

MSNBC's *The ReidOut*  
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7:15:56 p.m. [TEASE]  
28 seconds

JOY REID: And it was an historic day at the White House.

VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS: Juneteenth has been known by many days. Jubilee Day, Freedom Day, Liberation Day, Emancipation Day. And today, a national holiday.  
[APPLAUSE]

REID: Republicans claim they support the holiday while simultaneously passing laws to make sure your kids can't learn about it in school. *The ReidOut* continues after this.

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7:53:04 p.m.  
6 minutes and 39 seconds

CONGRESSWOMAN SHELIA JACKSON-LEE (D-TX): On this vote, the yeas are 415 and the nays are 14. The bill is passed.

REID: After a — after a hard fought effort, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee presided over a vote in the House last night that was years in the making, the vote to designate Juneteenth a federal holiday, celebrated on June 19<sup>th</sup>, it commemorates the day in 1865 that all black Americans in every corner of this station were officially freed from slavery. And while the bill passed overwhelmingly in the House, there were still 14 Republicans who apparently didn't think that that landmark occasion was worth commemorating with a federal holiday. Today, President Biden signed that legislation at the White House officially making Juneteenth the 12th federal holiday to be recognized in this country and the first since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was established in 1983. And here's the President.

[BIDEN CLIP]

REID: While Juneteenth will now be commemorated nationwide, there's a catch. In some red states, it could soon be illegal to teach what the holiday is all about. That's because Republican state legislatures in a dozen states are now aiming to dictate how historical and modern racism in America are taught. That includes the state of Texas where Juneteenth was first celebrated. Governor Abbott signed a law this week intended to ban critical race theory from being taught in public schools, even though it's not being taught in any K-12 curriculums anywhere, including in Texas. Joining me now is Annette Gordon-Reed, history professor at Harvard University, and author of *On Juneteenth* which I was kicking I didn't bring with me to get it signed.

ANNETTE GORDON-REED: I'll send you a copy.

REID: I had your book. I did a Barnes and Noble run recently and I got a copy. Talk to me about what this means. I was happy for Sheila Jackson Lee.

GORDON-REED: Yes.

REID: I know she's fought for this for a long time. Beyond being a warm and fuzzy sort of acknowledgement, finally, of the country and the end of slavery, what does it mean?

GORDON-REED: Well, it means that we can actually begin a discussion about it. I mean, one of the great things about this holiday is it's tailor-made for history, because people have to know what happened, when did it happen, why did it happen that way and I think the people — every sort of celebration I've seen of it, institutions who do it, they always have an educational component. I mean, I — this is the United States, it will be co-modified in some way.

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: But I think people who are serious about it will ride herd on that and will continue to make it a holiday, where we talk about the past, some really hard things about the past too.

REID: Well, that's inconvenient because that's going to be illegal all over the country. I mean, we're at a moment where there are a lot of Republicans who have made their cause celebre doing the opposite and saying that we're not to talk about history that makes anyone who is white uncomfortable, to say anything sort of cast aspersions on slave owners, to make them something other than benevolent and beneficent people, to say that the Founders were not, you know, these sort of innocence on race and that they really had this master plan that they were going to end slavery — they had slaves, but they had this master plan. If you're not saying that, they're saying, well, it should be illegal to teach anything but that. How can that be happening at the same time we're getting a Juneteenth holiday?

GORDON-REED: Well, it's the American dilemma. It's a conundrum. There — it's a push-back. It's a push-back against all of the efforts over the past — really since the '50s to bring a more realistic vision about the America — about America's — the American beginning, slavery and so forth. And so, I think a lot of people are self-conscious about the strides we've made in doing that in history. You know, I — I don't know what's going to happen with this. I mean, there will be push-back. Teachers are very — my mother was a high schoolteacher. They're creative people. The Texas Constitution — the Constitution of the Republic of Texas explicitly talks about race, explicitly talks about people of African descent saying they can't be citizens. It promotes slavery, all those things. You can't teach that topic. How are you going to talk about 1836?

REID: Right.

GORDON-REED: And it's right there in the document. So, I mean, if you give people the documents, you read it, the questions will arise naturally, because we're right here — we didn't

just invent talking about race.

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: They talk about race a lot in the 18th and 19th century. They put it in their laws, and letters, policies, sermons, you name it.

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: It was always there.

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: And we didn't just invent this.

REID: You're absolutely right. The Confederacy was all — all of their secession documents went right to race and slavery.

GORDON-REED: Absolutely.

REID: There is this obsession right now, with taking everything that talks about race, probably including your book. It's probably soon going to be labeled critical race theory. You're at Harvard —

GORDON-REED: Yes, yes.

REID: — where Derrick Bell, of course, was one of the people who actually utilized critical race theory.

GORDON-REED: And my classmate Kimberle Crenshaw.

REID: And Kimberle Crenshaw who we are desperately trying to get on the show. Your book is not critical race theory. Your book is about Juneteenth.

GORDON-REED: Uh-huh.

REID: But they're trying to label anything that makes them feel uncomfortable as a critical race theory. This is from a guy named Christopher Rufo is who's at the — a conservative think tank — at a conservative think tank and he says "the goal is have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think 'critical race theory'... We have decodified the term and we will recodify to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans." Basically using critical race theory as a brand name.

GORDON-REED: Oh, absolutely, it's a distraction. You're right. No one is teaching critical race theory, K through 12.

REID: Just to be clear, can you just repeat? It is a law school technique. What is critical race theory?

GORDON-REED: Critical race theory talks about the influence of race in American laws, even things that don't have to do specifically that they're not talking about race. They often have a racial component to it. They have a racial impact and it permeates law. And so, that's what people are thinking about. That's what Derrick Bell and Kim write about and others.

REID: Who've been law professors at Harvard.

GORDON-REED: A law school professor. This is not K through 12 material, but they're saying is, anytime you talk about race —

REID: That's right.

GORDON-REED: — is you're talking critical race theory. Not everybody who talks about race are critical race theorists.

REID: What are you — I mean, Fox News has mentioned nearly 1,300 times in the past three and a half months. This is now going to be used to get out the vote in 2022.

GORDON-REED: Absolutely.

REID: And as a historian, it seems like a perversion of the idea of history to just take something and slap a label on it that isn't even true. true.

GORDON-REED: It does, but it happens all the time.

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: I mean, people use history in that way, or seek to use history for political ends, and they see that this is an inroad into — making inroads into, you know, making people frightened —

REID: Yeah.

GORDON-REED: — about the new inclusiveness and new understandings about history.