history of slavery and newspapers, and the kind of shocking moment of realizing that at the bottom of an ad to sell a human being or recover a human being to slavery was "contact the publisher." And thus the publisher was an agent of the trade. And that was, you know, an even yes, Benjamin Franklin. I mean, I'm sorry, yes, Benjamin Franklin, folks, was part of the trade of slavery. And that's shocking for our industry. So the light dawns on each of us in every sector of society about our role. And I was going to ask this anyway, but especially in light of that, what does reparations from journalism look like? You wrote that magnificent essay in the magazine about reparations from the nation, but each sector, each industry, each institution must ask the same question. So this is our institution here at ISOJ, so I'd love to hear you riff on the idea of what do we as journalism owe in reparations?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Well, that's a fascinating question, and I don't even know that I can give you a good answer because I haven't thought about that in particular. I think it's a question that you ask across industries. Because, as you know, our financial systems, universities, Brooks Brothers, right, created clothes for enslaved people down south. Like shipping companies. There are so many industries that were entangled in the institution of slavery, even though we've been taught to think that the only people who benefited or bear any responsibility for slavery are people who actually owned human beings. But of course, that's not the case. So, man, I feel like that's such a question that I want to be more thoughtful. What does reparations look like?

I mean, I felt very strongly that reparations has to be, no matter what the institution, monetary in some way. That all of these, you know, decisions to make reparations, things like, "Oh, well, we'll rename a building, or we'll give a scholarship, or we'll, you know, just study it." And that's repair. It's not actually repair. But what does one ask from the news industry? Is it hiring? Wow, I don't know, that's such a great question. I think it's a question that I'd like to think more about actually. Because I also feel like hiring isn't going to do it either. Right, because that's not repair. That's offering a few people who are probably pretty damn privileged as it is, you know, a slot at a job. So, yeah, I think that's something I'd like to think more about. But it's a great question. And I think that's part of why we've seen so much opposition to the idea of reparations, is even as we deny how foundational slavery was and how it costs nearly every American institution, even as we deny that, we also understand that that's not true. And that if you open this can of worms, lots of different organizations, private and public, would be paying, and I think we have more to deal with that.

Jeff Jarvis So let's talk about how we've done as an industry, which is, and spoiler here, badly. First I want to, as an entry into that, I want to go back a little bit. I was looking at your talk from the Oregonian, and you told Brentin Mock in your conversation about a week or two ago that Portland nearly drove you out of journalism.

Nikole Hannah-Jones Yes.

Jeff Jarvis And I hope you don't mind me bringing that up because I think it's illustrative of how our industry has done in terms of how you were treated and how your work was treated. We're doing a study at Newark on journalists of color who rise and then leave. And it's hard enough to get talent into the industry, and then how we treat that talent and how we lose that talent is a tragedy. So how were you treated? What was frustrating, and what almost drove you out?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Sure, so the thing about journalism is, even though we are constantly told that we are too far to the left, too progressive, that may or may not be true. But when it comes to race, it is often not true. And I think what I experienced at The Oregonian is what Black and brown people experience across industries. And that is that industries are looking for small levels of racial diversity, but they want to phenotype diversity. They want you to be Black, but not act too Black, and certainly not pitch stories and want to write stories about the Black experience. So they want people who are racially different, but ideologically the same. And that just wasn't me.

So the only reason I became a journalist was to write about racism and the Black experience. There are plenty of other people to write about everything else, but that's what drove me to journalism. And when I got to The Oregonian, there was a sense that these stories weren't mainstream enough. That this is not what our audience wants to read. That I was biased for wanting to pitch stories about the Black experience and Black folks. And it got to the point where I was told, like, "You're hurting your career. You're not going to advance in this way." And I think I may have gotten on the front page of that newspaper three times. And I don't know that for sure, so if anybody fact-checks that, it could be off. But in the six years I was there. And that's a very common experience, is Black and Latinos, in particular, and indigenous people get into these newsrooms never on par with our representation in our communities. And then when we get in the newsrooms, we're expected to conform to the mainstream ideas of what coverage look like. And by mainstream, I mean white normative.

