



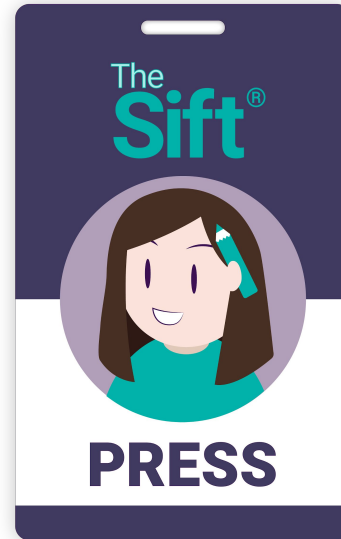
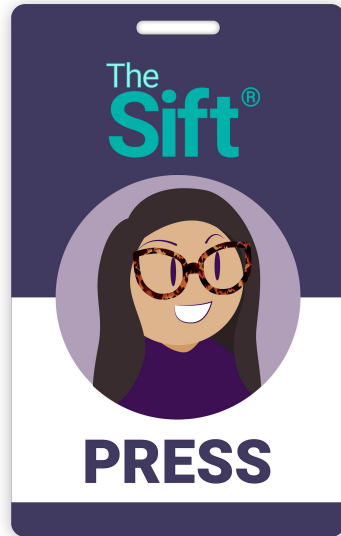
The Sift[®] News Goggles

News or opinion? Excerpts related to The New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project

Oct. 19, 2020

First things first

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



This week, we're going to examine the ongoing debate over The New York Times Magazine's award-winning [1619 Project](#), which marks the 400th anniversary of the beginning of slavery in America.

The New York Times Magazine

The 1619 Project

The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.

[Read more about The 1619 Project.](#)

Photograph by Dannielle Bowman

The project, first published in August 2019, attracted renewed attention recently after a New York Times [opinion column](#) criticizing the project appeared online on Oct. 9. Let's examine four short excerpts related to the 1619 Project — including an excerpt from the project itself — to determine whether these examples are news or opinion.



We will chime in with a few thoughts after each example.

Reminder:

- **Straight news** coverage primarily seeks to be as fair, accurate and impartial as possible.
- **Opinion** writing generally shares a specific point of view.

Ready? Let's go!



Excerpt 1:
News or opinion?

Opinion

The 1619 Chronicles

Journalism does better when it writes the first rough draft of history, not the last word on it.



By Bret Stephens
Opinion Columnist

Oct. 9, 2020



Do you notice any clues that indicate whether this is news or opinion? Discuss any initial observations. Then, let's examine the first few paragraphs on the next slide.



What do you notice about these paragraphs? Is there anything that indicates this is a news or opinion piece?

So, what's your verdict? News or opinion?

Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

If there's one word admirers and critics alike can agree on when it comes to The New York Times's award-winning [1619 Project](#), it's *ambition*. Ambition to reframe America's conversation about race. Ambition to reframe our understanding of history. Ambition to move from news pages to classrooms. Ambition to move from scholarly debate to national consciousness.

In some ways, this ambition succeeded. The 1619 Project introduced a date, previously obscure to most Americans, that ought always to have been thought of as seminal — and probably now will. It offered fresh reminders of the extent to which Black freedom was a victory gained by courageous Black Americans, and not just a gift obtained from benevolent whites.

It showed, in a stunning [photo essay](#), the places where human beings were once bought and sold as slaves — neglected scenes of American infamy. It illuminated the extent to which so much of what makes America great, including some of our uniquely American understandings of liberty and equality, is unthinkable without the struggle of Black Americans, as well as the extent to which so much of what continues to bedevil us is the result of centuries of racism.



Opinion

The 1619

Let's see...ah, bingo! Here we have some clear labels, including the word "opinion" above the headline and the words "opinion columnist" beneath Bret Stephens' byline.



Journalism does better when it writes the first rough draft of history, not the last word on it.



by Bret Stephens
Opinion Columnist

Oct. 9, 2020



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It's a good idea to check the beginning of any text for initial clues on whether it is news or opinion.





