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**Press Contact:**

Clara Guerrero, Director of Communications

(210) 416-4026

[ClaraGuerrero@WitteMuseum.org](mailto:ClaraGuerrero@WitteMuseum.org)

**The Witte Museum Announces 2024 Conference on Texas Theme: "Ode to Juneteenth: Slavery in Texas"**

*Join the timely and resonant national conversation featuring keynote speaker,*

*Annette Gordon-Reed, Pulitzer Prize winner and acclaimed historian*

**[San Antonio, TX] – November 21, 2024** – The Witte Museum proudly announces its 8th annual **Conference on Texas**, a dynamic event that highlights new research and fosters meaningful conversations about the state’s history. This year’s conference, taking place on **December 5 & 6, 2024**, is themed: **"Ode to Juneteenth: Slavery in Texas."** This timely topic resonates nationally, reflecting broader conversations on race and history, and is also critical to understanding Texas’ past — where this subject remains deeply significant yet often underexplored. Through expert presentations and new scholarship, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how slavery shaped Texas, particularly how enslaved peoples’ labor powered the expansion of the Texas economy. The conference promises to be an essential and innovative contribution to the ongoing discussion about America's past and future.

This year’s conference is co-presented with our partners, the **San Antonio African American Community Archive & Museum (SAAACAM)** and the **Smithsonian Institution’s initiative “Our Shared Future: Reckoning with our Racial Past”.** It is a continuation of the Witte’s ongoing commitment to exploring untold stories of Texas, an initiative that also brought about the award-winning exhibition, ***Black Cowboys: An American Story, supported by Bank of America***.

Headlining the conference is **Annette Gordon-Reed**, a MacArthur Genius, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of the **New York Times bestseller** *On Juneteenth*. Known for her groundbreaking work that brought Juneteenth into the national conversation, Gordon-Reed will deliver a keynote address that reflects on the significance of this historic day and its continued influence on the fight for racial justice in America.

Gordon-Reed’s *On Juneteenth* weaves together historical scholarship and personal memoir, offering a powerful narrative that explores the meaning of freedom and progress in America. Named one of the best books of the year by the Washington Post, TIME and NPR, her work sheds light on the complex and often overlooked aspects of Texas history, solidifying her place as one of the most influential historians of our time.

**Quote from the Witte Museum CEO:**

“At the Witte Museum, we’re proud to lead and curate this conference, connecting top scholars with the community to explore Texas’ history on such an important subject. With the expertise of groundbreaking researchers, this event is a unique chance to uncover the past and understand how it shaped the Texas we know today. It’s an exciting opportunity to inspire conversation and build a more informed future together.” said Dirk Elmendorf, CEO & President of the Witte Museum.

**About the Conference:**

The **2024 Conference on Texas** will delve into the foundational role that chattel slavery played in the formation and growth of Texas. The conference will center on the lives of enslaved people, as mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, revealing stories of labor, law, resistance, family and community.

Enslaved people labored on cotton and sugar plantations, but also worked as artisans such as blacksmiths, seamstresses, and as enslaved cowboys. The enslaved population in Texas grew from 5,000 people in 1834 to 182,566 people in 1861, becoming the fastest-growing demographic in the state. It was not until **Juneteenth: June 19, 1865**, that enslaved people in Texas were freed, two years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

**Conference Highlights:**

* **Keynote Speaker**: Annette Gordon-Reed, MacArthur Genius, Pulitzer Prize Winner and author of *On Juneteenth*
* **Panelists:** Dr. Daina Ramey Berry, Dr. Ed Baptist, Dr. Kellie Carter Jackson, Dr. Keisha Ray, and many more.
* **Topics Covered**: The history of slavery in Texas, the role of enslaved labor in the Texas economy and the legacies of slavery impacting African Americans in Texas communities today
* **Partners**: SAAACAM & the Smithsonian Institution
* **Family Day**: Join us for **Black Cowboys Family Day** on **Saturday, December 7, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.**, at the Witte Museum.

**Smithsonian’s Reckoning with our Racial Past Programming**

San Antonio is honored to be the third city to partner with the Smithsonian Institution as part of their *Our Shared Future:* *Reckoning with our Racial Past* initiative. The Smithsonian has previously partnered with Los Angeles and Chicago to develop localized, community-generated programming. This prestigious initiative fosters reflection and dialogue on America’s history of racial injustice. The San Antonio program will run from December 3rd through December 14th, 2024, hosted by, and in collaboration with, the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Mission (AIT-SCM), Asian Texans for Justice (ATJ), DoSeum, Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, San Antonio African American Community Archive Museum (SAAACAM), and the Witte Museum.

With critical conversations, panel discussions, educator workshops, and film screenings, the free program offers attendees opportunities to expand their understanding on how race is interwoven in all components of daily life. For more information and schedule of events, please visit <https://s.si.edu/ncorsa>

**Donors and Sponsors:**

The **Conference on Texas** is presented by **H-E-B** with generous support from **Bank of America**, the **Smithsonian Institution’s Our Shared Future: Reckoning with Our Racial Past Initiative**, **Wells Fargo Advisors**, **William Knox Holt Foundation**, **Humanities Texas**, the **Smothers Foundation**, **Spurs Sports and Entertainment**, and **Frost Bank**.

**Tickets and Scholarships:**

Tickets for the two-day, museum-wide Conference on Texas are now available for purchase. Thanks to the generous support of conference sponsors, scholarships are available to educators and students to attend the event at no cost.

For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit [WitteMuseum.org](https://www.wittemuseum.org/conference/).

**About the Witte Museum:**

Founded in 1926, the Witte Museum inspires people to shape the future of Texas through transformative and relevant experiences in nature, science and culture. Located on the banks of the San Antonio River in Brackenridge Park, the Witte is consistently voted San Antonio’s top museum. Explore Texas from the time of the dinosaurs to the First People to the cowboys to modern-day discoveries. Adventurers of all ages are invited to explore the Witte, where wonder awaits you.