

Racial Sanctification Reading List

Following our sermon series: The Color of God, the elders wanted to provide some resources for your consideration as you pursue racial sanctification into the future. Remember it's one small step at a time. Don't feel as if you need to read everything on the list. (That would certainly take some time!) But, do prayerfully look over it and see what God might lay on your heart. We will also be posting this list on the website for easy access into the future. May God bless our church as we pursue him in all we do!

In no way exhaustive, this reading list for further study is generally arranged in order of: "I've not read a lot about the Black experience in America" down to "I would like to do more heavy lifting and be challenged", and in two sections: literature & fiction vs. perspective & non-fiction. Identify where you feel like you might like to begin, and just start (or continue) there!

Fiction

- **"The Sheriff's Children" / Charles Chestnutt:** A short story about a wrongful arrest and ultimately tragic outcome containing subtle twists and nuance. Published in 1899, by an author whose perspective was informed by his own physical appearance, it can be found at <https://chesnuttarchive.org/Works/Stories/sheriff.html>.
- **"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" / Mark Twain:** This often satirical novel, which is set against the backdrop of slavery in the Midwest, challenges the reader to perceive the character transformation of a poor, uneducated but culturally-inculcated boy, illustrating how it's possible to detach one's thinking from systems of power and see hurt, hypocrisy, and oppression for what they really are, with an ironic 'rejection' of church teaching in regard to race.
- **"Invisible Man" / Ralph Ellison:** A Black man struggles to arrive at a conception of his own identity in this novel complicated by the values, expectations and prescribed roles imposed on him by society, which forces him to become an inauthentic version of himself.
- **"A Lesson Before Dying" / Ernest Gaines:** A novel about a young uneducated field-worker at the wrong place, and at the wrong time. Set in the pre-Civil Rights south, it's loosely based on a true story; examining themes of race, injustice and salvation.

Non-Fiction

- **"Black Like Me" / John Howard Griffin:** Autobiography by a White southerner chronicling his personal experience while conducting a six-week experiment pretending to be a Black man in the deep south.
- **"Letter From A Birmingham Jail" / Martin Luther King:** While imprisoned in Alabama nearly five years to the day before his future assassination, Dr. King responds to fellow

clergy, who have been critical of his civil rights "activities". His letter can be found here: https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html .

- **"Let Justice Roll Down" / John M. Perkins:** Ministering to the Black community during the civil-rights era, Perkins tells the story of his childhood, conversion, pastoral calling to California and then obedience to go back to his home state of Mississippi and his ultimate disappointment in the White evangelical church.
- **"The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes" / Langston Hughes:** Considered by many the poet laureate of Black America, Hughes was a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance. This collection of his poetry spans five decades and almost 900 poems that are passionate descriptions of life as he saw it, using a vocabulary that has entered the bloodstream of our shared language.
- **"Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus" / Reggie Williams:** Traces Bonhoeffer's resistance to German Christianity's image of Christ through the way the Black church in Harlem perceived who Christ was, and what that perception meant when activated.
- **"Bonhoeffer, Racism, and a Communal Model for Living," / Mark Ellingson, Journal of Church and State, 2001:** Article that explores Bonhoeffer's early work and thinking about the communal-social character of the human being particularly in the context of the American racial climate at the time.
- **"The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks" / Gwendolyn Brooks:** Collection of poetry by a Pulitzer Prize winner and one of the more influential 20th-century American poets that delves into themes of personal celebration and the corresponding struggles of ordinary people in her community. Some of her work can also be found at: <https://www.literaryladiesguide.com/classic-women-authors-poetry/11-iconic-poems-by-gwendolyn-brooks/> .
- **"Just Mercy" / Bryan Stevenson:** The Harvard-educated lawyer and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative writes about his relationship with a Black man wrongfully accused of murder and sentenced to death in Alabama in the late 1980's; inspiring a life-long passion for representing the marginalized who have been either falsely convicted or harshly sentenced.
- **"Becoming Brave" / Brenda Salter McNeil:** Using the story of Esther as parallel, this book explains the "why" it's important to do the work of racial reconciliation especially for those that call themselves Christians and the courage necessary to do so. "Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0" is a companion book that describes the "how", in both personal and organizational contexts.
- **"Be the Bridge" / Latasha Morrison:** What does it look like when every follower of Jesus becomes a bridge builder, committed to advocacy? Along with prayers, discussion questions and resources that foster group engagement, this book presents a compelling vision of the results of seeking justice in light of the Gospel.
- **"Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America" / Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith:** Grassroots exploration of racial attitudes in the White evangelical church, with a conclusion that the emphasis on individualism and free will makes pervasive injustice invisible, fundamentally preventing a recognition of systemic issues in America.

