



THE  
**BLACKEST  
BOOK CLUB**

# Reading List



[recon.today/blackest-book-club](https://recon.today/blackest-book-club)

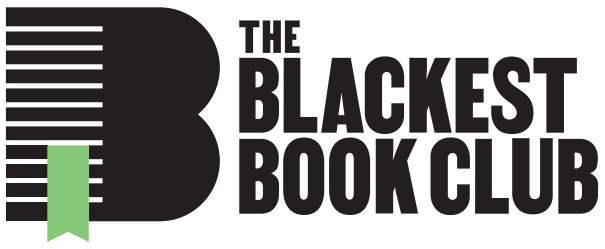
This is a collection of stories, poems, and essays from classic and contemporary leaders of Black thought and literature. We share this list so that their genius will continue to create understanding and connection among us. We share with the hope that these titles provide mirrors into the political, social, and personal realities of the intersection of Black lives with the notions of power, gender, race, faith, and love.

**Reconstruction**, **Pod Save the People** and **Campaign Zero** came together to answer these questions and we think they are a great way for you to talk with your kids, families, and friends.

- **Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?**
- **What book in the last year has sparked your spirit?**
- **Which Black author would you love to interview on your podcast? Which of their books would you discuss?**
- **Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?**
- **Which book best explains and explores solutions for a societal problem you most want to solve?**



**Reconstruction** is a Black owned and Black operated curriculum company that provides live, K-12 supplemental and enrichment courses through an online platform that situates Black people, Black culture and Black heritage and contributions to American and the world in an authentic, identity-affirming manner. These interactive courses are designed to bring joy to students with a blend of academic intensives and cultural exploration curriculum. Students of all backgrounds benefit from a more complete understanding of our shared history and society.



# Reading List

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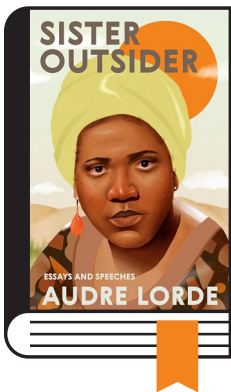
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# De'Ara Balenger

Social Impact

## Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?



### *Sister Outsider*

AUDRE LORDE

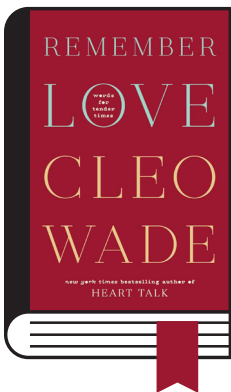
In this charged collection of fifteen essays and speeches, Lorde takes on sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, and class, and propounds social difference as a vehicle for action and change. Her prose is incisive, unflinching, and lyrical, reflecting struggle but ultimately offering messages of hope. These landmark writings are, in Lorde's own words, a call to "never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black, which is creative, which is female, which is dark, which is rejected, which is messy, which is..."

“

*This is a big question - but what immediately comes up for me is Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde*

”

## What book in the last year has sparked your spirit?

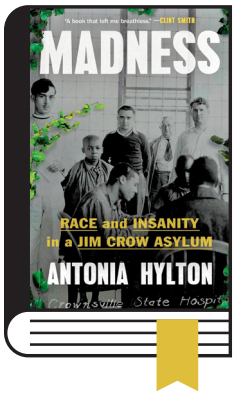


### *Remember Love*

CLEO WADE

At a time when many of us feel overwhelmed by fear and isolation, Cleo Wade's *Remember Love* offers intimate, uplifting words that anchor, nurture, and make us feel less alone. She shares that the heart work we do for ourselves is not done to avoid the tough stuff—periods of lostness, self-doubt, depression, grief, heartbreak, and anxiety. Wade instead suggests that to live is to get lost, and it's our task, our great privilege, to learn to love ourselves so that we can handle these periods and our discomfort does not block our healing. *Remember Love* reminds us that lostness is not our permanent state but a starting point for self-discovery, connection, and growth.

## Which Black author would you love to interview on your podcast? Which of their books would you discuss?



### ***Madness: Race and Insanity in a Jim Crow Asylum***

**ANTONIA HYLTON**

In *Madness*, Peabody and Emmy award-winning journalist Antonia Hylton tells the 93-year-old history of Crownsville Hospital, one of the last segregated asylums with surviving records and a campus that still stands to this day in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. She blends the intimate tales of patients and employees whose lives were shaped by Crownsville with a decade-worth of investigative research and archival documents. *Madness* chronicles the stories of Black families whose mental health suffered as they tried, and sometimes failed, to find safety and dignity. Hylton also grapples with her own family's experiences with mental illness, and the secrecy and shame that it reproduced for generations.

