



Discussion Guide

Further Reading:

- [Ben H. Winters shares some notes on the paperback publication](#), and how the world has changed (or not changed)
- [Jesse Washington interviews Winters](#) about being a white writer of a black narrator for *The Undeclared*
- Recommended by Winters for “anyone who has read *Underground Airlines* and wants more elucidation of the book’s prime underlying thesis — that the institutions and attitudes formed during the long years of American slavery still inform our treatment of black citizens (to often brutal and deadly effect)”: [“The Cloak of Fear” by Jamelle Bouie in Slate](#)
- How closely did you read *Underground Airlines*? [Try your hand at this trivia quiz!](#)

Questions:

- 1.) Author Ben H. Winters says his novel is “an attempt to dramatize the ways that the legacy of American slavery still informs our lives today.” How does this novel resonate with contemporary race relations in the United States?
- 2.) How does Victor repress his past through his various identities? What are his coping mechanisms, and how effective are they in completing his mission?
- 3.) *Underground Airlines* paints several portraits of white people, ranging from complicit racists to kindhearted abolitionists. What do you make of these various archetypes? What are the ways in which Victor sees “whiteness”? Conversely, what are the different perspectives on “blackness”?

- 4.) In Part 1 Victor quotes an abolitionist friend who claims “*la liberté est une question de logistique.*” Do you find the logistics of this novel convincing, and the setting believable? How so?
- 5.) If you were in Victor’s shoes, would you decide to complete Kevin’s mission? Would you bring Martha with you to the GGS facility? How would you react to the discovery that the government is connecting genetic material for cloning?
- 6.) Discuss the character of Martha: how does she defy stereotypes? What are her priorities, and how do they relate to the stakes of the setting?
- 7.) Which scene in the novel did you find the most compelling?
- 8.) Empathy is a major theme of the novel. How does Victor show empathy towards other characters, from both the past and present?
- 9.) How does this book tackle the question of story-telling authority?
- 10.) How would you categorize this book? Which genre does it belong to?
- 11.) What did you make of the novel’s conclusion? Does the ending provide closure for you?
- 12.) How does this novel change your perspective on American history?

WHAT TO READ NEXT:

- “Why Not Use This Moment to Celebrate Writers of Color?” [A reading list by Winters](#) in LitHub.
- *Bluebird, Bluebird* by Attica Locke
- *Skies of Ash* and *Trail of Echoes* by Rachel Howzell Hall
- *Black Noir: Mystery, Crime and Suspense Stories by African-American Writers*
- *The New Black: A Neo-Noir Anthology* (2014) edited by Richard Thomas
- *The Good Lord Bird* by James McBride
- *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead
- [The Trump Story Project](#), edited by Winters for Slate