

Ironically, perhaps it is this very resistance that magnifies the contribution of a resource like this. There is no doubt that migration will continue—human beings have always moved, individually and as whole communities, to survive, to colonize, to explore, and to start anew. In the face of heightened hostility toward migrants, and ever harsher measures of control and cruelty, bell hooks' final words in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) are instructive:

The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (p. 207).

ALYSHA BANERJI

## Notes

1. As Masha Gessen (Coaston, 2022) notes, “(n)obody is more governed than immigrants, and nobody has less say in government.”

## References

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## HOW THE WORD IS PASSED: A RECKONING WITH THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY ACROSS AMERICA

by Clint Smith

*New York: Little, Brown, 2021. 352 pp. \$29 (cloth).*

In one of the most striking passages from *How the Word Is Passed*, Clint Smith writes of entering the gates of the maximum-security Louisiana State Penitentiary, better known as Angola after the plantation that once existed on the land. A bus has dropped visitors at the prison's museum for a few moments of browsing before an official tour begins. Behind the checkout counter hangs a photograph of two dozen Black men with garden tools marching into the fields that surround the prison, with a white woman on horseback standing charge over the group. Smith realizes with shock that this is not a snapshot from the past but a recent photograph. He circles the small museum, noting

the array of memorabilia branded with the Angola name for sale—T-shirts, ashtrays, and, most disturbing, a “mug with the silhouette of a guard sitting in a watchtower surrounded by fencing” with the slogan “Angola: A Gated Community” (pp. 90–91). When Smith later presses the Angola tour guide about the prison’s connections to slavery, the guide exasperatingly stutters, “Our history is our history, and I can’t change that”—unwilling (or perhaps, unable) to even attempt to answer Smith’s inquiry (p. 100).

At once a work of history and Smith’s personal reflections, *How the Word Is Passed* urges readers to confront head-on the “patchworks of stories we’ve been told” about slavery and Black America (p. 172). Through visits to six historical sites in the US—Monticello, Whitney Plantation, Angola Prison, Bradford Cemetery, Galveston Island, and New York City—as well as to Dakar, Senegal, Smith weaves a story of the various monuments and landmarks that reveal a piece of this patchwork. In doing so, he makes it clear that the past is ever-present in the museums we visit, the streets we walk, and, perhaps of most interest to this journal’s readers, the teachings we learn.

There is no single chapter in *How the Word Is Passed* dedicated to a school, teacher, or curriculum. Rather, in weaving his experiences at each site with historical and archival data, Smith shows us the responsibility—and, at many points, failure—of our education system to adequately teach the immoral and harmful pieces of our past. At Monticello, Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia plantation and burial ground, Smith illuminates the long archival quest to give Sally Hemmings her rightful place in the story of Jefferson. While there, he introduces us to Donna and Grace, two middle-aged women “perplexed by what they had just learned” about Lincoln the slaveowner, an aspect of the former president their schooling had never taught them (p. 20). At Blandford Cemetery, a memorial in Virginia marking the largest grave of Confederate soldiers in the country, Smith introduces an array of individuals—tour guides and visitors alike—who adamantly deny slavery as a cause for the Civil War. And at Angola, Smith steps in to provide a blunt and granular account of slavery-by-another-name—convict leasing, a critical piece of the prison’s history (pp. 87–89).

Alongside these snapshots, Smith features individuals working to reclaim history and all that is both bright and despairing about it. Numerous tour guides—at Monticello and the Whitney Plantation and in a walking tour of New York City’s slavery and the Underground Railroad—demonstrate a willingness to surface a truth that most would rather pass over in an attempt to give visitors a benign experience. Each of these guides, in their own way, views their job as more than curation, preservation, and touring; they describe themselves as educators, healers, and connectors. Perhaps the most powerful of these moments surfaces during Smith’s trip to Galveston Island, Texas, where he participates in their annual Juneteenth celebration welcoming an intergenerational mix of college students, young children, grandparents, and community members. A central organizer, Kathy, speaks of her love for the

“project of community education . . . Learning models that break down and break out of our traditional conceptions of what education should look like” (p. 180). In each of these site visits, *How the Word Is Passed* encourages the question, what disservice do we perpetuate for future generations by looking away and past the ongoing harms of slavery?

