

Reflecting on Our Theme—400 Years of Enslavement: It Stops With Us!

2019 marks the sad anniversary of the arrival of the first ship carrying stolen Africans to our shores. From that time, descendants of Europeans developed ideas about race, chattel slavery, and white supremacy that are specific to our country and that continue to shape the lives of everyone in the United States. Resistance to enslavement also arose from this time because those who were expected to comply with others' orders and assumptions found ways to refuse. When the formal system of enslavement ended, new forms arose, and so resistance continued. Uncompensated labor, race-based oppression, and the unearned privileges of whiteness continue today. As the MLK Chorale's selections remind us, it's time to "Wake Up, Everybody"; it's time to acknowledge the depths of the rivers of sorrow that still flow through this land, and it's time to find our way to contribute to ending inequality and to spreading freedom and love.

Today we rededicate ourselves to Dr. King's vision of equality and justice for all. To that end, 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 Louise Lawarre, Vivian Rodgers, and Martha Viehmann.

Books for Children

I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About A Simple Act of Kindness by Kerascoët (2018). The new girl at school is left out and bullied until a bystander decides she must be brave and make a difference. This book is told in pictures that are simple yet expressive.

The Big Umbrella by Amy June Bates with Juniper Bates (2018). A friendly red umbrella has room for everyone! The simple story invites preschoolers to talk about differences (activities, clothing, size, and shape are all mentioned while illustrations also show different ages, races, abilities, and interests) and about what can be big enough to always have room for everyone.

Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights by Rob Sanders, illus. by Jared Andrew Schorr (2018). "Assemble. Take action. Create allies." "Read. Remember. Resist." An activist ABC illustrated with layered cut outs filled with details. The book includes a glossary of protest terms and a brief essay on non-violent action that refers to Dr. King's "The Power of Non-violence."

I Am Enough by Grace Byers, illus. by Keturah A. Bobo (2018). A picture book that affirms our many gifts and differences: "I'm not meant to be like you; you're not meant to be like me."

Women in Black History: Stories of Courage, Faith, and Resilience by Tricia Williams Jackson (2016). Brief biographies inform readers about writers, activists, and trail-blazers from 200 years of US history. About half the women profiled contributed to the civil rights movement. Others advocated for the end of slavery and for votes for women. All lived remarkable lives that will inspire middle-grade readers.

Young Water Protectors: A Story About Standing Rock by Aslan and Kelly Tudor (2018). Aslan turned nine years old during his time at the Standing Rock camp protesting an oil pipeline. This photo essay tells of his experiences during the multi-tribal peaceful activism to protect the water, land, and people.

Books for Teens

Bayard Rustin: The Invisible Activist by Jacqueline Houtman, Walter Naegle, and Michael G. Long (2014). This comprehensive biography covers Rustin's life from his early resistance to segregation through his civil rights activism to his international work. The authors outline the beliefs that inspired his pacifism and activism, explain the impact of his brief interest in communism, and treat his sexuality as an integral part of his identity throughout his life, exactly as Rustin lived. Discussion questions and black and white photographs round out this book. Houtman, Naegle, and Long drew upon an earlier biography by James Haskins, *Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement* (1997). We recommend this book for middle schoolers and teens, although long asides with historical background in early chapters take the focus away from Rustin. We do not recommend Brimmer's *We Are One* (2007); the author chose to use period language even in sections that are not quotations. The outdated terms are not helpful for youth and are disconcerting, to say the least.

Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom by Lynda Blackmon Lowery as told to Elspeth Leacock and Susan Buckley. Illus. by PJ Loughran. Lynda Blackmon gives her first person account of the series of actions in Selma, Alabama, that culminated with the voting rights march to Montgomery. The book centers on the role of children and makes the connections between the actions in Alabama, which other books typically treat separately. Blackmon makes vivid the fear, determination, and communal spirit of the civil rights movement. The book concludes with chapters on the significance of voting rights and tributes to those who were killed in 1965 during the actions in Selma. Ages 12 and up.

How I Resist: Activism and Hope for a New Generation edited by Maureen Johnson (2018). The cover of this book immediately lets readers know this is a collection of diverse voices. The pieces inside not only describe a variety of ways to resist but are also written in a variety of styles and formats. Whether teen readers relate to the experiences of the authors or find through the writing windows into new worlds, everyone will come away knowing that sometimes resistance is the courage to get up each day and live as yourself and sometimes it's active political engagement. Johnson invites everyone to read this book for we are all "voters-in-training" with opportunities to help everyone grow.

October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard by Lesléa Newman (2012). This is a novel in verse, a collection of related poems that tells the story of Matthew Shepard's death and its impact. Newman uses poetry to capture a variety of voices and emotions. Shepard's death resulted in expanding recognition of and rights for LGBTQ people. Newman includes an afterword and resources, too. Look for it in the teen fiction section.

The Agency by Y. S. Lee. This series of four mysteries is set in London, England, around 1860. It features Mary Quinn, a teen rescued from the gallows and trained as a private detective. Mary is half Chinese, so in addition to action, romance, and intrigue, the novels reveal her struggle to fit into a world that favors clear boundaries of race and class. Mary's adventures also provide details on what life was like for the working poor before there was a government safety net. Lee is a scholar of Victorian English literature, and packs her books with details about daily life without sacrificing the thrill of adventure.

Books for Adults

What Truth Sounds Like by Michael Eric Dyson (2018) In an historic meeting in early 1963, Robert F. Kennedy invited several black stars to his New York penthouse. His guests were entertainers Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne, Lorraine Hansberry, the playwright who wrote "A Raisin in the Sun," and a young activist Jerome Smith. Kennedy's goal is to show that he understood African Americans, but in

expressing what we would call today “white privilege” and “white fragility,” he demonstrated how little he knew. James Baldwin and the other guests told him he was ignorant of black life and struggles. In this book, after detailing the meeting, Dr. Dyson examines the role of many key black artists, politicians and intellectuals.

