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Subject:from UNC-Chapel Hill Philosophy Department Chair

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Dear members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees,

I write to you with a heavy heart. The failure of the Board of Trustees to approve tenure for Nikole Hannah-Jones is doing great harm to the standing, reputation, and integrity of the University that I have served energetically since 2003 -- including as Chair of the Department of Philosophy for the past ten years. (I am speaking here only for myself, not for my Departmental colleagues.)

It is a grave step for a university Board of Trustees to fail to approve a recommendation for tenure generated in accordance with the university's own elaborate and painstaking faculty procedures for reviewing a tenure candidate. As you know, experts in the relevant field evaluate the tenure candidate, and their evaluations are reviewed at the department, school, and university level. These recommendations are then submitted to the Board. For the Board to refuse to act on a recommendation generated in this careful and responsible way, without giving any explanation, gives the strong impression that the Board has failed to accept the recommendation for reasons that are too obviously inappropriate and shameful to declare publicly.

That an important donor to the Journalism School has raised his voice against the candidate also casts suspicion on the Board's reasoning. A donor is the last person on Earth who should weigh in, publicly or privately, on faculty appointments. As Department Chair, I have had to explain to potential donors that they are not permitted to have any voice in how their donations, once made, are to be used. (As a successful fundraiser for my Department, I can assure you that these candid warnings to potential donors do not deter donations.)

As you know, UNC-Chapel Hill already faces a tremendous "credibility gap" when it comes to issues of race, slavery, and history. From the controversies surrounding the Confederate Monument to the (happily recently lifted) ban on renaming campus buildings to the ever-present issue of making our campus welcoming to a diverse group of faculty and students, UNC-Chapel Hill has acquitted itself poorly. The failure to tenure the first Black woman to hold the Knight Chair, when her predecessors received tenure, adds to the impression that our University leaders simply do not share the University's avowed core values and do not support a central part of the University's strategic plan.

Junior faculty who work on controversial issues will now rightly fear that they will not receive tenure at UNC-Chapel Hill -- that the Board will not leave it to the scholarly experts to judge their case, but instead will be guided by whether they find the candidate's research conclusions congenial or repugnant. I myself have repeatedly assured new hires -- who must take their children out of school, sell their homes, quit their University posts, and move to Chapel Hill in time for the semester to begin, all before

their appointment receives official approval by the Board -- that the Board's review will be nominal. I can no longer give this kind of confident assurance.

It is difficult for me to see how the Board can repair the self-inflicted damage that its action has caused. But I will offer some suggestions. The Board would have to stop standing behind technicalities about having never received a genuine recommendation regarding Hannah-Jones on which to act. It would have to reaffirm the Board's traditional, extremely circumscribed role in tenure decisions (e.g., in ensuring that proper procedure was followed) and declare that scholarly rather than political considerations govern tenure decisions. And finally, "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" (as the Declaration of Independence puts it) requires the Board to explain its reasoning in this case and to defend it (if, in fact, it can be defended) or else to decide to offer tenure to Hannah-Jones.

Yours sincerely,

Marc Lange

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