- **"Between the World and Me" / Ta-Nehisi Coates:** Written as a letter to his son, Coates describes life in a White America that is reductionary in that it sees the beauty of Black culture as simply the interaction of soul-less Black bodies, and therefore of no consequence.
- **"Black Boy" / Richard Wright:** An autobiography, Wright portrays his life experience in the deep south, and following that, in Chicago during the mid-1940's. He uses his characters to play out parts in a panoramic drama of monolithic hatred and oppression, driven by a culture of fear. His brutally honest portrayal of life (with a strong religious influence from his family) as he confronts Jim Crow in the 1920's, reveals that the problem of racism might be so interwoven into American culture that it could be impossible to untangle without unraveling culture itself.
- **"White Awake" / Daniel Hill:** Following a singular revelation about his ethnicity, Hill documents his journey towards cultural awakening, including seven stages that many of us can expect to travel along on a similar path as we seek to address and confront racial and systemic injustices.
- **"The Color of Compromise" / Jemar Tisby:** Revealing study that examines the connections between the American protestant church and racist behavior throughout American history, and the complicity through which racism was allowed to continue and even thrive.
- **"Caste: The Origins of our Discontents" / Isabel Wilkerson:** Set against caste systems of India and Nazi Germany, Wilkerson exposes the reality of a practically identical hierarchical system in the United States and argues that it achieves its most violent manifestation in the treatment of American Blacks.
- **"How to Fight Racism" / Jemar Tisby:** Using real-world examples and an array of actionable items, Tisby argues that we need to move beyond mere discussion and begin equipping people with tools to confront racism in our daily lives and courageously fight against it.

For the younger (and older) crowd, there's also these:

- **"Mississippi Solo" / Eddy L. Harris:** A Twain-esque journal by an adventurer who achieved a life-long dream to canoe, by himself, the length of the Mississippi River from Minnesota to New Orleans and the harrowing perils, as well as the personal triumphs, he experienced along the way.
- **"Gabriel's Story" / David Anthony Durham:** A novel about the trials of a pioneer family set in the late 1870's, a young man reluctantly moves with his mother and brother from the urban North to join his stepfather, a homesteader in Kansas. Eventually aching for more adventure, he sets out for the frontier-west on his own, only to face haunting dangers. . .
- **"I Never Had It Made" / Jackie Robinson:** Written in the same month as his untimely death, this autobiography by one of the greatest American baseball players to ever play the game, Robinson's first-person perspective as the grandson of a slave chronologically details his life experiences all while facing withering obstacles, breaking barriers and ultimately successfully defying the status quo.

For the even younger (and even older!) crowd, there's also these:

- **"Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom" / Carole Boston Weatherford, Illustrated by Kadir Nelson:** Depicts the escape to freedom by Tubman and others as divinely inspired, achieved only by fervent prayer and an even deeper faith. A corresponding study guide is located here:
<https://www.teachingbooks.net/media/pdf/DisneyHyperion/Moses.pdf>
- **"Carter Reads the Newspaper" / Deborah Hopkinson, Illustrated by Don Tate:** Born ten years after the Civil War to formerly enslaved parents, Carter Woodson is credited with being the father of Black History Month. Believing that it was important to be an informed citizen, Carter read the newspaper to his father daily. Due to his literacy, he became a resource for the larger community pushing him into worldwide travels with a hunger for knowledge and discovering untold histories. . .
- **"Let the Children March" / Monica Clark-Robinson, Illustrated by Frank Morrison:** Loosely based on actual events and set in 1963, Martin Luther King is on his way to speak at an un-named girl's church and rally their congregation for a march. As the adults express their reservations and concerns for the potential burden on the church, the kids recognize their stake in the cause and, with little to lose, go out to march even while realizing the jeopardy they're placing themselves in. Photographs, quotation sources and a bibliography accompany this portrayal of the Jim Crow south.
- **"ColorFull: Celebrating the Colors God Gave Us" / Dorena Williamson, Illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright & Yin-Hwa Hu:** Best friends examine the dappled colors of nature realizing that rather than being blind to color, they can celebrate the beauty of the diversity that surrounds them!
- **"When God Made You" / Matthew Paul Turner, Illustrated by David Catrow:** Through original illustrations and creative rhymes, readers are inspired to learn about how God created them to be uniquely themselves crafted specifically for a place in God's divine plan that only their own special gifts can fit into as they grow, explore and begin to create for themselves.
- **"Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History" / Vashti Harrison:** This New York Times Best Seller features stories of forty Black women in world history that were trailblazers. This book not only educates, but also inspires as true stories of women who exceeded expectations and broke boundaries are brought to life.
- **"Little Legends: Exceptional Men in Black History" / Vashti Harrison:** Another New York Times Best Seller highlights the true stories of extraordinary men throughout history who blazed trails for generations to come. Engagingly written and beautifully illustrated, this book is relevant for readers of all ages.