And I just, I couldn't do that. And to be clear, I got to the point where I went into our system and printed every story I'd ever written the entire time I was there. And if the story even mentioned Black people or had Black people in it, even if it wasn't a story about race, I put it in a pile, and I counted it. And it was 10% of my stories, which means 90% of my stories were not about race or Black folks, and I was being told that was too much. So if I couldn't write about us, I didn't want to be a journalist. And a lot of my colleagues of color had already left the industry, facing similar frustrations. And the only reason I didn't leave was that I just couldn't think of what else I wanted to do with my life. Like, this is literally the only thing that I wanted to do with my life. But, yeah, I nearly left. I was nearly pushed out. And, you know, Jeff, that this is a common story and common experience.

Jeff Jarvis Absolutely. And we've seen it in school at Newark, where we have a wonderfully diverse student body. And the value of our institution is the lived experience of that student body. And we send them out into the field, where we see that too often, of

course, their careers are not nurtured. They're not sponsored. They're not understood. And we all have work to do. My school has work to do. Everybody has work to do. But Lord knows our institutions do in journalism. And Meredith Clark, wonderful Meredith Clark at University of Virginia, is working with the NLA. We can't even get newspapers to count, which is the most basic level. Let alone how are we treating people once they're there and so on?

Nikole Hannah-Jones So let me put a pause on that, because I think that's such an important point. So our very industry is based on transparency and accountability, and we write stories all the time about the tech industry hardly has any Black or Latino people. Or this industry. But we refuse to be accountable and transparent ourselves about who we hire, and I just think that is just so hypocritical. And it's something that journalists of color, like myself, and other journalists who also believe in transparency have fought for a long time, and there's never a good reason why we won't do it, except we're embarrassed that in a democracy, the industry that is most supposedly representing our society, continues to not hire Black and Latinos and retain large numbers of Black and Latinos. And I just think it is a scourge on our industry that we refuse to be transparent about these things.

Jeff Jarvis Amen. So after generations of trying and failing, is it time to give up on the legacy industry and start new things? And let's accept The New York Times is the grand exception to all rules. So not dealing with the Times, but dealing with newspapers, and newsrooms, broadcast as well, as a whole. Do you have any hope that we can repair them, that we can change them, or will the repair come through ownership of media by journalists of color in new institutions? You know, I'm reminded of the Knight Foundation was rumored to be considering buying McClatchy. And as honorable as that sounds, I thought, "Well, 300-million dollars is going to go straight into the pockets of the debt holders. And then they're going to own this newspaper, and how much change are they going to do, versus what could you do with 300-million dollars in entrepreneurship?" So first, I want to ask you generically, then I want to ask you personally, where do we put our attention and our resources? Is it toward the legacy still, or is it toward the new?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Well, I think that's a tough question, clearly. And New York Times aside, as you said, we don't want to completely segregate our sources of news. You do want someone like myself at The Oregonian who was writing about these things for the broader community, and that we're not just writing about these issues. Because this is America. This is what I think is so frustrating to me, is this is not like asterick news about the Black community. Right. This is news about our communities and our country. And we can look at what's happening in America right now and see that these stories are central. They're not stories that should be siloed. So I believe in a strong press operated by marginalized people. Absolutely. I think that is critical. And I wish we had a stronger press and more resources going into Black, and Latino, and Asian, and indigenous owned media. But we also have to push these legacy institutions. Right. I mean, I know you said except in The New York Times, but if you think about the role that the News and Observer played in North Carolina, or The Oregonian played in Portland, or The New York Times plays for the country, if we're not here telling those stories, we are being left out of our community conversations and our national conversations. And when you think about what do politicians read, what do those who access and move the levers of power read? If we're not in those institutions, then I think we've clearly seen what happens.

At the same time, I do strongly believe that we need to also be investing in our own organizations and our own institutions so that we can drive our own coverage. And ownership is always important. The very first Black newspaper in this country, The

Freedom's Journal, said, "We wish to plead our own cause. No longer shall others speak for us." And I think that that is also critical.