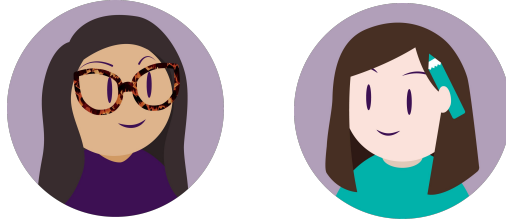
This is a clear opinion-based statement. Stephens is offering his own opinion on the project's success, which others may or may not agree with. The degree to which the ambition succeeded is a matter of opinion, not facts, and cannot be definitively proven right or wrong.

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Our verdict?

This is **opinion!**

Click [here](#) to read the full column.

Excerpt 2: News or opinion?

1619 Project faces renewed criticism – this time from within The New York Times



By [Brian Stelter](#) and [Oliver Darcy](#), CNN

Updated 5:10 PM ET, Mon October 12, 2020



Do you notice any clues that indicate whether this is news or opinion? Discuss any initial observations. Then, let's examine the first few paragraphs on the next slide.

New York (CNN) – Amid all the external debate that the 1619 Project has provoked in the past year, the project led by Nikole Hannah-Jones has also prompted internal criticism at The New York Times.

Some of the angst is chalked up to the usual sniping that happens when a reporter, in this case Hannah-Jones, becomes a "star," in newsroom parlance.

But there are substantive critiques too, and they were surfaced by David G. S. Stephens, a Times op-ed writer with a conservative bent.

Stephens wrote in a Friday column that the acclaimed project, which was launched in 2019, "failed to do justice to the history of the US around the beginning of American slavery, had 'failed



What do you notice about these paragraphs? Is there anything that indicates this is a news or opinion piece?

So, what's your verdict? News or opinion?

Click to the next slide for our thoughts.



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But there are substantive critiques too, and they were surfaced in an unusual column by Bret Stephens, a Times op-ed writer with a conservative bent.

Stephens wrote in a Friday column that the acclaimed project, which aims to reframe the history of the US around the beginning of American slavery, had "failed."



This looks like a straight news "lede" to me. Each story begins with a lede (pronounced "lead"), and a straight news lede usually provides a summary and/or the most important and newsworthy information in a story.



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Stephens, a Times op-ed writer with a conservative bent.

Stephens wrote in a column about the history of the US around the 1619 Project.



This conversational tone can feel like opinion. The word choices here may also lead you to believe that this isn't straight news. But this graf offers context on newsroom office politics for those unfamiliar with the journalism world. Straight news doesn't have to be boring. Journalists still try to punch up their writing with lively word choices.

New York (CNN) – Am

the pr by Ni
Times



Here is one side of the story. This is the “internal criticism” referenced in the lede. Straight news reports should accurately portray multiple relevant perspectives on a given subject or debate. Any guesses yet on what this piece is?

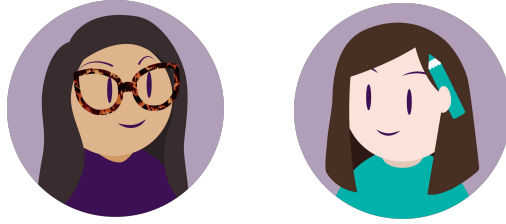
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Our verdict?

This is a news report!

Click [here](#) to read the full report.



Excerpt 3: News or opinion?

Media

How the 1619 Project took over 2020

By Sarah Ellison

Oct. 13, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. CDT

+ Add to list



Do you notice any clues that indicate whether this is news or opinion? Discuss any initial observations. Then, let's examine the first few paragraphs on the next slide.



What do you notice about these paragraphs? Is there anything that indicates this is a news or opinion piece?

One morning in mid-September, Nikole Hannah-Jones woke to a text message from a friend noting an unusual event on President Trump's schedule: the first "White House Conference on American History."