When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir by Patrisse Kahn-Cullors and Asha Bandele, with a Forward by Angela Davis. (2018) Long before she is drawn into her role as a founder of Black Lives Matter, Patrisse Kahn-Cullors’ story of life, love, family, and the seemingly endless challenges her black family and friends faced, especially with the justice system, is filled with her personal perseverance and her building communities of support and caring. Her story is as gripping as a novel. Yet this is no fiction she describes. It is a call to action to combat the reality of oppression that is daily life for people of color in this country.

So You Want To Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo (2018). The short chapters, conversational style, and personal examples make this book easy to read. Oluo doesn’t simplify the concepts, though. She explains why understanding intersectionality, microaggressions, appropriation, and privilege is important, asserts that she is not telling anyone what they can or can’t say or do but making clear the consequences of racist choices, and shows how the difficult conversations also challenge people of color. The final chapter urges readers to move beyond talk into a range of actions. If you are part of a book club that tackles tough topics, this would be a great choice.

One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy by Carol Anderson (2018). Anderson aims to explain why Black voter turnout was so low in 2016—a result not simply of disengagement but of a history of systematically preventing African Americans and other people of color from exercising their political power. The book opens with a chapter on the “history of disenfranchisement” and then explores three strategies for suppressing the votes of those who are not financially secure and white. Then Anderson turns to the special election in Alabama in 2017 for a model of resistance: how churches, the NAACP, Black fraternities and sororities, the ACLU and other organizations and individuals bent on keeping Roy Moore out of the US Senate joined forces to both get out the vote and to provide the information voters needed to understand their rights despite the barriers the state had erected since the overturning of the Voting Rights Act.

Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era by Ashley D. Power (2017). This is a scholarly study covering the emergence and transformation of the Black Power movement from 1944 to 1979 with attention to the role of black women. Farmer explains that the term Black Power refers to a global movement that challenged racial, gender and class hierarchies. Farmer pays attention to the role of black women in shaping new ideas of black womanhood, political activism, black liberation and the meaning of Black Power. For these women, revolutionary ideas about black womanhood were linked to creating a revolutionary new society, one that included women’s liberation. Although they did not succeed in rooting out sexism in the Black Power movement, they influenced some men in the movement and gained acknowledgment for black women’s “freedom dreams.” Farmer’s book challenges the notion of masculine control of one particular social movement and so gives women their due in history.

April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Death and How It Changed America by Michael Eric Dyson (2008). Dyson’s earlier book on Dr. King, *I May Not Get There With You* (2000) strives to reclaim King from conservatives by showing how radical his philosophy, words, and actions really were. Dyson’s second book on King marks the 40th anniversary of MLK’s death and reclaims the civil rights leader not only from conservative myths but also other idealizations. Dyson analyzes King’s words and life, examines his influence on popular culture, and considers current African American leadership as potential “Joshuas” charged with continuing King’s work. Statistics on economic inequality especially drive home the work left to do. Although Dyson’s statistics and some popular culture references are now a decade

out of date, the overarching themes of reclaiming King's life from the myths built up around him and situating his significance within lesser-known details, such as King's own anxieties and the concerns of his associates and critics, remain relevant. We have much to learn from King's life, from his gifts and his personal failings, and from the struggles of those who would take up the burden of the fight for racial and economic equality and justice. Dyson is an excellent guide to both the fine points of King's life and the broad sweep of his impact on African American culture and on the nation as a whole.

What I Know For Sure: Growing Up In America by Tavis Smiley (2006). Smiley states that "this isn't a formal autobiography" since he wrote it while still in his early forties. In this book Smiley talks about growing up in a predominantly white community in rural Indiana, where he faced many challenges being African American, and he describes growing up in a church where the "outside" world, like music by the Jackson 5, was off limits to him. Smiley also tells about the beating he took from his father because of something that happened in church; the beating was so severe that for awhile Tavis was removed from his family. Throughout the book Smiley makes numerous references to King. He even stated that his mission in life is "to do his small part to make the world safe for the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. which is justice to all, service to others and a love that liberates people." From playing King's speeches on his family's phonograph to reciting them in oratorical contests where he shined, Smiley's soul is made up of King's words and his strict upbringing in church. The impact that Martin Luther King, Jr. had on Smiley as a young man is undeniable, and that impact clearly continues today.

Other Resources

Our Story. This on-line application locates diverse children's and YA books based on interests (reading level, topic, type of story and more). There are versions for teens, children, and educators/librarians. Diversity includes ability, gender identity, race, and ethnicity. Find *Our Story* on DiverseBooks.org/ourstory/ and explore this website for recommendations and other information from We Need Diverse Books.

Teaching Hard History: American Slavery. Southern Poverty Law Center produced this podcast especially for educators to expand the resources available for teaching about the history of enslavement in the US. It's informative for everyone. Hosted by Ohio State history professor Hasan Kwame Jeffries and based on the book *Understanding and Teaching American Slavery*, the podcast and transcripts are available at tolerance.org/podcasts/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery . Also available through a variety of podcast services.

BlacKkKlansman. Spike Lee's most recent film is a powerful drama based on a true story. The excellent cast and skillful interweaving of overlapping stories poignantly illustrate the contrasts between the Black Power movement and the Klan's white nationalism. Lee and co-writer Jordan Peale transform Ron Stallworth's story to increase the emotional impact and to create thought-provoking parallels. PLCHC does not have copies of the DVD, but they do have Ron Stallworth's book of the same name.