Just based on my own experience. If The Oregonian had successfully, or my experience there has successfully pushed me out of the industry, I think a lot about what journalism wouldn't exist. And that someone like me who couldn't get on the front page of a regional paper in the Northwest is a few years later able to bring The 1619 Project into the world. I'm the same person, but those experiences could have driven me out. And I know so many people, and I know you do as well, who had equal talent, equal ambition, who are not journalists anymore. And if we had a viable Black press that could pay the same amount as a mainstream press, that could offer a huge platform, I think we could save a lot of journalists from leaving the profession, and our understanding of our country would be better.

Jeff Jarvis Yes, and I think we need to study that. Let me give a quick plug for Newark. We have our Center for Community Media there, with a Latino Media Project under Graciela Mochkofsky, and we've just managed to hire Aaron Foley for a Black media initiative. So we believe and care about this. So let me ask about your personal ambition in two ways. God help us, Marty Baron is rumored to be thinking about retiring. I wish he wouldn't, but he may. So fine, let's say he does. If you were offered the editorship of The Washington Post. What would you do with it?

Nikole Hannah-Jones I would never be offered that editorship of The Washington Post.

Jeff Jarvis Oh, I can dream.

Nikole Hannah-Jones No, that would never happen. Yeah, it would never happen. But, you know. I've never wanted to run a news organization. I really haven't. I've never wanted to be an editor. I love being a journalist, and a journalist that is going out and reporting and writing. I have a lot of ambitions, but being an editor or running a legacy news organization is certainly not it. I would at some point love to start a Black-run investigative news organization, but even that I don't want to run it. I want to help get it into the world and help support it. But for the first time in my life, I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do. And I think that I would be so intensely jealous of my reporters that I would be a terrible editor, and I've had those types of editors where I'm like, "You probably should have just kept reporting because you clearly want to still be a reporter." I just love being a reporter, but I also know that I have a certain platform and position and that I can bring resources to bear on something. And I want to do that, but I don't want to run it. So Washington Post, if you were going to come calling, don't worry about it.

Jeff Jarvis As I'm sure your e-mail box is full, you have plenty of people you could recommend for the job.

I want to go to the objectivity forever battle is just up again. I'm proud to say that our school assigned Wesley Lowery's essay and Lewis Raven Wallace's books on this. And I've been a little bit of a heretic on the topic that objectivity is something that comes out of the white box of the newsroom, and someone there has the power to decree what's objective. I'm going to cheat my lesson. If you had my students in front of you and we were having that discussion, that every damn journalism school is going to have forever about objectivity, what would your lesson to them be about how to look at that question?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Well, the first thing that I always am curious about is how are we defining objectivity? What's the actual definition? And do we all have the same sense of what that definition is? I, of course, coming as a Black journalist and out of the Black traditional journalism have never been naive enough to believe that such a thing is possible. Because it is not. And we all know that the only things we don't have opinions or feelings about are things that we don't know enough about yet. And as soon as we know enough about something, of course, we're human beings. We have thoughts and opinions, and objectivity has been used, to me, to keep a very white voice in media, to use as a shield against criticism of coverage of why we covered certain things and how we cover certain things, when none of it is objective. Everything that we do is subjective. Everything from what beats we have? Every newspaper have a crime or police beat. Almost none have a poverty beat. That's not an objective decision. Who we talk to in a story? What's the lead of the story? What's the focus of it? And then does it go on the front page, above the fold or inside? None of these are objective decisions. They are all subjective decisions, but then we pretend we have objectivity. So I've always believed that, you know, to ask a Black person to be objective covering segregation, for instance, is silly. And to think that a white journalist is objective, covering segregation is equally as silly.