“

*I am really curious about Antonia Hylton's new book.*

”

## Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?



### ***Ghetto Gastro Presents: Black Power Kitchen***

**JON GRAY, PIERRE SERRAO, LESTER WALKER & OSAYI ENDOLYN**

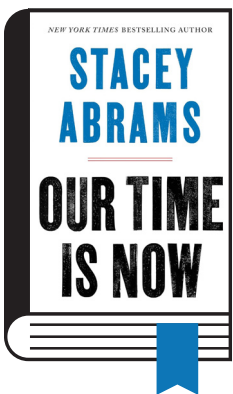
Part cookbook. Part manifesto. Created with big Bronx energy, *Black Power Kitchen* combines 75 mostly plant-based, layered-with-flavor recipes with immersive storytelling, diverse voices, and striking images and photographs that celebrate Black food and Black culture, and inspire larger conversations about race, history, food inequality, and how eating well can be a pathway to personal freedom and self-empowerment.

“

*This book taught me new recipes steeped in Black cooking culture and traditions.*

”

## Which book best explains and explores solutions for a societal problem you most want to solve?



### ***Our Time Is Now: Power, Purpose, and the Fight for a Fair America***

**STACEY ABRAMS**

A recognized expert on fair voting and civic engagement, Abrams chronicles a chilling account of how the right to vote and the principle of democracy have been and continue to be under attack. Abrams would have been the first African American woman governor, but experienced these effects firsthand, despite running the most innovative race in modern politics as the Democratic nominee in Georgia. Abrams didn't win, but she has not conceded. The book compellingly argues for the importance of robust voter protections, an elevation of identity politics, engagement in the census, and a return to moral international leadership.

“

*[This book] speaks to issues related to voter suppression, education, and economic inequality.*

”

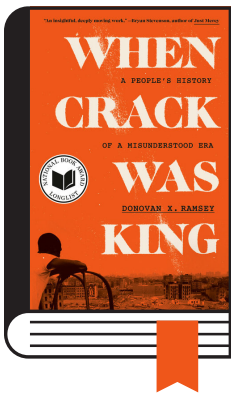


# DeRay Mckesson

Organizer, Activist

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## Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?



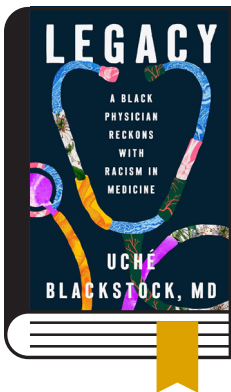
### *When Crack Was King: A People's History of a Misunderstood Era*

DONOVAN X. RAMSEY

The crack epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s is arguably the least examined crisis in American history. Beginning with the myths inspired by Reagan's war on drugs, journalist Donovan X. Ramsey's exacting analysis traces the path from the last triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement to the devastating realities we live with today: a racist criminal justice system, continued mass incarceration and gentrification, and increased police brutality.

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## What book in the last year has sparked your spirit?



### *Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine*

UCHÉ BLACKSTOCK, MD

*Legacy* is a journey through the critical intersection of racism and healthcare. At once a searing indictment of our healthcare system, a generational family memoir, and a call to action, *Legacy* is Dr. Blackstock's odyssey from child to medical student to practicing physician—to finally seizing her own power as a health equity advocate against the backdrop of the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.

## Which Black author would you love to interview on your podcast? Which of their books would you discuss ?



### *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*

**TOMI ADEYEMI**

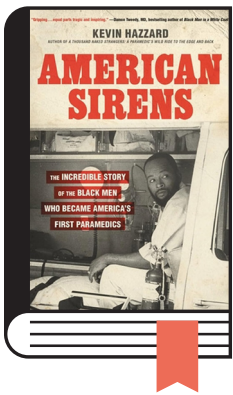
After battling the impossible, Zélie and Amari have finally succeeded in bringing magic back to the land of Orisha. But the ritual was more powerful than they could've imagined, reigniting the powers of not only the maji, but of nobles with magic ancestry, too. Now, Zélie struggles to unite the maji in an Orisha where the enemy is just as powerful as they are. But when the monarchy and military unite to keep control of Orisha, Zélie must fight to secure Amari's right to the throne and protect the new maji from the monarchy's wrath. With civil war looming on the horizon, Zélie finds herself at a breaking point: she must discover a way to bring the kingdom together or watch as Orisha tears itself apart.

