

Shortlisted Book for the 2023-24 Book in Common

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Clint Smith

How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America

Date: 2021

List price: \$19 paperback

Publisher website: <https://www.littlebrown.com/titles/clint-smith/how-the-word-is-passed/9780316492935/>

Publisher description:

This compelling “important and timely” (Drew Faust, *Harvard Magazine*) #1 *New York Times* bestseller examines the legacy of slavery in America—and how both history and memory continue to shape our everyday lives. Beginning in his hometown of New Orleans, Clint Smith leads the reader on an unforgettable tour of monuments and landmarks—those that are honest about the past and those that are not—that offer an intergenerational story of how slavery has been central in shaping our nation's collective history, and ourselves.... Informed by scholarship and brought to life by the story of people living today, Smith's debut work of nonfiction is a landmark of reflection and insight that offers a new understanding of the hopeful role that memory and history can play in making sense of our country and how it has come to be.

This book is shortlisted for the 2023-2024 Book in Common because

- *It is engaging to students and to a broad audience.* Accessible and sincere, Smith's writing brings to life the people and places he encounters, in ways that illuminate American history and the responsibilities of truthful remembering for our current moment. Each chapter focuses upon specific places of memory that can be read individually or as a whole.
- *It has broad appeal across disciplines.* Smith's book will be of direct relevance to the diverse disciplines in the Colleges of Behavioral and Social Sciences; Humanities and Fine Arts; and Communication and Education. In addition to thinking about the way that history is approached in specific places in the US landscape (such as Thomas Jefferson's Monticello), Smith reflects on topics including historical trauma, the prison-industrial complex, and approaches to memory and commemoration. According to Ibram X. Kendi, author of the 2020-21 Book in Common, “we need this book.”
- *It is relevant and timely.* The last few years have been marked by heated and urgent conversations about public monuments and commemoration. This book offers an anchor to approach the history of slavery and racism thoughtfully and from both historical and personal angles. As the *New York Times* review states, “the book's standout quality is the range and sincerity of its encounters. Smith walks with tourists, guides, teachers, scholars, ex-convicts, local historians and heritage zealots, managing to catch nearly everyone in a moment of unscripted candor.”
- *It relates to the university mission.* This book directly supports the strategic priorities of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion and Civic & Global Engagement including to “address real-world issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion” and “create an environment committed to the active pursuit of global engagement, service, social justice, and connectedness.”