What is critical and what's always been critical to me is, is your reporting fair, and is it accurate? Those are the only two things that we can honestly say that we are trying to do, and that doesn't pretend we have a view from nowhere. I don't find that useful. Now, there's a difference, of course, between understanding that personally we are not objective and that our coverage is not objective, and telling the news consumer everything about what we feel about the things that we cover. I don't think in general, I mean, I'm in a different place in my career right now. But I don't think in general, I don't want to know what a political reporter thinks about the candidates that he or she is covering. But I know that that reporter has thoughts, right. And I know that that reporter probably votes. And so it's just to me, why are we playing the game? Like, again, it's the transparency. Like we know that the political reporter has thoughts. Let's not pretend that they don't. We know that the coverage is not objective. Let's not pretend that it isn't. But let's just be honest about that. And the thing that I always try to do is just be fair and as accurate as possible. And I wish we could have that language more. Because objectivity has been wielded against journalists of color continuously in a way that it is not against white journalists, unless they come from a marginalized group.

Jeff Jarvis To do the catalog of all the, and I don't want to do it now, but the catalog of the things that are wielded against journalists of color. You mentioned before, "Oh, that's not big enough. Not enough people care." Right? "That's not objective. You have bias." It's interesting to look at the things that, you know are going to happen.

So let me do ask this in the same vein. Career advice to the students I'm going to talk to next month at my school? More than half are journalists of color. They come from underrepresented backgrounds. They're going to face these challenges when they go into newsrooms, and they do go into newsrooms, old and new. So what would you advise them?

Nikole Hannah-Jones So as you know, Jeff, I'm very candid. So you may have some people who will give you a very inspirational advice, but that's not me. What I'm going to say is that it's going to be really challenging to do the work and get the support to do the work that you want to do, particularly if that work is about marginalized communities. The best advice I can give you is you can only control the things that you can control, and the thing that you can control is your own excellence. Allowing me to get in the position to do

this work was three things. I worked hard, and I had better ideas than a lot of people, and when I pitch something, I made it as excellent as possible. Persistence. I just didn't give up. I got told "no" on stories that I knew were good stories so many times, and I would go back and try to find what's another angle to pitch this? What's another way I can show this? Or sometimes, you know, a lot of us, we work on stories for a while before we even pitch them to our editors because we know. We've heard enough. We studied them enough to know what are their objections going to be? What are the questions they're going to ask me?

So it was that, and then it was really luck. If Stephen Engelberg had not called me and asked me to come interview at ProPublica, I may very well have been driven out of the industry, if I didn't find a place where I could go and do the work that I wanted to do. So it's those three things.

It is going to be very hard. You have to learn how to do the foundational things in order to be able to prove to people who don't, by instinct, trust that you will be a great journalist, that you can be a great journalist. So I covered education. I covered the county beat. You know, I did all of that work on things that I wasn't as interested in so that I could get in the position to do the work that I really wanted to. But even doing all of that, I can't say that it won't be hard all the time, that you will struggle to find people who invest in your career, that you will struggle to get the opportunities that you see people who don't seem to be working as hard as you are getting. And that's just the nature of it, and I think that's the nature of going into any mainstream organization, whether it be in news or not.

And I guess the last thing I'd say is find a mentor somewhere who can help open doors for you and guide you. Someone whom you really trust. I learned this as a graduate student. I didn't come from a family of white collar folks. And I didn't understand the degree to which your entry into institutions depends on you knowing someone there. I was naive enough to think that just working hard, having clip's, doing internships was going to be enough. And it's not. You have to find people who open doors for you because as you know, Jeff, so much of our industry is jobs get filled, positions happen, and they are never advertised to the public. I believe that The New York Times is the first job I ever got where I didn't have a personal connection in the institution.

Jeff Jarvis You did it by all that hard work before. Since you mentioned mentors, also, if you don't mind, give advice to how to be a good mentor.

Nikole Hannah-Jones I struggle with that myself because I know how desperately I needed that, so I agree to mentor far too many young folks than I can actually mentor well. So to be a good mentor, you have to have time, and be really accessible, and be someone who follows through on what you promise you're going to help someone with. I think what's also important, particularly when you want to mentor kids who are coming from working-class backgrounds or marginalized backgrounds, is not to presume that their silence is disinterest. I think so often someone would give me their card and would be like, "Yeah, reach out to me." And I'd be like, "They're not serious. They don't really want me to reach out to them. I don't know what to say to them. I'm not worthy of reaching out to them." And I wouldn't, and it wasn't because I didn't want to. It's because I didn't feel good enough. And so many of our kids who are first generation are just not coming out of that experience. Versus I would see my more middle-class classmates and they were selling themselves. Like they were out there. They were gathering cards. They were following up with emails. They were setting up lunches. I was not ever going to initiate any of that because I just didn't know how to do it. And if you want to mentor students who don't come

from that background, you're going to actually have to be more assertive with them, even though you feel like they're coming to you. I think we really have to understand that.