It might have sounded banal, but Hannah-Jones, a staff writer for the New York Times Magazine, sensed a subtext immediately: This was about her and the project she says is the most important

Sure enough, the National Archives and Museum that houses the 1619 Project.

You've probably seen the hashtag, a dueling academic series of Oprah-style jeers.

So, what's your verdict? News or opinion?

Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

at the National Archives American story with deceptions, New York Times's totally discredited

erged as a watchword for our era early mission. It is the subject of adding wars and an upcoming liably triggers an electric round of



One morning in mid-September, Nikole Hannah-Jones woke to a text message from a friend noting an unusual event on President Trump's schedule: the first "White House Conference on American History."



Oooh, this journalist takes a different approach to begin her piece. We call this an "anecdotal lede." Unlike a straight news lede, which summarizes the most important points up front, an anecdotal lede often begins more creatively. Sometimes, these ledes set the scene by focusing on a particular person or place. Here, the reporter tells a story – or anecdote – to capture our interest.

You've probably heard of it by now. [The 1619 Project](#) has emerged as a watchword for our era – a hashtag, a talking point, a journalism case study, a scholarly mission. It is the subject of dueling academic screeds, Fox News segments, publishers' bidding wars and an upcoming series of Oprah-produced films. It is a Trump rally riff that reliably triggers an electric round of jeers.

...ter for the New York Times
...r and the project she says is the
...rn at the National Archives
... American story with deceptions,
...w York Times's totally discredited





This isn't the reporter's perspective. Also, this sentence seems to indicate that Hannah-Jones was interviewed for the story.

from a friend
Conference on

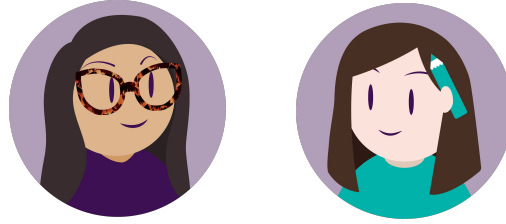
It might have sounded banal, but Hannah-Jones, a staff writer for the New York Times Magazine, sensed a subtext immediately: This was about her and the project she says is the most important work of her career.

Sure enough, that afternoon, Trump thundered from a lectern at the National Archives Museum that “the left has warped, distorted and defiled the American story with deceptions, falsehoods, and lies. There is no better example than the New York Times’s totally discredited 1619 Project.”



Here is another perspective on the 1619 Project — but it's not the reporter's opinion; it's President Trump's.

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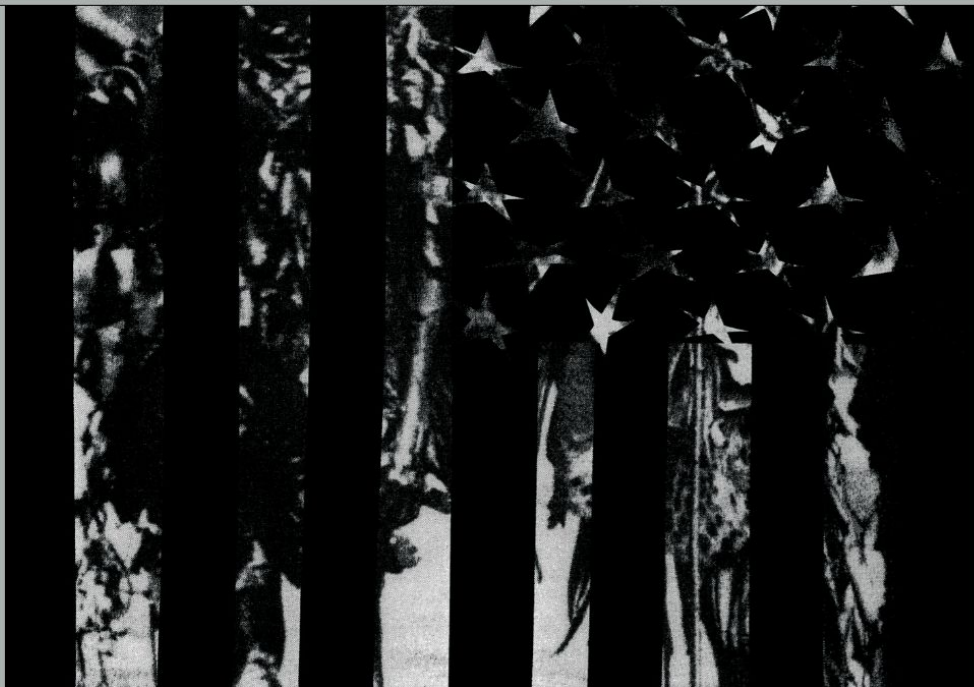


