



**Go Big Read**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON COMMON BOOK PROGRAM

## ***How the Word Is Passed* Discussion Questions**

Who do you think the author had in mind when writing this book? What might the author hope a reader gains from this book?

Following Reconstruction-era efforts to build an integrated society, Jim Crow laws were created throughout the South. How did these laws recodify Black American second-class citizenship? In the absence of Jim Crow laws, what laws and practices in the North reinforced white supremacy and racial hierarchy? What are their legacies?

Different perspectives on racism are presented through conversations between Smith and other visitors and tourists. Why might these perspectives be presented like this? In what ways has racism been explained away throughout history? What impact does this have on current perceptions of historical events?

How does the enslavement and the treatment of Indigenous Peoples in the United States intersect with the history of African slavery? Where do you see the connections between these histories?

In speaking of people's misconceptions of slavery and the slave trade, Clint Smith states, "They do not see the faces. They cannot picture the hands. They do not hear the fear, or the laughter" (p. 26). How does the book guide an understanding of the slave trade away from the abstract and towards the everyday reality? How does it show us the humanity of enslaved people?

In the chapter on Gorée Island, Educator Hasan Kane says the phrase, "White sugar means Black misery" (p. 260), highlighting the way slavery, colonialism, and capitalism are interconnected. What does he mean by this? How does Damaras Obi's tour of New York City reinforce this connection?

"The miseducation of the mind and hidden history" (p. 80) are two prominent themes in the book's discussions about education. What could Ibrahima Seck have meant by this? What examples are given throughout the book to support his statement?

How do internal perceptions impact the way individuals process major historical events? How can these perceptions impact the way current events are recorded and how future generations understand history?

How does the author address the idea that power impacts whose history is recorded, how, by whom, and how or if it's told? (p. 291)

How can monuments, landmarks, and "sites of memory and reckoning" address "the problem of the memory of slavery" (p. 252), specifically the gaps of our knowledge and understanding of slavery's reality and legacy/impact? How did sites and historical interpreters and researchers get creative when informing visitors about the past?

What feelings or reactions did you experience while reading this book?

*Additional discussion questions are available from the Little, Brown and Company Reading Group Guides. <https://www.littlebrown.com/titles/clint-smith/how-the-word-is-passed/9780316492911/>*