

ABHM Book Club: Black In Blues

Quick recap

The ABHM Book Club held a discussion on Imani Perry's book "Black and Blues," focusing on how the color blue connects to Black history and experiences throughout American history. The group explored Perry's use of personal connections to historical topics, her analysis of race as a social construct, and the significance of literacy and education in Black communities. Participants discussed how Perry uncovered overlooked historical figures and stories, including her coverage of George Washington Carver's artistic and scientific contributions beyond peanuts, and examined how material culture and artifacts help preserve and understand Black history. The discussion concluded with reflections on how the book connects to the 250th anniversary of the United States, highlighting ongoing struggles and the importance of continued work toward equality and justice.

Summary

ABHM Book Club Meeting

ABHM welcomed participants to the ABHM Book Club meeting focused on discussing "Black and Blues" by Imani Perry, mentioning that the author spoke at the museum in April. The book club, founded by Dr. James Cameron, aligns with America's 250th anniversary celebrations and follows a schedule of readings throughout the year, including "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings" for June and "Black Patriots and Loyalists" for July. ABHM outlined the meeting's ground rules for discussing difficult topics and announced upcoming book club meetings.

Book Discussion on Color History

The meeting focused on discussing a book about color and history. ABHM shared positive feedback, praising the author's poetic approach and use of art, while one person noted that the flowery language made the beginning difficult to engage with. The discussion included mentions of a connection to Casa Romero's art and activism retreat, where participants created a mural inspired by the book's themes, particularly focusing on the color blue.

Color Symbolism in Amani Perry's Book

The group discussed the significance of colors, particularly blue, in Imani Perry's book. They explored how blue symbolizes different aspects of history, including Union Soldier's uniforms becoming police uniforms and how the critics of the Black Lives Matter movement responded with "Blue Lives Matter." The discussion highlighted how colors can connect separate historical events and stories. The participants also considered how other cultures use colors symbolically, noting the significance of red in Hindu and Indian traditions.

Blue and Personal History Exploration

"Black in Blues" explores the personal connection Imani Perry has to the color blue, noting how the author writes herself into the story similar to previous works like "South to America" and her Lorraine Hansberry biography. The group highlighted how personal experiences make the historical content more relatable and powerful, while also bringing lightness to heavy topics. The discussion touched on how misinformation about people of color's health has been perpetuated, including within the medical profession, and concluded with a mention of exploring concepts of race as a construct.

Racialization and Blues Music Discussion

The group discussed insights from the book offers about racialization and how race is consistently rebuilt. They highlighted the book's section on the blues, particularly its description of the blues as a form of expressing pain and trauma through music, creating beauty and connection. The discussion also touched on how white artists often appropriate the blues and gain more recognition, including examples like Elvis Presley, while the original African-American artists face challenges and commodification of their art.

Race as Technology Discussion

The group discussed Imani Perry's book, focusing on concepts of race as technology and how race is socially constructed. They explored Perry's insights on historical record-keeping and its connection to museum missions, particularly at America's Black Holocaust Museum and Wisconsin Black Historical Society. The discussion also covered Perry's exploration of literacy and education as pathways to freedom, highlighted through examples like Frederick Douglass and George Washington Carver. The conversation concluded with reflections on Perry's

perspective on the 250th anniversary of the United States, emphasizing the ongoing struggles with democracy and the importance of continued advocacy for racial justice.