

Chasing History

An Annotated Reading List on Racism, African American History, and Whiteness
By Pam Woll

First, links to a couple of other people's book lists:

From National Public Radio (NPR): "This List of Books, Films and Podcasts About Racism Is a Start, Not a Panacea"

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/06/06/871023438/this-list-of-books-films-and-podcasts-about-racism-is-a-start-not-a-panacea>

"To help people be better allies, lists of antiracist books, films, and podcasts are being published in droves. There's never a bad time to learn, but such a list can become erroneously prescriptive, a balm to centuries-old lacerations that cut deeper than the individual reader." (Isabella Rosario, author of the NPR list)

From *Business Insider*: "22 books on race and white privilege that will show you what's really happening in America right now"

<https://www.businessinsider.com/books-white-privilege-novels-racism-antiracism-black-scholars-2020-6>

"*Business Insider* reached out to Black professors and scholars at institutions across the country to find out which books they recommend. We also included some popular books on anti-racism Americans are digitally reading at their libraries right now." (Marguerite Ward, author of the *Business Insider* list)

Note: After the book list, there's a long list of good podcasts and podcast series on the subject.

Pam's book list and very subjective comments (in six categories)

- Foundational Ideas
- Race, Caste, and Racism
- American History
- The Criminal Justice System
- Misc. Effects of Systemic Racism
- “Whiteness”

1. Foundational Ideas	
For anyone who wants to start on common ground—the biases and historical wounds that are common to all or most cultures—these two books would be good places to start	
<i>Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do</i> Jennifer L. Eberhardt, PhD	Dr. Eberhardt’s research is fascinating, and her anecdotes give it depth and texture. This provides good grounding for an empathic understanding of how we all sometimes get it wrong.
<i>My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies</i> Resmaa Menakem	Therapist Resmaa Menakem has written a careful, healing book about the influences of history on the experiences and actions of white people, people of color, and law enforcement. It also functions as a workbook, with frequent activities for absorbing, integrating, and dealing with information about this sometimes-painful subject.
<i>The Origin of Others</i> Toni Morrison	Just got this and haven’t started it yet. Sounds like a fascinating examination of that “other-ness” thing we all do.
2. Race, Caste, and Racism	
If you want to go in-depth into the basic ideas that have shaped many of the challenges that surround interracial relations, these three books are excellent resources.	
<i>Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents</i> Isabel Wilkerson	This was published this year (2020) and is an amazing compendium of historical, conceptual, and deeply human thought, with a central focus on the American racial caste system and much comparative information on the Hindu caste system in India and the caste system that developed in Nazi Germany.
<i>Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America</i> Ibram X. Kendi	Kendi’s history presents a veritable blizzard of well documented lies and pseudoscience used to justify slavery, prejudice, inequity, and oppression through the centuries. (He also published a young adult version of this.)
<i>The Fire Next Time</i> James Baldwin	Brilliant, beautiful, deep, and unflinchingly honest, Baldwin was a loving critic of our society whose observations we’ve needed to heed all along. This 1963 classic has just two essays, a letter to his nephew and a longer memoir.
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Ta-Nehisi Coates	Written as a letter to his son, this book blends history, recent events (including the first several police killings of young Black men), and Coates’s own experiences in

	a loving, difficult examination of where we are in America.
<i>How to Be an Antiracist</i> Ibram X. Kendi	This one also combines personal anecdote with conceptual information about racism, though in this case grounded in the academic literature. Kendi's book follows his own thought-life and academic story, from his early "racist" days, through several phases of development, illuminating all of the ways he learned he'd been completely wrong up until that moment. It's full of persuasive arguments, but it's also hugely inspiring because of his attitude of continual self-searching and self-honesty. (He also published a children's version called <i>Antiracist Baby</i> , which comes in a board book!)
<i>Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own</i> Eddie S. Glaude, Jr.	If you're a James Baldwin fan, this book offers a fascinating look at his life, his work, his hopes for America, and where we are right now.
"I Am Not Your Negro" Documentary, available on Netflix	This is a 2016 documentary about James Baldwin, directed by Raoul Peck, based on an unfinished manuscript called <i>Remember This House</i> .
<i>The Ethnic Project: Transforming Racial Fiction into Ethnic Factions</i> Vilna Bashi Treitler	Haven't read this yet. Sounds like a fascinating arrangement of concepts around race and ethnicity.

