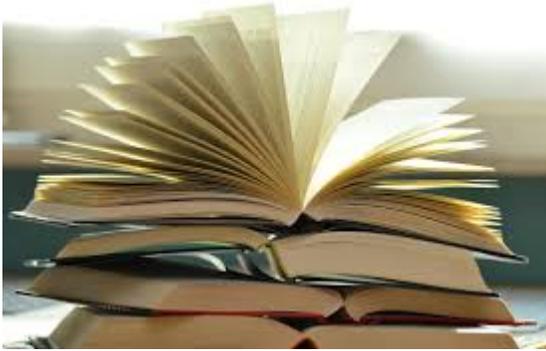


Page Turners: Essential reading for steps toward being anti-racist



It's a popular social media trend, lists of book recommendations dealing with anti-racism. You're probably familiar with their contents, *The Color of Law*, *White Fragility*, Audre Lorde, Ta Neesi-Coates, with some fiction by Zora Neale Huston or Toni Morrison for good measure. I'm male and pale, so I can't speak to whether a list of recommendations will actually help any white person understand race, but here's a list that I feel has helped me:

The End of Policing by Alex Vitale: This and the next book on the list are easily in my top three nonfiction reads of the past 10 years. Vitale expertly walks you through an analysis of our modern policing system. He begins with the inherent vice of police reform, why it continually does not exit us out of our current policing nightmare, beginning with the example of Eric Garner. He proceeds with deconstructing our perceptions of police, how they don't really help us even when we are the victims of crimes, the school-to-prison pipeline, the way they criminalize the homeless, the way police are political creatures and more. This book is essential reading for anyone watching videos of police riots on social media and wondering how it came to be. It's succinct, barely a few hundred pages. An older and more extensive text on police critiques is **Our Enemy in Blue** by Kristian Williams. An excellent work on the militarization of modern police since the Iraq/Afghanistan wars is **Rise of the Warrior Cop** by Radley Balko.

Black against Empire, by Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr: Speaking of aggressive policing, this book, an American Book Award winner, details the politics and history of the Black Panther Party. Few organizations in the continental United States are as misunderstood and unfairly maligned as the Black Panther Party. The book tracks their beginning on the West Coast, their apex in the late '60s, and the repeated targeting and sabotage by the FBI. The Panthers have a rich history, an enduring legacy, far beyond just a five-minute boogiemer in *Forrest Gump*.

The Radical King, edited by Cornel West: What I was taught and most people are taught about Martin Luther King is the safe-for-primetime, offensive to none version. This book, curated and edited by Cornel West, shows just how radical the man was. Divided into four sections, they underscore his identification with the working poor, his opposition to the war in Vietnam and his hostility to American imperialism abroad. King takes great pains to identify racism with economic oppression, something that still applies to our present historical moment. As I see various political leaders invoke his name, I repeatedly come back to this quote by the man himself: "What you're saying may get you a foundation grant, but it won't get you into the kingdom of truth."

Race for Profit by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor: Housing discrimination was banned in the late '60s, but Taylor shows how the economic system deliberately undermined black homeownership. Even though redlining came to an end, many of its racist goals and implications continued to exist through something Taylor calls predatory inclusion. An excellent companion read to *The Color of Law*. Essential reading if you grew up in a white suburb and have had little trouble buying a house or have parents who easily bought a house.

Give Us the Ballot by Ari Berman: If you're like me, your history education in high school ends somewhere around World War 2, with maybe a brief unit on the civil rights movement. This book details what happened after, focusing on the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and what happened after. Super ghouls and ghosts in red states and beyond have performed dozens of acts of counter-revolution chipping away slowly at the expanded franchise to ensure nonwhite can't vote. The Supreme Court of the United States recently invalidated a key part of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*. As a result, various states have removed online voting registration, early voting, same-day registration, Sunday voting, expunged thousands of voters from state rolls, and implemented voter ID laws. Almost 1,000 polling places would shut down in the years after the Shelby decision, and the US Commission on Civil Rights found a growth in discriminatory laws that made it harder for minorities to vote.

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Look, I'm pale and male. For straight white males in America, there's a glass floor, not a glass ceiling. Reading these books isn't automatically going to make you an anti-racist, but it may inspire some radical empathy and humanism. The reason I suggest these books is that the systemic problems never went away. The past isn't dead — it's not even past. By learning more about what it's like for someone to live without the privileges of being white, maybe one day it will be past.