

# Veronica Bikowicz on The 1619 Project

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## What's at Stake

When asked the question what is at stake there can be so many answers, but all these answers will have a core similarity. This similarity is that The 1619 Project's stakes are the very core view American citizens will have of their own nation's history. Nikole Hannah-Jones's stake in writing The 1619 project was both to demonstrate and prove just how essential African Americans were to the creation of the United States of America. And while Hannah-Jones is correct in her belief that African Americans were essential in building America, like many historians before her, she forgot about the other groups who suffered along side the African Americans.



Nikole Hannah-Jones, chief author of The 1619 Project

## Voting Rights Transcend The English Language

If there is one thing every child learns in the American school system, it is that for a time in history people could only vote if they could pass an English literary test. It discriminated against both the illiterate as well as those who were not fluent in English but in a different language. Hispanic Americans had two cases against these English laws: Katzenbach v. Morgan (1966) and Cardona v. Power (1966). In Cardona v. Power (1966), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Hispanic Americans, securing the vote to those without fluency in the English language (Montoya). The issue with this amazing accomplishment is that, in school, children are not usually taught this fact, which is generally lost to history. Hannah-Jones errs in the same way.

## The Fear of Knowing

When the first Africans arrived in America in 1619 there is now doubt they must have been afraid; they were in a new land they did not know of and forced to work as slaves against their will. Native American slaves did not experience the fear of the unknown; they experienced the fear of knowing. Historian Linford D. Fisher has written on Native American slavery, trying to make sure we as a nation do not forget that while colonists enslaved peoples from Africa, they did the same to those indigenous to America as well. During King Philip's War, captured Indigenous Americas were forced into slavery and they knew where they would likely be shipped. Barbados was where many Indigenous Peoples were sent to be slaves, and the Indigenous populations would openly talk about where they would likely be sent to as slaves if they lost the war. This history is almost completely erased from standard American history and Hannah-Jones kept it away from The 1619 Project as well.

## Betrayed Alliances

The historian Fisher also writes about Indigenous peoples who allied themselves with the New Englanders. Those indigenous people who allied with New England colonists thought it would save them the fate of being forced into slavery and shipped away from their homeland. Unfortunately, that was not the case. New Englanders forced their allies into slavery just as they did their enemies; it was a total act of betray that is ignored in history books. Like most history books, The 1619 Project completely leaves out Indigenous slavery and the suffering of other minorities.



*"The Supreme Court decided two New York cases challenging literacy tests in 1966 pursuant to the Voting Rights Act. New Yorkers who sought to continue to exclude Latino voters brought Katzenbach v. Morgan (1966). In the companion case, Cardona v. Power (1966), the Court discarded such tests and secured the voting rights of Puerto Ricans and other language minorities with limited English skills, a ruling that eventually led to bilingual ballots."*

– Margaret E. Montoya

## Takeaways

There is no doubt that the 1619 Project has vitality: it brings up historical facts and moments generally left out of school curricula and shows just how important African Americans were (and are) to the formation of this country. But like many before her, Nikole Hannah-Jones forgot to include the others who suffered and, through their suffering, changed America. African Americans fought for equal rights and, to this day, fight to have their stories told and ancestors' histories remembered, and that is why The 1619 Project is good at helping people to think about American history in new ways. But when taking a new deeper look at history you begin to see the ways in which this project could be improved. The 1619 Project makes a good point about African American history and accomplishments while ignoring the history and accomplishments of other peoples, so while the 1619 Project is not inherently bad it would be far better if it did not ignore those all the other minority groups who have fought to make the United States of America live up to its claim of offering an equal chance for all people.



Key locations relating to King Philip's War, 1676

*"Unlike most enslaved Africans, who were largely unaware of their destination when they were shipped out from the West African coast, New England Indian captives not only knew where they might be sent, but they often stated it outright: Barbados."*

– Linford D. Fisher