

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

The civil rights movement during the King years protested unjust laws and succeeded in changing legal codes. We celebrate the success in ending segregation and expanding voting rights even as we struggle against more subtle systems that continue to limit access to justice and opportunity. Today, laws reinforce disparities and degrade some segments of the population without using the language of segregation, and so we continue to press for change. Current laws make it more difficult for some people to earn enough money to live decently or to improve their economic condition; laws continue to define some immigrants as “illegal,” which also limits access to justice and opportunity. Other sources of injustice that were in place decades ago continue. As many argue, the criminal justice system has become a criminal system rather than a justice system. It targets some groups and neighborhoods systematically with surveillance and citations for petty violations; it keeps in jail those without the ability to pay cash bail even though they have not been convicted of a crime; for these same people, the system provides inadequate representation in court; the over-burdened system encourages plea deals regardless of guilt or innocence without explaining the long-term consequences of pleading guilty. Economic and law-enforcement disparities fuel resentment and division. We cannot move forward as a nation without attending to these problems.

Today we rededicate ourselves to Dr. King’s vision of justice in which all the disadvantaged have access to decent housing, quality education, and good jobs. To these ends, we need to educate ourselves about the civil rights movement, and we need to talk honestly about race and our nation’s history. The MLK Coalition is a proud supporter of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Some of the donations collected today will be donated to the library to support acquisition of more books about King and civil rights. Below is a list of some of the resources available at the library or online that any of us can use to further our own education. Contributors include Desiré Bennett, Louise Lawarre, and Martha Viehmann.

BOOKS FOR ADULTS

***Why We Can’t Wait* by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1964).** Focusing on actions in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963, King characterizes the increasing engagement of the black community in the protests for integration, fair employment, and quality education as a revolution. He explains the power of non-violent direct action, describes details about decision-making and the actions, and analyzes the context, response, backlash, and future of the civil rights movement. A central chapter reprints his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Throughout, King remains hopeful that a tide has turned because of the revolutionary tactics and increased unity of blacks and other advocates for equality and justice gained through non-violent means, even as he acknowledges that “the depth of racism in American life has been underestimated” and reminds readers that from the start, this nation was born in a battle for racial supremacy. The book concludes with a critique of the liberal plea for gradual change, a call for government programs to aid the disadvantaged of all races, and a reaffirmation of the power of non-violence.

***We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017).** The title of Coates’s new book comes from a black political leader mourning the end of Reconstruction, which had aimed to rebuild an inclusive South. Coates uses the quote to establish that effective government by black people challenges white supremacy and inspires the kind of backlash we saw in the 1870s and again today. Coates combines eight of his outstanding essays from *The Atlantic* magazine during the Obama presidency with new chapters about his own life. In these new chapters, he shares some of his life journey in that period, and he critiques his own essays with new insights and wisdom. The essays themselves include his widely read article on Reparations, his meeting with Michelle Obama, a piece about Malcolm X, a stark look at mass incarceration, and a look at the first black, and the first white, presidents. Coates is clear and direct in his thoughts about the state of our union. His desire to write like James Baldwin bears fruit in this book.

***Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* by Michael Eric Dyson** (2017). Dyson was a Baptist minister before he earned a PhD in sociology, and this book uses the format of a church service and the tone of a preacher to tell white America about the African American experience. Dyson uses his personal experience, rap lyrics, current events and more to convey the frustrations, indignities, and dangers that blacks face. He makes clear that white people need to understand their part in the suffering of people of color and take responsibility or the tears will never stop. The call to action demands that whites move beyond empathy and provides specific suggestions to address the problems of racial inequality and injustice.

***They Can't Kill Us All* by Wesley Lowery** (2016). Wesley Lowery, a national reporter for the Washington Post, was new to the job when he was sent to Ferguson, Missouri, to cover the events following the killing of Michael Brown. From there he traveled to Cleveland, Charleston, and Baltimore. He follows the stories of communities demanding justice for Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott and Freddy Gray, both in his first-hand reporting, and through research and interviews. His book is an exploration of protests of police killings in black communities and the failure of the nation to deliver tangible security to people of color.

***Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* by Marc Lamont Hill** (2016). What does it mean to be a "nobody" in contemporary America? And how does it happen that whole groups of people become "nobodies"? Dr. Hill examines the two cities of Ferguson, Missouri, and Flint, Michigan, as examples of a national tragedy—that government policies, corporate profits, and social practices have for generations denied significant segments of their populations access to full equality and freedom. This book is about how ordinary people are relegated to the status of disposable people, whose race and class make them irrelevant to the workings of unregulated capitalism.

***Answering the Call: An Autobiography of the Modern Struggle to End Racial Discrimination in America* by Nathaniel R. Jones** (2016). *Answering The Call* is an extraordinary eyewitness account from an unsung hero of the battle for racial equality in America. Judge Jones has been a civil rights activist, a federal prosecutor, NAACP general counsel, a federal court of appeals judge, and a prominent attorney. His autobiography shares the story of race in the United States over the ninety years of his life, of the struggles, of how far our society has come, and how much is left to be done. His story, told with candor and grace, is a reminder of the call to service and what one person can accomplish.

***The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois** (originally published in 1903). This classic work of essays and "sketches" (memoir, biography, and short fiction) is one of the foundations of African American studies. It is an exploration of "the problem of the color line," grounded in his time and relevant to ours. Du Bois argues for equality, voting rights, and educational opportunities and condemns Booker T. Washington's compromise with segregation. He uses now-classic language, such as "double-consciousness" and "the veil" to describe the condition of African Americans. If the statistics or academic language of one section is hard to get through, turn to another chapter. The short story "Of the Coming of John," the biography of Alexander Crummell, and the personal accounts of teaching at a rural Tennessee school (chapter 4) and of his son's death (chapter 11) are accessible and moving.

***The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead** (2016). Cora is enslaved on a cotton plantation in Georgia, where the horrors of slavery are especially hard for her: among her fellow Africans, she is an outcast. Also, she is coming into her womanhood, which puts her in danger of becoming a breeding machine. When she meets Caesar, a new arrival from Virginia, he tells her of his plans to escape using the Underground Railroad. Whitehead portrays this as a literal railroad run by conductors in tunnels underneath the Southern landscape. Cora decides to join

him. Not everything goes as planned, though. As they begin their escape, Cora kills a white boy who tries to capture her. Cora manages to find a station and head north, but she is hunted by a relentless slave catcher who refuses to stop until his job is done. Through this story, Whitehead creates a piece of historical fiction that weaves terrifying reality with Gulliver's Travels-like fantasy. It is a novel that will definitely spark discussions.

OTHER MEDIA: APPS, PODCASTS, AND MOVIES

We Read Too. This Smartphone App helps young readers and their caregivers find books by and (mostly) about people of color. Two lists, one of children's books and one of YA or teen novels and memoirs, provide an alphabetical list of titles and authors. Click any title for a picture of the cover and a brief description. A "Discover" feature will suggest a random book, and readers can suggest new titles, too.

Uncivil. A history podcast that brings to life stories we rarely hear that stem from the Civil War. The premise of the podcast is that divisiveness is not new to this country. One episode explains how markers honoring Confederate soldiers ended up in places like southwest Ohio. Hosts: Chenjerie Kumanyika and Jack Hitt.

Seeing White. This series of episodes from the *Scene on Radio* podcast explores the history and meaning of race in America by looking explicitly at the race that is usually left out of the conversation. A study guide is available on the Center for Documentary Studies website: podcast.cdspor.ch.org. Host: John Biewen with frequent commentary by Chenjerie Kumanyika.

Closer Than They Appear. This podcast addresses the fears that are "closer than they appear" and engages in wide-ranging conversations to explore the question of how we as a nation and as individuals can overcome our fears and divisions. Host: Carvell Wallace.

