

ABHM Book Club: The Underground Railroad

Quick recap

This was a book club meeting at America's Black Holocaust Museum focused on discussing "The Underground Railroad" by Colson Whitehead. The group discussed the book's powerful writing style, historical connections to modern racism, and the author's choice to present the Underground Railroad as an actual railroad despite it being a metaphor. They explored themes of museum representation and the importance of centering Black perspectives in historical narratives rather than focusing on white saviors. The conversation also touched on the museum's mission to continue Dr. James Cameron's work through educational programs like the book club, which was founded in 2020 to address modern manifestations of racism and create racial reconciliation.

Summary

Underground Railroad Book Club Discussion

The group discussed their book club's recent reading of "The Underground Railroad" by Colson Whitehead. A participant shared her shock at discovering extremist content promoted by young men, while another highlighted the book's vivid descriptions of the enslavement process and its portrayal of internal conflicts within enslaved communities. The group reflected on how the book challenged readers to address personal biases and move beyond superficial virtue signaling.

Historical Fiction and Museum Representation

A participant explained that historical fiction helps make complex history more accessible, especially compared to traditional history books, and shared personal experiences connecting with historical artifacts in schools. The conversation then shifted to discussing a museum setting in the book where a character plays an enslaved person for educational purposes, with the group examining how this reflects broader issues in museum practices and the representation of difficult history.

Underground Railroad Novel Discussion

The group focused on the book's portrayal of the Underground Railroad as an actual railroad and the central role of Black people in abolition. They shared insights about the book's representation of different states' experiences with slavery and the importance of highlighting Black agency in historical narratives.