

MSNBC's *Decision 2021 – Election Night*

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7:05:25 p.m.

4 minutes and 1 second

RACHEL MADDOW: Do you think that the race, the way that Youngkin harped on race so much as his closing message is potentially motivating to black voters and to anti-racist voters. Was it — was it — did he overplay that hand in a way that may have turned out people in reaction to it?

JOY REID: I think he was being subtle and being really tricky and slick until he dropped that Toni Morrison ad.

MADDOW: Yeah.

REID: The Toni Morrison ad might have been — he might have gone — that might have been the point at which he went too far. A lot of the people who heard the ad on his — that were maybe his maybe voters, maybe didn't even know who Toni Morrison was. But I promise you black people know who Toni Morrison was. We grew up on her. Anybody who's my age or even a little bit younger, we read her in high school. She's the reason I wanted to be a writer. This is someone who is beloved among black people. And particularly for people who say education is important, that's why that question — I don't know what it means. If you're saying education is the most important issue, you might be a black voter who says, "I'm defending great literature and defending Toni Morrison and I don't like the idea that Youngkin wants to be a governor that would purge those books. What's next? The biography of Dr. King? Is E.B. Dubois next." I mean, Dr. King said America might go to hell. Are we going to erase of his — you know, his more sort of robust American commentary? Is that not going to be allowed to be taught? Trust and believe, he took that so far, he probably animated some African-American voters, too.

NICOLLE WALLACE: I guess, I don't want to be the skunk at the garden party, but I think there's a sense among Republicans that what Youngkin did was, where Trump ran as a guy who wasn't going to — who was going to ban all Muslims, who Mexicans were rapists and murderers, black people came from bleep hole countries. He was such an uncouth and flagrant, you know, debased — there was no conversation about race under him. It was — it was underneath even people who said they voted for him. What Youngkin has done is he put it in a disguise —

REID: Yes.

WALLACE: — gave it a fake name —

WALLACE: — and his candidacy is wrapped in two big lies. One is this half truth. I'm — I flew an insurrection flag at my rally. Oh, Trump's at arm's length. Arm length. There's Trump. And the second big lie is his — his camp — I watched his rally last Saturday. His campaign promise, and he was making this promise in Loudoun and in Alexandria, is on day one, I'm going to ban critical race theory. That is like us banning the ghosts.

REID: Right.

[MADDOW LAUGHS]

WALLACE: There are no ghosts. So we can say, you know what, 7:00 p.m., we're banning the ghosts. There are no ghosts. There isn't critical race theory taught.

REID: Exactly.

WALLACE: But he's laundered Trump's really sort of disgusting, flagrant out racism, he's wrapped it in education.

REID: Yep.

WALLACE: — and he's given it a lie as a label and he said he's going to ban it. There isn't any critical race theory.

REID: It's a ban.

WALLACE: It's a legal theory not taught in public schools in Virginia.

REID: It's so powerful. Because it takes the exhausted, you know, voter who wants to vote on what is fundamentally a racist idea, right? That you cannot teach the truth about Thomas Jefferson. You must give encomiums to Thomas Jefferson in school. Otherwise, that's critical race theory. If you even talk about enslavement, that's critical race theory. Anything that makes a white parent uncomfortable is critical race theory. And you're absolutely right. He's been very subtle and very slick. That Tony Morrison ad was too much of a blunt hammer. But everything he did up until then, I totally agree with you. He's found a way to launder a pretty racist trope, this idea that we cannot talk about America's history, because it hurts my feelings. He's turned that into a campaign and I think what Democrats have to worry about is if he succeeds, and he wins, that is going to be the campaign model for every single Republican that's running in 2020.

MADDOW: Well, I think, I mean, even if Youngkin comes close and doesn't win, it still will be.

WALLACE: Correct.

MADDOW: To have the Fox News Channel, our friends at the Fox News Channel building their programming, particularly the prime-time programming around this for months, they're building a campaign platform for conservative candidates

WALLACE: Correct.

MADDOW: — to run on it everywhere even though it's not actually taught anywhere.

REID: It's not even real.

MADDOW: Even though it's not a real thing. There's nothing you could pay for in any campaign that would equal the kind of free help you'd get from that sort of conservative media, just fire hose on the issue.

(...)

7:09:53 p.m.

3 minutes and 24 seconds

WALLACE: The question for Democrats is going to almost Rumsefeldian, do you go on the campaign trail with the Republican Party you know you've got, that they lie, that they launder the Trump racism in — in — in fleece, that they have a propaganda network that reaches more candidate's ads —

REID: That's right.

WALLACE: — in any state election. Do you adjust with this new propaganda, disinformation, barely veiled dog whistle, race stuff or keep trying to fight on, you know, policy.

REID: This is the problem with Democrats, that they want to do the latter. They seem to —

WALLACE: I know.

REID: — believe if they just do goo-goo good-government policy, that somehow people will understand that they are better for them. It's better for you to be with us because we're going to give you this policy, this policy, this policy while Republicans are fighting with a sledgehammer. They're using a blow torch and Democrats are coming out with, like, a fork. They don't understand. And Democrats also, I hate to say this, and it may sound mean, but the Democratic party has not developed the reflex of defending black voters. They don't know how to do it. Even though African-American voters overwhelmingly — and brown voters and all voters who are in a minority, they don't know how to openly defend them, because they're so afraid of offending that suburban, white voter who might be uncomfortable on race and they're so desperate to get back — to be able to win white voters again, they don't have the reflex and truly don't have the language to robustly defend their core voter. They haven't been able to defend them on civil rights legislation, they've dropped — they prefer to just drop the entire attempt to pass voting rights and really defend it. On critical race theory, you have to come back with something and have an answer.

MADDOW: Yeah.

REID: They haven't — they haven't figured out how to answer this racist charge.

MADDOW: Also the same — there's another way in which it cuts back at them, though, right? Because there's — for the voter who, as you're saying, Joy, the voter who's exhausted and the voter who wants the temperature to come down and the voter who just wants things to get more

rational and less dangerous, when you're talking about caring about education, maybe one of the things you care about is the school board members not being screamed at and threatened —

REID: That's right.

MADDOW: — and doxxed and having their families threatened and all of these things, which has come with the fearmongering around what's happening in schools, whether it's about vaccines, whether it's about masks, whether it's about this made-up stuff about racial indoctrination.

REID: Yep.

MADDOW: The way it's played out on the ground, including in Virginia, is by teachers, school administrators and school board members being put in the bulls-eye —

REID: Yeah.

MADDOW: — and those threats against people who are public servants and who are trying to provide basic services to our kids and families, that is also a form of toxicity —

REID: Yeah.

MADDOW: — that I think the exhausted voter —

REID: Yeah.

REID: — black, white, and other, does — there's a resonance there as well.

REID: You know what? For Democrats to really fight that, they would have to be willing to say what you have said on your show, I think we've all said a version of it, you have to be willing to vocalize that these Republicans are dangerous. That this isn't a party that's just another political party that disagrees with us on tax policy. That, at this point, they're dangerous. They're dangerous to our national security, because stoking that kind of soft, white nationalism eventually leads to the hard-core stuff. It leads to the January 6th stuff, because if people are tolerant of it in your party, they're tolerant of the soft racism, it's a really short trip to get to the January 6th insurrectionist play.