Hidden Figures is a 2016 film about three brilliant African-American women at NASA in the 1950s and 1960s who faced both racism and sexism. Their outstanding abilities, tremendous courage, and fierce determination made them indispensable in the launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit. Katherine Johnson is the mathematician who calculated flight trajectories for Project Mercury and other missions. Dorothy Vaughn became acting supervisor of the West Area Computers, the first African-American woman to supervise a group of staff at the center. Mary Jackson took advanced engineering classes and in 1958 became NASA's first black female engineer. This wonderful film, which was nominated for 3 Academy Awards, stars Taraji P. Henson as Johnson, Octavia Spencer as Vaughn, Janelle Monáe Robinson as Jackson.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

***We Are the Ship* by Kadir Nelson.** See Dior B.'s report about this book.

***Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine.** See Simeon B.'s description about this book.

***The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist* by Cynthia Levinson, illus. By Vanessa Brantley Newton (2017).** Nine-year old Audrey struggles to sit still when ministers come to dinner and talk about civil rights. She wants the right to sit at the counter at the ice cream shop and to read new school books instead of tattered hand-me-downs. Dr. King has come to Birmingham to assist the Hendricks' pastor, Fred Shuttlesworth. When King calls for children to join the marches and fill the jails, Audrey steps up. Detailed, stylized illustrations invite young children to linger over the pages. The family recipe for "hot rolls baptized in butter" lets anyone share the special food prepared for the ministers. Older children will enjoy Levinson's earlier book, *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*. *The Youngest Marcher* is recommended for ages 5 to 10, but you don't have to take my word for it. See Juan Bates II's report!

***What's the Big Deal About Freedom?* by Ruby Shamir, illus. by Matt Faulkner (2017).** Each two-page spread answers a key question about freedom and US history in the main text and then adds more detail in text-boxes that accompany the illustrations. The book uses a humorous tone in both words and pictures even as it explains serious concepts about government, power, and rights. It addresses the many ways that our country has failed to live up to the promise of liberty for all. It ends with one last question: "How can you use your voice to make America more fair and free."

***Love Will See You Through: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Six Guiding Beliefs* by Angela Farris Watkins, PhD, illus. by Sally Were Comport (2015).** Dr. King's niece, Angela Farris Watkins, is a non-violence trainer and has written several books about her uncle. This book focuses on the guiding principles of non-violent direct action. Scenes from Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, and Chicago provide examples. Some sentences are complex and may be hard for children, but beliefs such as "when innocent people are hurt, others are inspired to help" are clear. The illustrations use bold splashes of color, with bright, cheerful colors on the pages stating beliefs and dark, somber colors for those representing solemn scenes from the Birmingham jail or Chicago protests.

***Coretta Scott King: I Kept On Marching* by Kathleen Krull, illus. by Laura Freeman (2015).** This is one of several biographies in the series "Women Who Broke the Rules." Coretta fought against the rules about race. She and her sister defied expectations by attending college; they came to Antioch, here in Ohio, where she studied music. Later, she went on a concert tour to raise money for the civil rights movement. After the death of her husband, she continued to work to end racism, poverty, and war. Written in short chapters with lush illustrations, this is a good book for independent readers, who might also like the "Women Who Broke the Rules" biography of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

***The Beatitudes From Slavery to Civil Rights* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illus. by Tim Ladwig (2010).** Weatherford's free verse text evokes the religious foundation on which many who struggled for freedom have stood. Each two-page spread is vividly illustrated and honors one aspect of African American history. At the back of the book, brief biographies explain the significance the people mentioned in the poem.

***Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told* by Walter Dean Myers, illus. by Bonnie Christensen (2008).** Acclaimed children's book author Walter Dean Myers tells the story of Ida B. Wells from birth to death, focusing on her crusade against lynching and segregation to her agitation for voting rights. He gives special attention to her gradual growth into her career as a journalism and throughout notes her commitment to family. Quotes from Wells's autobiography enhance the text. This book is suited for children in the upper elementary grades. Myers has also written an illustrated biography of Dr. King called *I Have Seen the Promised Land*.

***I Am Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Brad Meltzer, illus. by Christopher Eliopoulos (2016).** Every branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County will have several biographies of Dr. King for children. This one from the series "Ordinary People Change the World" stands out because of its comic-book style illustrations. Also, it begins with King's childhood, showing his own early lessons in racism and segregation, such as winning a speech competition but having to ride in the back of the bus. Meltzer notes the influence of Thoreau and Gandhi and King's thinking, and subtly highlights the roles of women and children in the movement. While the focus is on King as a leader, the message of ordinary people as heroes shows that shared experiences creates common cause and shared commitment leads to success. The book ends with King directly addressing his reader, inviting them to use love and kindness so everyone's voices can be heard.