Jeff Jarvis You've got to be aware of their imposter syndrome, and you are the cure for that as a mentor, I think.

Nikole Hannah-Jones Yeah, exactly. Yes. It's so critical. I mean, I just know I'd be like, "I don't know how to small talk. It seems like brownnosing. How am I going to ask this person to coffee? What am I going to say?" And so we shut ourselves down because it's just not our experience. We just don't know how to navigate. And if you're a mentor, your whole job is to help students and young journalists navigate. So I think I talk to a lot of people who want to be mentors, and they write our kids off so quickly because they didn't do something that we think is a test of your worthiness. And a lot of times, it's just because we either don't know or we just feel unworthy.

Jeff Jarvis Yeah, there's a bias against silence. Jose Lou in the questions asks about The 1619 Project and the deal you've just announced recently, which is very exciting. You'll do a better job than I will. Why don't you outline that deal first? And then she asks whether you ever expected that when you came up with the idea of The 1619 Project that it would turn into this multimedia institution that it's going to be?

Nikole Hannah-Jones I thought I'll answer the second part of that question first. And that answer is, "hell, no." Absolutely not. I mean, this was a project on slavery and anti-Black racism. And the whole reason the project exists is because we as a country have not wanted to deal with this history and legacy. So when I pushed the project, I can't even tell you how much anxiety I had during the entire nine months that I worked on the project, that I had somehow managed to command all of these resources. And if it published and no one read it and no one cared, I was never going to get a chance to do a project like this again. And I was going to make it harder for every Black and brown journalist with an ambitious project after me to get the green light. So I believe strongly in the power of what we were doing and the quality of what we were doing and the argument we were making, but I had no idea if anybody would read it, or care, or if it would make a splash the first day and die out to the news cycle the next. So absolutely not. It has been the most surprising thing in the world to me, what has come out of this project. And that's actually something I'm really, really proud of because you can tell some journalism projects where they were driven by prizes from the beginning. You can just tell sometimes.

Jeff Jarvis Yes, right.

Nikole Hannah-Jones And this project was truly driven by mission. I just believed we had to do it. And to see that you were able to do this type of journalism and that it results in what it has, it's just been really, really amazing to me.

So the latest news, of course, we announced is that we have a big development deal with Lionsgate and in partnership with Oprah Winfrey to turn The 1619 project into film and television, and possibly other programming. It's very, very exciting. But I'm also extremely frightened because it's not my area of expertise. I don't have experience in TV and film. And I was so protective of every aspect of The 1619 Project, that we weren't going to water down certain things that we were going to be unafraid of how people would read or respond. We were just going to tell what we felt was a story that needed to be told. And I lose a lot of control now over the project in that way. And I've seen enough biopics and movies about the Black American experience that are just absolutely appalling to know

what the pitfalls might be. So while it's very exciting to me, I come from a working class family in a small Iowa town, and most people in my family are never going to read a 40,000 word magazine. And it's not saying anything about their intellect or anything else, but it's just not something that most people are doing. But they will watch TV and film about this experience. And so I think a lot about all of the people that we'll be able to reach who don't read The New York Times, who don't subscribe to The New York Times, who will now be able to also understand The 1619 Project. And I'm excited about that, but I am also very scared.

Jeff Jarvis Do you consider yourself an educator? By that I mean, I think as journalists we tend to throw things out there, what the world does with it, the world does with it. As educators, I have learned, we try to think about outcomes. And did someone learn something? Do you care about the outcome of your work? Does that make you an educator?