“

*Tomi Adeyemi -- I would love to talk to her about how she decided to build the world she built in the books [The Legacy of Orisha Series], how blackness informed that world, and what are the elements of a black future to her.*

”

## Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?



### *American Sirens: The Incredible Story of the Black Men Who Became America's First Paramedics*

**KEVIN HAZZARD**

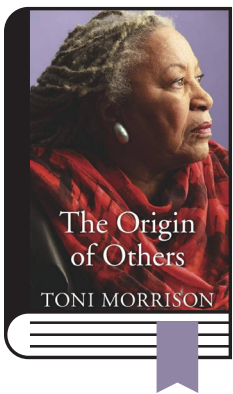
Until the 1970s, if you suffered a medical crisis, your chances of survival were minimal. A 9-1-1 call might bring police or even the local funeral home. But that all changed with Freedom House EMS in Pittsburgh, a group of Black men who became America's first paramedics and set the gold standard for emergency medicine around the world, only to have their story and their legacy erased—until now.

“

*I didn't know that the entire concept of paramedics were pioneered by black people!*

”

## Which book best explains and explores solutions for a societal problem you most want to solve?



### *The Origin Of Others*

**TONI MORRISON**

America's foremost novelist reflects on the themes that preoccupy her work and increasingly dominate national and world politics: race, fear, borders, the mass movement of peoples, the desire for belonging. What is race and why does it matter? What motivates the human tendency to construct Others? Why does the presence of Others make us so afraid? Drawing on her Norton Lectures, Toni Morrison takes up these and other vital questions bearing on identity in *The Origin of Others*. In her search for answers, the novelist considers her own memories as well as history, politics, and especially literature. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Camara Laye are among the authors she examines. Readers of Morrison's fiction will welcome her discussions of some of her most celebrated books—*Beloved*, *Paradise*, and *A Mercy*.

“

*Most people know Toni's fiction but her non-fiction is equally powerful and she pushes us to think deeper about blackness, identity, and otherness in ways that honestly we should all be talking about.*

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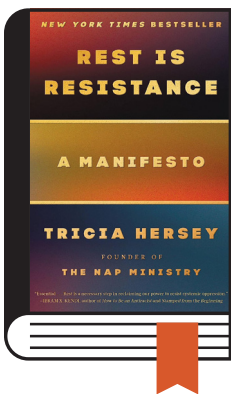


# Myles E. Johnson

Performance Artist, Writer, Mystic

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## Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?



### *Rest is Resistance*

TRICIA HERSEY

Disrupt and push back against capitalism and white supremacy. In this book, Tricia Hersey, aka The Nap Bishop, encourages us to connect to the liberating power of rest, daydreaming, and naps as a foundation for healing and justice. In *Rest Is Resistance*, Tricia Hersey, aka the Nap Bishop, casts an illuminating light on our troubled relationship with rest and how to imagine and dream our way to a future where rest is exalted. Our worth does not reside in how much we produce, especially not for a system that exploits and dehumanizes us. Rest, in its simplest form, becomes an act of resistance and a reclaiming of power because it asserts our most basic humanity. We are enough. The systems cannot have us.

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## What book in the last year has sparked your spirit?



### *Black Futures*

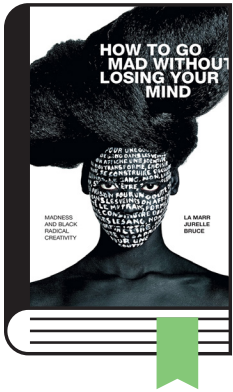
KIMBERLY DREW & JENNA WORTHAM

What does it mean to be Black and alive right now? Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham have brought together this collection of work - images, photos, essays, memes, dialogues, recipes, tweets, poetry, and more - to tell the story of the radical, imaginative, provocative, and gorgeous world that Black creators are bringing forth today. The book presents a succession of startling and beautiful pieces that generate an entrancing rhythm: Readers will go from conversations with activists and academics to memes and Instagram posts, from powerful essays to dazzling paintings and insightful infographics.



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## Which Black author would you love to interview on your podcast? Which of their books would you discuss ?



