Annette Gordon-Reed’s *On Juneteenth* is about much more than the history of, revelry during, and fun on June 19. Juneteenth started as a Texas commemoration of the day news of emancipation reached the last of the enslaved people in the South and has since grown into a federally recognized holiday. Every June 19, African Americans commemorate the end of slavery and celebrate Black history. *On Juneteenth* is a collection of vignettes ranging from the colonial period to the present, each of which explains the context leading up to the holiday or the ways its memory influences the modern day. Juneteenth is a framing device for the missing aspects of white historical memory of US history. Like Civil War historians who refocus the narrative of the war on emancipation rather than on military exploits, Gordon-Reed refocuses US history on the long struggle for freedom and civil rights but frames it through the study of festivals and celebrations.

Gordon-Reed shows how historical memory shapes individual and community identities by seamlessly transitioning between the historical and the personal, using autobiographical anecdotes as examples within her big picture analysis. She flows from recalling seeing a white man dressed as a Native American, to noting that the common memory today is that Native Americans were merely the opposition to colonists and cowboys, and finally to providing a historian’s analysis of both memories. She first expands the imagined role of Native Americans in US history to be more than a roadblock to modernity and then counters their romanticization, presenting readers with the fact that Native Americans participated in the enslavement of Black people. Gordon-Reed addresses the desire to view Native Americans and Black people as historic allies but urges readers “not to import the knowledge we have into the minds of people and circumstances in the past” (pp. 82–83). Furthermore, she explains that the historical misremembering of the past stems from a fallacious division of peoples into “white” and “not white” categories and that this division loses sight of the complexities of historical reality in order to create a historical memory that is better suited to the modern fight for racial justice. As noble as this political cause is, Gordon-Reed argues, the United States needs to acknowledge the grayness of human morality in the past to work for justice in the present.

Gordon-Reed explores the relationship between culture, race, and identity, particularly in her home state of Texas. *On Juneteenth* wrestles with seemingly conflicting truths, such as Black Texans’ dual pride and chagrin when remembering their state’s history or Native Americans as both victims of oppression and enslavers of Black people. Gordon-Reed believes that these complicated realities and the state’s racial diversity make Texas the ideal microcosm for studying the US. She explains that white historical memory is selective, focusing only on slavery’s end but reciting *ad nauseam* the glorious tale of the Alamo. The current historical memory expects
minorities not to dwell on the past, while also encouraging white Americans to memorialize events that make white people feel heroic. Moreover, Gordon-Reed emphasizes the numerous archival examples of discussions about race throughout Texas and broader US history.

On Juneteenth is an exemplary work on the relationship between memory and celebrations. Holidays are never just an anniversary of an event; they affirm a community’s values and identity through memorials and commemorations. Juneteenth marks more than just the calendar-day that emancipation reached the last enslaved people’s ears; it is a declaration that Black memory lives on despite white supremacists’ best attempts to silence it. Gordon-Reed enthusiastically engages with the contractions of America’s historical memory and resulting identity. She presents readers both with an examination of the past and an explanation for why it continues to matter. On Juneteenth is thoughtful and thoroughly engaging. Those interested in Texas history would especially enjoy Gordon-Reed’s affection and pride for the Lone Star State.
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Kris Plunkett is a PhD student at Tulane University. Her academic interest is Civil War memory, especially its relationships with race and epistemology. Outside of academia, she coaches the speech and debate team at St. Mary’s Dominican High School and is an active member of both the Louisiana and National Senior Classical League.

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