Nikole Hannah-Jones I don't think formally, I'm an educator, but certainly. I write because, I mean, I think so much of my writing is teaching. It's not just, again, saying this is what happened. But I'm trying to tell you why it happened, and how it happened, and what were the decisions going back years and years that make it happen. Because I just don't think when you write about racial inequality that if you don't build in that education, people can't really understand it. And if they can't really understand it, they can't empathize. If they can't empathize, they're not going to do anything to change it.

So I've never been a person whose work is, you know. So Ida B. Wells says, "The people must know in order to act, and there is no educator like the press." So my journalistic tradition is not simply I'm a stenographer of the world. My journalistic position is there are a lot of wrongs in this world, and I want my journalism to help right them. And in order to do that, of course, education is a huge component. So not only do I write and try to educate through the writing, but, you know, I talk all over the country about the things that I write about. I try to get the word out as broadly as I can. So in that way, I hope that my journalism is educational.

Jeff Jarvis I think it is. Jonathan Grove asks the question you've been asked a million times is about the reaction to 1619, not only the good but also the attacks. And I'd like to ask that in the context of the current discussion about cancel culture, and The New York Times op-ed page, and all that we've been seeing. Do you feel as if there was an effort to cancel you any more than there ever has been? You know, what's the proper state of the public discussion and how disagreement should be handled in it is I guess what I'm asking.

Nikole Hannah-Jones So I don't believe that there's such a thing as cancel culture, so, no, I don't think there was an effort to cancel me. There has been a concerted effort to discredit the project. That is for certain. And what's interesting about it is it really does speak to the power of the project because the effort didn't begin until three and a half months or so after the project published. And that's when you started to see that secret letter being circulated by those historians. And then since then, right-wing media, if you search The 1619 Project on Google right now, all you will see are articles trying to discredit the project. Like you have to click one or two pages in to see anything other than that.

So, yeah, I think there has been I mean I know there has been a concerted effort to discredit the work of the project. And for a period of months, two months, it was really hard because I worked my ass off on this project and believe strongly in the project. And when

you're dealing with people who have different ethical news standards, you can't really fight back because they don't care if they mischaracterize. They don't care if they don't give you a chance to respond. And that's just not how we work as journalists. So that part was really hard.

But the pride that I take in that is if the project didn't have power, if the project wasn't meaningful a year later, you still wouldn't see a tax on it. I mean, in the last two weeks, Pompeo, Tom, Cotton and Trump have all spoken out against The 1619 Project, and it published 11 months ago. So you have to take the good with the bad. And that impact has been really amazing and astounding. But I'm a human being. You know, there's journalist. Well, I wouldn't call them journalists. Right-wing media has tried to dig up dirt on me. Everything I tweet now, I have to realize, could be on Fox News or in an article. People threatened to burn down my house. Like it hasn't been all great.

Jeff Jarvis The weight on you is tremendous. I mean, in both ways. In the sense that you become the object of attack from what you're reporting on. Also what you said before about if nobody read The 1619 Project or you did a bad job on it, you immediately say it was a burden on Black journalists to follow you. Right? So that's a weight on you. Your family and how they operate in all of this. And I know you talked to Brentin Mock about about eating, and exercise, and things like that. But psychically how do you handle this weight?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Well, sometimes cussing people out on Twitter, which isn't a good way to handle it.

Jeff Jarvis Been there.

Nikole Hannah-Jones You know, this is the truth. I feel so tremendously privileged to do the work that I do and to have the platform that I have. I won't say there's no psychic weight. As you know, when I was talking to Brentin I said, you know, I've had to try to get my life together in the coronavirus shutdowns because I was eating way too much. I was drinking way too much. And it was taking a really physical toll on me. But with that said, I don't spend a lot of time like feeling bad about how hard it is. Like my life is not hard. And I have a power to actually write about things on the biggest platform in the world in a way that can change the national conversation, so I handle it by trying to just funnel it into more work and trying to use what privilege I have for the benefit of my people.