3. American History

This starts with three books, plus an incredible series of resources from the *New York Times*, represent just a teaspoonful of the ocean—but an important teaspoonful.

<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> W.E.B. DuBois.	Published in 1903, this hauntingly beautiful series of essays presents history and then-current events/circumstances as poetry. In these essays DuBois addresses a number of disparate subjects, but somehow they seem to form a complete whole. (If you use Audible, get the "Amazon Classics Edition" of this, narrated by Prentice Onayemi. His voice and his narration style for this book are also poetry.)
<i>The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration</i> Isabel Wilkerson	In this epic, Wilkerson wove a comprehensive view of the need for and consequences of the Great Migration around the stories of three people who made the trip. Like <i>Caste</i> , this is a beautiful and gracious work.
<i>Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America</i> Eugene Robinson	I bought this one because I love Eugene Robinson (Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the Washington Post and frequent panelist on cable news shows), and it's fascinating. He writes of the way African American society in this country has been divided into four largely separate populations, and the implications of this splintering.
The 1619 Project <i>New York Times Magazine</i> https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html	Nikole Hannah-Jones led the creation of this beautiful and heartbreaking compendium of articles, available both in print and in audio format (e.g., podcast), released on the 400 th anniversary of the first ship that bore slaves to the shores of this continent.
<i>White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide</i>	Haven't read this history yet. Sounds good.

Carol Anderson	
4. <u>The Criminal Justice System</u>	
I've only read two books on this so far, and watched one great documentary, because it's so incredibly large and disheartening a problem—now made more horrible by COVID-19.	
<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> Michelle Alexander	This is an urgent and important book about how the use of our criminal justice system against people of color has turned into a highly efficient way of buying expensive labor, funded by taxpayer dollars, with profits going—more and more—to for-profit prison corporations.
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Bryan Stevenson	Even outside his work for the Equal Justice Initiative, founder Bryan Stevenson has become a huge force for justice and healing in this country. This book tells the horrifying stories of several people caught in the justice system, and the story of their struggles for actual justice.
13 th Netflix documentary	Though the 13 th Amendment abolished slavery, it included the qualification "...except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted..." This documentary shows how that language has been manipulated to set up what amounts to an enduring system of slavery.
<i>The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America</i> Khalil Gibran Muhammad	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
5. <u>Misc. Effects of Systemic Racism</u>	
Just ran into these titles.	
<i>Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership</i> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
<i>The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America</i> Richard Rothstein	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
<i>Black Wealth/White Wealth</i> Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
<i>A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault On The American Mind</i> Harriet A. Washington	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
<i>Blackballed: The Black Vote and U.S. Democracy</i> Darryl Pinckney	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
<i>Why we need reparations for Black Americans</i> Rashawn Ray and Andre Perry Brookings.edu/policy2020 – April 2020 https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/why-we-need-reparations-for-black-americans/	Haven't read this yet. Sounds good.
6. <u>Whiteness</u>	
There is a whole universe of things that most white people never learn about non-white people's experience of us—and how even truly good and un-bigoted white people can insult people of color without ever knowing it	

