

ABHM

AMERICA'S BLACK HOLOCAUST MUSEUM



A Program of the
Dr. James Cameron Legacy Foundation

How to use this guide:

ABHM staff created this guide inspired by the author's own recommended discussion guide to assist in reading and discussing this work. 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 at once. Perhaps consider them conversation starters or an invitation to reflect more deeply about your own or shared experiences.

Themes from the book:

- **Whiteness at Work:** "Navigating" white culture in the workplace and in school as a Black person where white people are not taught to be critical of whiteness and white supremacy
- **Code Switching:** The life lessons that Black parents have to teach their children to protect them in a world made for whiteness and the code switching they have to do as they grow up
- **Religion:** Religious communities and white Jesus versus Black Jesus
- **Colorblindness:** ignoring/hiding issues of race in 90s/early 2000s, instead of identifying whiteness and white supremacy when you see it
- **Black History is American History:** Understanding the hard truths of this country's history as a way forward/repercussions of asserting a truer version of history in education system
- **White Fragility:** White feelings prioritized over the work of antiracism and true change (white fragility); instead of avoiding conflict and discomfort
- **Reconciliation:** buzz word that too often focuses on only diversity efforts and conversations, rather than action-oriented change in current power structures

Questions:

1) **Black History is American History**

Channing Brown says that like many Black students, she had to act on her own behalf if she wanted to see herself reflected in her school curriculum at her predominately white school (page 44) and that they were not supposed to "question history" (page 27). So much of this memoir focuses on our country's treatment of its past.

Has history curriculum changed much since the time Brown was in school? **How can we get school curriculum, particularly in history classes, to reflect a truthful representation of America?** How will this help us reconcile with the issues of race in our country or will it? What role did teachers play in Channing Brown's evolving understanding of Blackness and whiteness in America?

2) Colorblindness

Channing Brown says that she learned that "harmony - the absence of outright conflict - often leaves deeper complications untouched" (page 40). Part of ABHM's mission is to embrace difficult conversations about racism and historical truth telling because only then can we come up with real solutions for racial reconciliation.

What effect did promoting colorblindness and avoiding conflict have on Channing Brown's white classmates? **How might we go about creating spaces to embrace these difficult conversations in schools, workplaces, and other social circles?** What will these conversations look like? Do you think this is the right way forward?

3) Black History is American History

In college, Channing Brown took a three-day trip down South exploring Black history through Sankofa, which allowed her and her classmates to move past "superficial niceties," "social conventions and respectability politics," to talking honestly about the violent and racist past of America.

What effect did this trip have on Channing Brown and other Black students? How did this differ from the effect it had on her white classmates? What did she accomplish once she decided to become a change agent? **What could we accomplish in our own lives as agents of meaningful change once we are honest about our past?**

4) Whiteness at Work

Channing Brown describes her experience with racism in both applying and interviewing for jobs and how she is treated once she starts at a workplace with a white supremacist culture (chapter one).

Have you experienced or seen these types of racism in your own workplaces? How was (or was it?) addressed? **How can we identify and change whiteness and white supremacy in these spaces to create a better work environment for everyone?** In what ways do current DEAI efforts, such as those described by Channing Brown, fall short or fail to truly address racism in the workplace?

5) White Fragility

When writing about white fragility, Channing Brown says it is dangerous because “it ignores the personhood of people of color and instead makes the feelings of whiteness the most important thing” (page 89).

What personal experiences with white fragility does Channing Brown offer? Why does Channing Brown feel that there is a danger in assuming that “niceness” disproves the presence of racism? Relatedly, why do you think it is so hard for white people to talk about race? **What action steps do you hope the white people in your life will begin to take to move beyond “niceness” and start to have honest conversations about racism?**

6) Religion

Channing Brown talks about her different experiences in her predominately white church versus in her predominantly Black church (page 35). She further discusses Jesus' own arrest, incarceration, and execution, drawing parallels to Black people's own experience inside the criminal justice system (page 146).

What were the differences between Black Jesus and white Jesus, according to Channing Brown? **In her eyes, what do white Jesus and Black Jesus represent? Do you agree or disagree?** Have you observed any differences between Black and white churches?

7) Code Switching

Throughout the book, Channing Brown talks about how her name often leads people to believe that she is a white man before they meet her and about the expectation within white organizations for Black people to code-switch, “conforming to the cultural communication of white people when [she] is with them” (page 78).

What's the story behind your name? Did your parents have to consider race when you were named? If you have children, did you consider race when choosing names? **What harm does tokenism do to Black people in these organizations and to the organizations themselves?** How can we address this issue in our own workplaces?

8) Black History is American History

Although this memoir was published in 2018, many of Channing Brown's main arguments remain relevant. She writes, whiteness wants Blackness to “sing the celebratory ‘We Shall Overcome’ during MLK Day but doesn't want to hear the indicting lyrics of ‘Strange Fruit’” (page 70). In chapter 12, she also discusses the birth of the

Black Lives Matter movement and how Ferguson and the shooting of Black church goes at AME Church in Charleston was history “collapsing on itself once again.”

What does Channing Brown suggest will happen once we acknowledge the violent truth of our collective past? **How does Channing Brown’s discussion of the whitewashing and sanitization of the history of the Civil War, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement relate to the current movement for Black lives?** Do you think things will change as a result of the Black Lives Matter protests and that America is finally ready to have these honest conversations? What, if anything, makes this movement different from those of the past?

9) Reconciliation

Channing Brown writes, “I offer this story in hopes that we will embody a community eager to name whiteness, celebrate Blackness, and, in a world still governed by systems of racial oppression, begin to see there’s another way” (page 23). In chapter 13, Channing Brown talks about reconciliation, which is an integral part of ABHM’s mission.

What does Channing Brown say reconciliation is NOT? What does she say it actually needs to be? **What do you think the way forward is? What strategies and solutions does Channing Brown’s memoir provide for this way forward?**

For further reading/discussion on I’m Still Here:

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<https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-austin-channing-brown-on-im-still-here-black-dignity-in-a-world-made-for-whiteness/>