Thoughts and Resources
from the Commission for Racial Understanding
April 2017

Adult Books

Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly
This is the amazing true story of four African-American female mathematicians at NASA who helped achieve some of the greatest moments in our space program. Now a major motion picture starring Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, Janelle Monae, Kirsten Dunst, and Kevin Costner.

Home Going by Yaa Gyasi
This novel follows the parallel paths of two half-sisters, and their descendants through eight generations: from the Gold Coast to the plantations of Mississippi, from the American Civil War to Jazz Age Harlem. Gyasi’s novel illuminates slavery’s troubled legacy both for those who were taken and those who stayed—and shows how the memory of captivity has been inscribed on the soul of our nation.

Young Adult Books

The Rock and the River by Kekla Magoon
(The Rock and the River #1)
For thirteen-year-old Sam it’s not easy being the son of known civil rights activist Roland Childs. Especially when his older (and best friend), Stick, begins to drift away from him for no apparent reason. And then it happens: Sam finds something that changes everything forever. Sam has always had faith in his father, but when he finds literature about the Black Panthers under Stick’s bed, he’s not sure who to believe: his father or his best friend. Suddenly, nothing feels certain anymore.

Fire in the Streets by Kekla Magoon
(The Rock and the River #2)
Maxie knows all about how fire can erupt at a moment’s notice, especially now, in the sweltering Chicago summer of 1968. She is a Black Panther—or at least she wants to be one. Maxie believes in the movement. She wants to belong. She wants to join the struggle. But everyone keeps telling her she’s too young. At fourteen, she’s allowed to help out in the office, but she certainly can’t help patrol the streets. Then Maxie realizes that there is a traitor in their midst, and if she can figure out who it is, it may be her ticket to becoming a real Panther.

Films

13th: (Netflix)
Director Ava DuVernay has successfully made a documentary that challenges and even dismantles our collective understanding of one of the most dangerous notions of our time: “progress.” How do we define progress, and who precisely gets to define it? 13th is a captivating argument against those who measure progress with laws that pretend to protect American citizens and amendments, and even to uphold the Constitution.

Moonlight is both specific and sweeping. It’s a story about identity—an intelligent, challenging work that wants viewers to reflect on assumptions they might make about the characters. It’s also a focused and personal work, a mental odyssey about the youth, adolescence, and adulthood of Chiron, who is growing up gay and black in Miami. From start to finish, the director Barry Jenkins’s new film balances the scope of its ambitions: The story weaves random memories and crucial life experiences into a tapestry, one that tries to unlock the shielded heart of its protagonist.

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