In his rich and thick descriptions, Smith illustrates time and again the characters he meets and scenes he enters with care and vibrance, allowing readers the gift of traveling with him on this journey. At Monticello, we meet David, our guide, who wore a “brown wide-brimmed hat that cast a slight shadow over his eyes” and who led the tour group with a “calm evenhandedness that invited people into discussion, like a professor” (p. 10). Later, on the drive to Whitney Plantation, we see the “yellow wildflowers that danced from their roots every time a car drove by” (p. 56). No doubt grown from his gifts as a poet and training in the portraiture methodology, Smith’s talent to evoke the essence and emotion of historical sites and their visitors adds immeasurable value to the book.

In the book’s final chapter, Smith takes us across an ocean to Dakar. Our guides, Momar and Eloi, ferry us from the bustling streets of the city to Gorée Island, widely considered the largest center of slave trading in Africa and a site of great historical and emotional significance to local residents and a global diaspora. More recently, however, scholars have questioned this characterization, proposing that far fewer (although still significant) numbers of people moved through the island. Smith gently asks Eloi, a former teacher and now curator of the Gorée Island historic site, about the discrepancies between these scholarly estimates and the stories still told to tourists at the museum, curious whether the inaccuracies do a disservice to our historical reckoning. He wonders if it is possible for “a place that misstates a certain set of facts [to] still be a site of memory for a larger truth” (p. 268). This is similar to questions he faced at the Whitney Plantation, where there is some skepticism around the structure and exhibits that are not original to the site but were placed there to tell a particular story. Smith doesn’t receive a definitive answer to these questions, nor does he try to construct one for us readers. Instead, he allows a chorus of historians around the world, high school students in Dakar, and teachers like Eloi to share their perspectives on the balances between symbolism and truth, local interpretations and “empirical” evidence, and remembrance and forgetting.

It seems that Smith intends this chapter set in Dakar to bring readers full circle, to a city in which Europeans originally forced Africans into bondage. In a way, it accomplishes this goal, particularly in its exploration of how Senegalese educators view their responsibility and roles in teaching the banes of colonization and the origins of slavery. Yet, this chapter left me feeling almost as if he had embarked on a new book. Smith raises such complex and consequential questions about the production of knowledge and the “entanglement of capitalism, colonialism, and slavery” (p. 260) that I found myself hoping

for a sequel in which he could continue to investigate the global collective memory of slavery.

*How the Word Is Passed* is a powerful and valuable book, one that will speak to a range of audiences, from archivists to teachers and students to parents. As we, like Smith, grapple with how to articulate and remember the gaps of a “crime that is still unfolding,” we would do well to ask ourselves what responsibility our public schools have to facilitate our collective reckoning with slavery and racial violence (p. 289). While readers must inevitably determine this responsibility for themselves, *How the Word Is Passed* suggests that the answer, in part, might lie within these museums, historical memorials, and community celebrations. In these places, and in thousands of similar sites around the world, there exists the opportunity to investigate a history that is too often forgotten or overlooked, a history we must learn so that we can truly understand our present and future.

ABIGAIL ORRICK

#### MINDS WIDE SHUT: HOW THE NEW FUNDAMENTALISMS DIVIDE US

by Gary Saul Morson and Morton Schapiro

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In late 2020, a collection of leading political scientists wrote a brief in *Science* on what they characterized as the “fierce urgency” of fighting growing political sectarianism in the United States (Finkel et al., 2020, p. 536). Among their recommendations for reforming our increasingly toxic and combative political culture, the authors called for promoting intellectual humility: by developing a commitment to nuance and an awareness of our own cognitive limits, we may become less self-righteous, more judicious, and better able to resist the simplistic and moralized stories that seduce us into extremism and open us to misinformation.

With the release of *Minds Wide Shut: How the New Fundamentalisms Divide Us*, Gary Saul Morson and Morton Schapiro take up the call for promoting intellectual humility with an engaging and wide-ranging paean to inquiring, cautious, and rigorous thinking.

The main preoccupation of *Minds Wide Shut* is the surge in what the authors call “fundamentalism,” a term they use to refer to a particular kind of reductive, self-certain thinking that flourishes under conditions of polarization. *Minds Wide Shut* focuses on the characteristics of fundamentalist stances and their alternatives in the domains of economics, literary theory, politics, and religion, but the habits of mind under discussion run deep, and educators of all stripes will find it easy to appreciate the contrasting approaches to thinking at work in their fields.

The book begins with the acknowledgment that the term *fundamentalism* has often been used loosely, as a catch-all disparagement to identify politi-