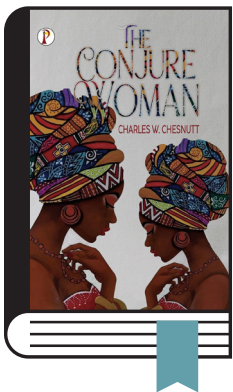
### *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*

LA MARR JURELLE BRUCE

“Hold tight. The way to go mad without losing your mind is sometimes unruly.” So begins La Marr Jurelle Bruce’s urgent provocation and poignant meditation on madness in black radical art. Bruce theorizes four overlapping meanings of madness: the lived experience of an unruly mind, the psychiatric category of serious mental illness, the emotional state also known as “rage,” and any drastic deviation from psychosocial norms. With care and verve, he explores the mad in the literature of Amiri Baraka, Gayl Jones, and Ntozake Shange; in the jazz repertoires of Buddy Bolden, Sun Ra, and Charles Mingus; in the comedic performances of Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle; in the protest music of Nina Simone, Lauryn Hill, and Kendrick Lamar, and beyond. These artists activate madness as content, form, aesthetic, strategy, philosophy, and energy in an enduring black radical tradition. Joining this tradition, Bruce mobilizes a set of interpretive practices, affective dispositions, political principles, and existential orientations that he calls “mad methodology.” Ultimately, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind* is both a *study* and an *act* of critical, ethical, radical madness.

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## Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?



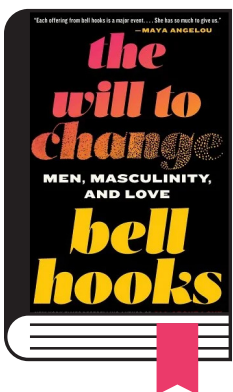
### *The Conjure Woman*

CHARLES W. CHESTNUTT

*The Conjure Woman* is a collection of short stories by African-American fiction writer, essayist, and activist Charles W. Chesnutt. First published in 1899, it is considered a seminal work of African-American literature. Written in the late nineteenth century, a time of enormous growth and change for a country only recently reunited in peace, these stories act as the uneasy meeting ground for the culture of northern capitalism, professionalism, and Christianity and the underdeveloped southern economy, a kind of colonial Third World whose power is manifest in life charms and magic spells, all embodied by the ruling figure of the conjure woman. Charles Waddell Chesnutt was an author, essayist and political activist, best known for his novels and short stories exploring complex issues of racial and social identity.

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## Which book best explains and explores solutions for a societal problem you most want to solve?



### *The Will to Change*

bell hooks

From the New York Times bestselling author of *All About Love*, a brave and astonishing work that challenges patriarchal culture and encourages men to reclaim the best part of themselves. In *The Will to Change*, bell hooks gets to the heart of the matter and shows men how to express the emotions that are a fundamental part of who they are—whatever their age, marital status, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. But toxic masculinity punishes those fundamental emotions, and it’s so deeply ingrained in our society that it’s hard for men to not comply—but hooks wants to help change that.

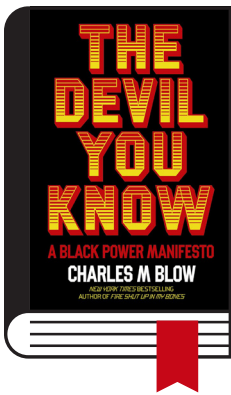


# Kaya Henderson

Educator, CEO

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## Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?



### *The Devil You Know*

**CHARLES BLOW**

Acclaimed columnist and author Charles Blow never wanted to write a “race book.” But as violence against Black people—both physical and psychological—seemed only to increase in recent years, culminating in the historic pandemic and protests of the summer of 2020, he felt compelled to write a new story for Black Americans. He envisioned a succinct, counterintuitive, and impassioned corrective to the myths that have for too long governed our thinking about race and geography in America. Drawing on both political observations and personal experience as a Black son of the South, Charles set out to offer a call to action by which Black people can finally achieve equality, on their own terms.

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## What book in the last year has sparked your spirit?

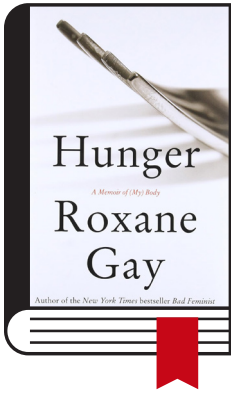


### *Black Futures*

**KIMBERLY DREW & JENNA WORTHAM**

What does it mean to be Black and alive right now? Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham have brought together this collection of work - images, photos, essays, memes, dialogues, recipes, tweets, poetry, and more - to tell the story of the radical, imaginative, provocative, and gorgeous world that Black creators are bringing forth today. The book presents a succession of startling and beautiful pieces that generate an entrancing rhythm: Readers will go from conversations with activists and academics to memes and Instagram posts, from powerful essays to dazzling paintings and insightful infographics.