(at least not consciously). And there has never been a better time to find really good resources to help us understand and make things better.	
<i>White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism</i> Robin DiAngelo	Robin DiAngelo is a white sociologist, lecturer, and author whose work has become the best-known, best-selling resource for white people who want to understand and do things differently. If you're ready for it, it's liberating. If you're not ready for it, it might feel unfair or even insulting at times. You might start with one of her YouTube presentations, or with my Introduction to White Fragility described below.
"Robin DiAngelo on White Fragility," interview broadcast on "Amanpour and Company" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx-gUfQx4-Q "Deconstructing White Privilege with Robin DiAngelo" Presentation by the author https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dwlx3KQer54	These are two of several presentations you can find on YouTube if you Google "YouTube" and "Robin DiAngelo." Getting more information on her insights makes them seem less blunt and more clearly accurate.
"Introduction to Robin DiAngelo's <i>White Fragility</i> ," essay by Pam Woll	I first wrote this for the white people at my church who were preparing to read DiAngelo's book, to get them used to the concepts in a gentler form and explain some things that my co-presenter had found confusing or insulting the first time he read the book.
<i>So You Want to Talk About Race</i> Ijeoma Oluo	Oluo blends many of her own experiences with broader conceptual material about the social and psychological impact of everyday interactions with white people. Like DiAngelo, she speaks her truth and pulls no punches. Unlike <i>White Fragility</i> , this book is written for multiracial audiences, though people of color are more likely to find its content familiar.
<i>Me and White Supremacy: How to Recognize Your Privilege, Combat Racism, and Change the World</i> Layla Saad	
<i>I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness</i> Austin Channing Brown	

Podcasts

This list of podcasts is from Krista Tippett's wonderful series called "On Being."

Isabel Wilkerson: This History is Long; This History is Deep

<https://onbeing.org/programs/isabel-wilkerson-this-history-is-long-this-history-is-deep/>

Ruby Sales: Where Does it Hurt?

<https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/>

Ta-Nehisi Coates: Imagining a New America

<https://onbeing.org/programs/ta-nehisi-coates-imagining-a-new-america/>

John Lewis: Love in Action

<https://onbeing.org/programs/john-lewis-love-in-action/>

Claudia Rankine: How Can I Say This So We Can Stay in This Car Together?

<https://onbeing.org/programs/claudia-rankine-how-can-i-say-this-so-we-can-stay-in-this-car-together-jan2019/>

Robin DiAngelo and Resmaa Menakem: In Conversation

<https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-diangelo-and-resmaa-menakem-in-conversation/>

Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Alexander, and Arnauld Rampersad: W.E.B. DuBois and the American Soul

<https://onbeing.org/programs/maya-angelou-elizabeth-alexander-arnold-rampersad-w-e-b-du-bois-and-the-american-soul/>

Nikki Giovanni: Soul Food, Sex, and Spice

<https://onbeing.org/programs/nikki-giovanni-soul-food-sex-and-space-aug2017/>

Desmond Tutu: A God of Surprises

<https://onbeing.org/programs/desmond-tutu-a-god-of-surprises/>

Mahzarin Banaji: The Mind Is a Difference-Seeking Machine

<https://onbeing.org/programs/mahzarin-banaji-the-mind-is-a-difference-seeking-machine-aug2018/>

Michelle Alexander: Who We Want to Become: Beyond the New Jim Crow

<https://onbeing.org/programs/mahzarin-banaji-the-mind-is-a-difference-seeking-machine-aug2018/>

Eula Biss: Talking About Whiteness

<https://onbeing.org/programs/eula-biss-talking-about-whiteness/>

Marilyn Nelson: Communal Pondering in a Noisy World

<https://onbeing.org/programs/marilyn-nelson-communal-pondering-in-a-noisy-world/>

Vincent Harding: Is America Possible?

<https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-diangelo-and-resmaa-menakem-in-conversation/>

Jason Reynolds: Fortifying Imagination

<https://onbeing.org/programs/jason-reynolds-fortifying-imagination/>

Resmaa Menakem: Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence

<https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

angel Kyodo williams: The World Is Our Field of Practice

<https://onbeing.org/programs/angel-kyodo-williams-the-world-is-our-field-of-practice/>

Imani Perry: More Beautiful

<https://onbeing.org/programs/imani-perry-more-beautiful/>

Darnell Moore: Self-Reflection and Social Evolution

<https://onbeing.org/programs/darnell-moore-self-reflection-and-social-evolution/>

And these are the few other podcast series I know of that also have good pods on these subjects:

Into America (MSNBC), with Trymaine Lee

Scene on Radio (NPR), their "Seeing White" series

Incarceration, Inc. (CNN) with Van Jones

Unlocking Us with Brene Brown (mixed in with other topics)