So I think one thing that has been a really interesting part of this is, and this is what every person of color understands, the success of my work is also used to show how unworthy I am as a Black person. So now the Pulitzer means nothing because I got it. But if I don't win anything, it's because I'm not good enough to win anything. But if I do win anything, it's because I didn't deserve to win anything. And this is like the constant struggle that journalists of color, particularly Black journalists, face. But at the same time, you just look at what the project has meant to people and the conversation that the project is driving, and I'm just blessed. In general, I get angry, but I can't stay angry because I'm just very lucky.

Jeff Jarvis Yeah, I think the greatest prize is what I see in the comments from a teacher who says that The 1619 Project talks to my students in her Spanish-language master's program. And it's hard to make them understand that 1619 is effective. It makes them connect the dots, even if they're not familiar with the history of the country. That's the greatest reward, I would imagine. Sorry, I was going back to the questions here. So

interesting. This is kind of a surprising question, but I'll ask it about the reparations question. It says that she wants to feature more Black scientists in her work as a science journalist, but she's come across sources who've asked for financial compensation for their time in interviews. And from a conflict of interest standpoint, this is an impossible request. But given discussions about reparations in our industry, I'm sympathetic, she says, to the idea that these interviews can be work for Black professionals who are already exhausted by their uncompensated work, and it could be a barrier to increasing representation and source diversity. Really interesting question. Do you have any thoughts about how you can navigate that kind of nuanced question?

Nikole Hannah-Jones I do. It's something that I struggle with myself. And again, some of these rules are created by people who have not had the financial struggles of Black Americans. Right? The rule is that we can't pay our sources, that people should just be willing to give us their labor for free. Well, where did that come from? Who decides?

So I had this. In 2014, I went to Mississippi to do a story on the Freedom Riders and the anniversary of Freedom Summer. And I contacted this veteran of the civil rights movement, Reverend Blue, and he agreed to be my tour guide, like take me to Greenwood. I'll interview him, and he'll show me around and give me the background that I need for my story. And at the end of it, he asked me for payment. And I said, "Oh, I can't pay you. I'm a journalist." And he was really bothered by that, and I'm still bothered by that. I actually swear to God, I was just thinking Monday that I need to find out where he is and send him money, because I've never gotten over how terrible that felt. That this was a man living in an assisted living home. None of those people who worked in the civil rights movement were ever paid for everything that they lost for working in that movement. Blackballed from jobs, not ever able to get any financial compensation. And I could have given him \$300 for his time. He was a guide to me, not just a source. And I felt that I couldn't. That working at ProPublica, my journalistic integrity meant that I could not pay this man. And I have felt bad about that ever since. And so literally on Monday I was like, "I'm going to find this man, and I'm going to pay him for that."

So I think we have to consider those questions. And if I'm saying mainstream objectivity is bullshit, then the idea that people who have nothing who are doing a service for your journalism shouldn't get paid while you're getting paid to do it, I think we need to have those conversations, particularly, again, when it's marginalized people whom we are interviewing. And it could be the case of we don't tell them we're going to compensate them, and we compensate them after the story ran. I mean, we would have to think about the rules because, of course, why we do it is we don't want to make it seem like we are paying someone to work for us and then that discredits the work. But there's got to be ways that we can implement these practices and stop being so rigid because, morally, I actually think I was wrong.

Jeff Jarvis That's absolutely fascinating, and I see it, too, right now in the COVID crisis. I started a Twitter list, a COVID Twitter list with 600 scientists in it. And one of the burning issues there is how women scientists and Black scientists are not represented in stories. They're not being sourced. And not to pick on The New York Times, but The New York Times did a story about the heroes of COVID, and they were all white men. And it's not hard to look at my list and see people. On the other hand, they also say they're busy. That when someone does discover them, everybody's going to come after and discover the same person over and over again. And it's a fascinating issue. So thank you for that great question.

Nikole Hannah-Jones That was a great question.

Jeff Jarvis Yeah, it really was. This is the problem with doing these Zoom things is you've got to multitask and do two things at once. Oh, let me ask you. I want to make sure I didn't leave this out. Ida B. Wells Society. On top of everything else you've done, you created this investigative effort. What's the progress report on it? How is it doing? What's it doing?