## Which Black author would you love to interview on your podcast? Which of their books would you discuss?



### *Hunger*

ROXANE GAY

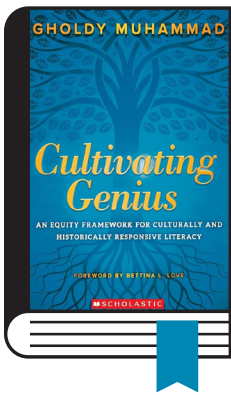
As a woman who describes her own body as “wildly undisciplined,” Roxane understands the tension between desire and denial, between self-comfort and self-care. In *Hunger*, she casts an insightful and critical eye on her childhood, teens, and twenties—including the devastating act of violence that acted as a turning point in her young life—and brings readers into the present and the realities, pains, and joys of her daily life. With the bracing candor, vulnerability, and authority that have made her one of the most admired voices of her generation, Roxane explores what it means to be overweight in a time when the bigger you are, the less you are seen. *Hunger* is a deeply personal memoir from one of our finest writers, and tells a story that hasn’t yet been told but needs to be.

“

*I think her candid discussions of obesity, desire, self-image, etc. are necessary for Black women to be having more out in the open.*

”

## Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?



### *Cultivating Genius*

GHOLDY MUHAMMAD

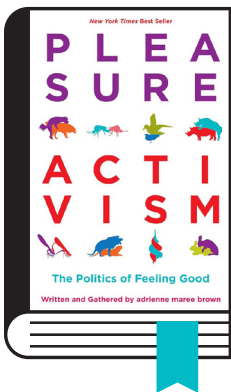
In *Cultivating Genius*, Dr. Gholdy E. Muhammad presents a four-layered equity framework—one that is grounded in history and restores excellence in literacy education. This framework, which she names, *Historically Responsive Literacy*, was derived from the study of literacy development within 19th-century Black literacy societies. The framework is essential and universal for all students, especially youth of color, who traditionally have been marginalized in learning standards, school policies, and classroom practices. The equity framework will help educators teach and lead toward the following learning goals or pursuits.

“

*[This book] taught me about the history of 19th century Black literary societies.*

”

## Which book best explains and explores solutions for a societal problem you most want to solve?



### *Pleasure Activism*

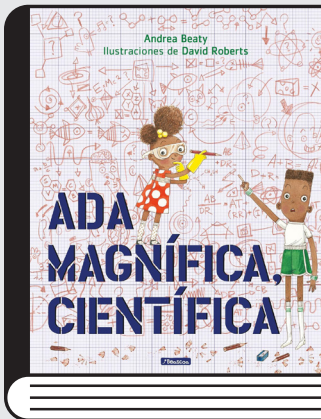
ADRIENNE MARIE BROWN

How do we make social justice the most pleasurable human experience? How can we awaken within ourselves desires that make it impossible to settle for anything less than a fulfilling life? Author and editor Adrienne Maree Brown finds the answer in something she calls “pleasure activism,” a politics of healing and happiness that explodes the dour myth that changing the world is just another form of work. Drawing on the black feminist tradition, she challenges us to rethink the ground rules of activism. Her mindset-altering essays are interwoven with conversations and insights from other feminist thinkers, including Audre Lorde, Joan Morgan, Cara Page, Sonya Renee Taylor, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Together, they cover a wide array of subjects — from sex work to climate change, from race and gender to sex and drugs — building new narratives about how politics can feel good and how what feels good always has a complex politics of its own.

# Top Children's and Young Adults Picks

K-2<sup>nd</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>



## ***Ada Twist Scientist***

**ANDREA BEATY**

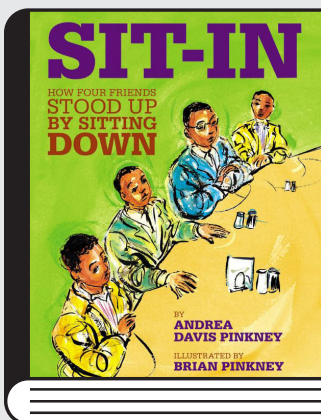
Ada Twist's head is full of questions. Like her classmates Iggy and Rosie. Ada has always been endlessly curious. Even when her fact-finding missions and elaborate scientific experiments don't go as planned, Ada learns the value of thinking her way through problems and continuing to stay curious.



