



**ABHM Book Club Discussion Guide**  
**January 30th, 2025 at 6 PM CT**  
***How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith (2021)**

**How to Use this Guide:**

[America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) staff created this guide to assist in reading and discussion of *How the Word is Passed*. Please feel free to print a copy and keep it with your book as you lend to friends and others who are interested. Do not expect to get through all of the questions during the upcoming meeting nor in one sitting. Perhaps consider them as conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about this book.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

1. Clint Smith starts this book by talking about his hometown, New Orleans, and ends it by interviewing his grandparents. How does making this history personal deepen his argument(s)? Have you collected your own family's stories before? Why is it important to preserve the history of everyday people?
2. How do you feel about the removal of symbols of the Confederacy? Are these places where people actually learn history? Does changing the names of streets and names of buildings matter? Where are we with this issue today?
3. Have you been to any of the sites discussed in the book? Where else could Smith have visited to learn about the reckoning with American slavery? Where does ABHM fit into this narrative?
4. What do you think the future of interpretation is at sites such as the ones explored by Smith? How do you feel about the fact that there are tours talking about slavery, but they are separate and optional?

5. What role do the guides Smith encounters play in the visitor experience? How can we take care of the emotional responses of both the audience and the guides when talking about slavery? How do you feel about having descendants working at plantations as interpreters?
6. What are the differences between history, memory, and heritage? Where do they overlap/inform one another? What role do museums and historic sites have in presenting and investigating these intersections? Can history exist without memory?
7. What does Juneteenth mean to you? How can we strike a balance between celebration and education? How does this holiday need to be revered and celebrated given our national memory (or misremembering) of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow?
8. How have the myths of the Lost Cause and Confederacy impacted how we talk about this history and to each other? Are there any stories you were told growing up about history that turned out to be untrue/myths? How do these myths shape the identity of our country?
9. How does Angola Prison illuminate the relationship between slavery and mass incarceration? What is the power of telling these stories honestly in these places? What could that tour have been like if that guide was less avoidant?
10. Do you think there is an age restriction in learning about the history of racism in this country? Why might it be important to revise how we talk about Africa with younger kids? What impact would a more honest education have?