Nikole Hannah-Jones So the Ida B. Wells Society. It's our four year anniversary this year, which is kind of hard to believe. It seems like we've been around for a long time. It's the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting. And despite COVID, things are great. We just moved to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which is my alma mater. It's where I got my journalism degree from. And our membership is great. We have a very strong financial foundation, and we are training hundreds of journalists. We've adapted to COVID. We're doing virtual trainings now. We are getting ready to hire our first full-time executive director, which I'm very excited about because we are all working too hard. We're all full-time journalists, but it's been great.

And, you know, I do have a lot on my plate, but it was very important. It's always been important to me to try to be the person I needed when I was trying to make it. And we founded the organization because we understood the particular obstacles that journalists of color face when they want to become investigative and projects reporters, and we can speak directly to that. So thank you for asking. For students on here, membership is still free. We determined that we wouldn't charge for membership until we were established enough to make your membership fee worth it. And our trainings, our virtual trainings right now are free. And even when our trainings are in person, they're very low cost. They're \$25, which is only so that we know that if you sign up, you'll actually come. So please sign up, and attend our trainings, and take advantage of our resources.

Jeff Jarvis Are you inspiring more Black journalists to stand up as investigative journalists? What do they need most? Was it the confidence and the training? It was the confidence of models? What do they need to be able to get more investigative journalists willing to go over the barriers for them?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Yeah, the biggest thing that we've seen are training them, or the particular skills of investigative reporting, and then the mentorship to actually bring a project to fruition. So those are the main areas that we're addressing. Because most of us don't have examples of Black people or brown people doing investigative reporting, we don't often see a pathway, and we're certainly not getting the guidance and the skills to get into those positions. So we're providing all of that. And what we hear from our trainees all the time is, "I've never been trained by a Black person before. I've never seen a Black person teaching me data reporting, and now I think I can do data reporting."

When you're white in this society and every example of everything you see white people doing it, I don't think you really understand how disempowering it is to see people in the highest areas of your profession and no one has ever looked like you. It really does keep you from thinking that there is a path there for you. And so both the skills that we teach at the training, which, by the way, whether you want to be an investigative reporter or not, they're just great reporting skills that any good reporter should have. But it's also being able to see people in the highest positions. You know, Ron Nixon is the international investigations editor for the AP. I am at The New York Times. Topher Sanders is at ProPublica. To see us in these positions and training is very powerful.

Jeff Jarvis One last question about The 1619 Project. I see a complaint in the comments that it's sold out, and it's selling for like \$130 on eBay I saw. No one can see it online, of course. As part of this new deal, is it going to be reprinted as books or in some form that people can get again?

Nikole Hannah-Jones Yeah, I guess you should have been subscribing to the print newspaper. Print is not dead after all. So we reissued the New York Times Magazine issue of The 1619 Project four times, and it sold out all four times. And if you know anything about the printing industry, you can't just simply reprint. It's not that easy. Everyone now is using the same printing press. Printings are scheduled months and months in advance. And you have to print such a large quantity of additional copies to make it worth it that you just can't simply order up a reprinting, like you could when you had your own printing press for magazines. We also announced last year that we signed a multibook deal with Penguin Random House, and I'm actually working on that right now. So we will be publishing The 1619 project in a book, and the book will actually have eight additional essays on top of the original essays that were in the project. And that's to come out fall of next year.

Jeff Jarvis Books are slow, man. It takes time. Nikole, I cannot thank you enough. I'm honored to be in conversation with you. I know everyone in the chat has enjoyed it. And I just want to say on behalf of ISOJ, thank you.

Nikole Hannah-Jones Thank you so much, and thanks, everyone, for watching me talk today.

Rosental Alves Wow, this was fascinating. Thank you so much, Nikole. Thank you, Jeff. It was an incredible conversation. We had lots of questions that we couldn't answer. But anyway thank you.

And we are going now to move with our program. The next session is going to be Building Trust: Best Practices to Improve Engagement Through Trust, Transparency, Inclusion and Ethics with Sally Lehrman, chief executive officer of the Trust Project. And I want again to thank our sponsors, and I will see you in just half an hour with the brunch workshop. Thank you very much.