Nikole Hannah-Jones, Pulitzer Prize winner for 1619 Project, addresses MN economic inclusion summit

The Center for Economic Inclusion summit’s theme is ‘Marching for Racial Equity & Economic Justice.’

By JOE KELLY | jkelly@pioneerpress.com | PUBLISHED: December 3, 2020 at 4:13 p.m. | UPDATED: December 3, 2020 at 4:13 p.m.

Pulitzer Prize winner and journalist from the New York Times Magazine Nikole Hannah-Jones spoke Thursday about the economic disparities in the U.S. and Minnesota as part of the Center for Economic Inclusion’s virtual summit.

The center — a research, action and consulting organization — was founded in Minnesota three years ago by CEO Tawanna Black. The virtual summit is being held through Friday. This year’s theme, “Marching for Racial Equity & Economic Justice,” aims to issue solutions to corporate leaders and policy makers to address racial wealth gaps and economic growth.

Black interviewed Hannah-Jones, who won the Pulitzer Prize for her work on The 1619 Project, which focused on the role and ongoing impact of slavery in American society.

“All of the inequality we see today didn’t just come about, it was constructed,” Hannah-Jones said. “We have the most economic disparities of all of western democracy.”
She said racial gaps in Minnesota and the U.S. are issues in need of confrontation. Fixing these gaps would not only help Black communities, but would also help economic growth for the state and nation as a whole.

“I hope that the lesson in that is, don’t just seek diversity because you can check a box,” Hannah-Jones said. “Understand that in getting that diversity, you actually create a better product, you actually create a better service.”
Hannah-Jones said education is an important area of focus that could lead to a better sense of diversity for children of color who grow up to become working adults.

“Very few people, no matter who they are, can self-finance education,” Hannah-Jones said. “That’s why we have public schools, because there was an understanding that it takes us all pooling our resources in order to be able to provide these quality educational structures. … We can do anti-poverty programming, but we can also do race specific programming that would close the racial and opportunity gaps as well.”

DIVERSITY EFFORTS

Both Hannah-Jones and Black talked about current diversity efforts in corporations. Workers and professionals of color leave a lot of corporate positions because of a lack of acceptance, Black said.

“We recruit them and recruit them and recruit them, and we tell people, ‘We want you to be different, I want you because you’re different,’” Black said. “But the moment people get there, we say ‘Hold on, we don’t do that.’”

Hannah-Jones said she flourished at the New York Times Magazine because the environment was open to her and her ideas. In contrast, Hannah-Jones said she wasn’t able to make the front page of the newspaper she worked for prior to her position at the magazine.
“If I’m not at the New York Times, and the New York Times doesn’t give me the freedom and support to do my work, The 1619 Project would not exist, period,” she said.

Even though Hannah-Jones’ project was well-received, it has drawn criticism from some academic scholars.

Near the end of the keynote, Hannah-Jones shared her hopes for the future.

“I would love to see for my grandchildren an America where we don’t fund schools based on local property tax, where we fund all of our schools equally, where we actually enforce fair housing law so that we can have more integrated neighborhoods,” she said. “And I would like to see schools that are truly, economically and racially integrated.”

Tags: Minneapolis, Minnesota, Nonprofits, St. Paul

Podbridge is a podcast connecting the US, the Middle East & the world. Hear the stories.

Joe Kelly

As you comment, please be respectful of other commenters and other viewpoints. Our goal with article comments is to provide a space for civil, informative and constructive conversations. We reserve the right to remove any comment we deem to be defamatory, rude, insulting to
others, hateful, off-topic or reckless to the community. See our full terms of use here.