Our verdict?

This is a news report!

Click [here](#) to read the full report.

Excerpt 4: News or opinion?



Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. *Black Americans* have fought to make them true.

By Nikole Hannah-Jones

AUG. 14, 2019



Do you notice any clues that indicate whether this is news or opinion? Discuss any initial observations. Then, let's examine the opening paragraph on the next slide.



So, what's your verdict? News or opinion?


Click to the next slide for our thoughts.

ew an American flag in our front yard. The blue
story house was perennially chipping; the fence,
stairs, or the front door, existed in a perpetual
but that flag always flew pristine. Our corner lot,
edlined by the federal government, was along the
the black side from the white side of our Iowa
of our lawn, high on an aluminum pole, soared
y dad would replace as soon as it showed the




What do you notice about this paragraph? Is there anything that indicates this is a news or opinion piece?





Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. *Black Americans* have fought to make them true.



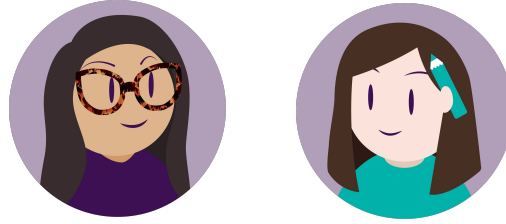
This opening essay of the 1619 Project by Hannah-Jones won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. But what is “commentary”? In an [Oct. 12 statement](#), the Pulitzer Prize Board explains, citing its standards, that eligible work in the commentary category is ““opinion writing containing well-reasoned and compelling argument on a topic or topics of public interest, whether originally researched or reported, informed by personal or analytical experience.”” So commentary is a form of opinion writing.

My dad always flew an American flag in our front yard. The blue paint on our two-story house was perennially chipping; the fence, or the rail by the stairs, or the front door, existed in a perpetual state of disrepair, but that flag always flew pristine. Our corner lot, which had been redlined by the federal government, was along the river that divided the black side from the white side of our Iowa town. At the edge of our lawn, high on an aluminum pole, soared the flag, which my dad would replace as soon as it showed the slightest tatter.



The word “my” here signals that this piece is written in first person. First person is pretty unusual in straight news reports, especially in “print” (which is the term journalists use for any report that primarily uses text rather than video or audio). We can see that this essay is telling a personal story.





Our verdict?

This is **opinion!**

Click [here](#) to read the full essay.

News Goggles: Next steps

Note: Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the Times, published [an editor's note](#) on Oct. 13, defending the 1619 Project in light of renewed criticism. For a fuller explanation of editor's notes and the purposes that they serve, check out the News Goggles materials in the [Oct. 5 issue](#) of the Sift.

Idea: Discuss the differences between news and opinion. Ask students to evaluate and categorize these two examples ([here](#) and [here](#)). The first shows letters to the editor about the 1619 Project and is opinion. The second is a Sept. 17 straight news tweet from ABC News. Then, challenge students to look at other recent comments about the 1619 Project on social media and coverage on news websites to determine whether each is news or opinion.

Related: [“A deeper look into the controversy of The New York Times’ ‘1619 Project’”](#) (Tom Jones, Poynter).

Resources: [“InfoZones”](#) (NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom), [“Understanding Bias”](#) (NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom) and [Informable®](#) (NLP’s free mobile app).



This exercise originated in the Oct. 19, 2020, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).

Thank you!



A future founded on facts



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