## ***I Am Smart, I Am Blessed, I Can Do Anything!***

**ALISSA HOLDER, ZULEKHA HOLDER-YOUNG & NNEKA MYERS**

It's a new day and Ayaan has woken up on the wrong side of the bed, where nothing feels quite right. What if he doesn't know the answer at school? What if he messes up? But as he sets out that morning, all it takes is a few reminders from his mom and some friends in the neighborhood to remind him that a new day is a good day because... *he is smart, he is blessed, and he can do anything!*



## ***Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down***

**ANDREA DAVIS PINKNEY**

This picture book is a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the momentous Woolworth's lunch counter sit-in, when four college students staged a peaceful protest that became a defining moment in the struggle for racial equality and the growing civil rights movement.



## ***The 1619 Project***

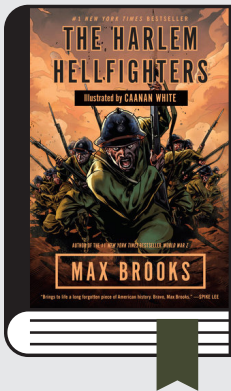
**NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES & RENEE WATSON**

The 1619 Project's lyrical picture book in verse chronicles the consequences of slavery and the history of Black resistance in the United States.



## 6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup>

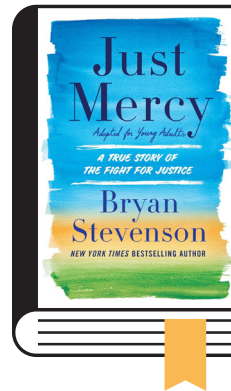
## 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup>



### ***The Harlem Hellfighters***

**MAX BROOKS**

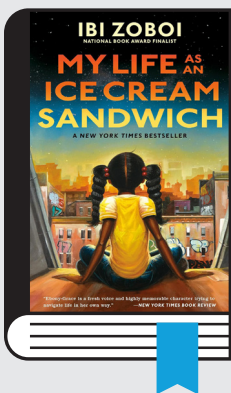
The Harlem Hellfighters, as the Germans called them, fought courageously on and off the battlefield to make Europe, and America, safe for democracy.



### ***Just Mercy* (Adapted for Young Adults)**

**BRYAN STEVENSON**

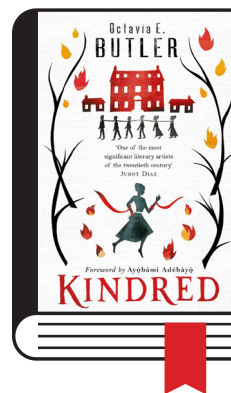
This very personal work—adapted from the original #1 bestseller, which the *New York Times* calls “as compelling as *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” and in some ways more so”—acclaimed lawyer and social justice advocate Bryan Stevenson offers a glimpse into the lives of the wrongfully imprisoned and his efforts to fight for their freedom.



### ***My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich***

**IBI ZOBOI**

Twelve-year-old Ebony-Grace Norfleet has lived with her beloved grandfather Jeremiah in Huntsville, Alabama ever since she was little. As one of the first black engineers to integrate NASA, Jeremiah has nurtured Ebony-Grace’s love for all things outer space and science fiction.



### ***Kindred***

**OCTAVIA E. BUTLER**

Octavia Butler’s most popular novel, *Kindred* follows Dana in 1976 who is abruptly transported to the antebellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, is drowning, and Dana has been summoned to save him. Also available as a graphic novel adaptation.

# Index

Full list of podcaster selected titles, listed by question:

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## Looking at the state of our world, what book do you recommend to educate and inform Black people?

- D B** *Sister Outsider* AUDRE LORDE
- DM** *When Crack Was King: A People's History of a Misunderstood Era* DONOVAN X. RAMSEY
- MJ** *Rest is Resistance* TRICIA HERSEY
- KH** *The Devil You Know* CHARLES BLOW

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- MJ** *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*  
LA MARR JURELLE BRUCE
- KH** *Hunger* ROXANE GAY



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## Which book has recently taught you something new about Black history or culture?

- D B** *Ghetto Gastro Presents: Black Power Kitchen*  
JON GRAY, PIERRE SERRAO, LESTER WALKER & OSAYI ENDOLYN
- DM** *American Sirens: The Incredible Story of the Black Men Who Became America's First Paramedics* KEVIN HAZZARD
- MJ** *The Conjure Woman* CHARLES W. CHESTNUTT
- KH** *Cultivating Genius* GHOLDY MUHAMMAD

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