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Featured Bookshelf: 2021 Black History Month

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2021 Black History Featured Bookshelf



The national celebration of African American History was started by Carter G. Woodson, a Harvard-trained historian and the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and first celebrated as a weeklong event in February of 1926. After a half century of overwhelming popularity, the event was expanded to a full month in 1976 by President Gerald Ford.

Here at UCF Libraries we believe that knowledge empowers everyone in our community and that recognizing past inequities is the only way to prevent their continuation. This is why our February Featured Bookshelf suggestions range from celebrating outstanding African Americans to works illuminating the effects of systemic racism in our country. We are proud to present our top staff suggested books in honor of Black History Month 2021.

Keep reading below to see the full list, descriptions, and catalog links for the Black History Month titles suggested by UCF Library employees. These books plus many, many more are also on display on the main floor of the John C. Hitt Library near the Research & Information Desk.

[A Black Women's History of the United States](#) by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross

In centering Black women's stories, two award-winning historians seek both to empower African American women and to show their allies that Black women's unique ability to make their own communities while combatting centuries of oppression is an essential component in our continued resistance to systemic racism and sexism. Berry and Gross prioritize many voices: enslaved women, freedwomen, religious leaders, artists, queer women, activists, and women who lived outside the law. The result is a starting point for exploring Black women's history and a testament to the beauty, richness, rhythm, tragedy, heartbreak, rage, and enduring love that abounds in the spirit of Black women in communities throughout the nation.

Suggested by Sandy Avila, Research & Information Services

A Bound Woman is a Dangerous Thing: the incarceration of African American women from Harriet Tubman to Sandra Bland by DaMaris B. Hill

For black American women, the experience of being bound has taken many forms: from the bondage of slavery to the Reconstruction-era criminalization of women; from the brutal constraints of Jim Crow to our own era's prison industrial complex, where between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women increased by 700%. For those women who lived and died resisting the dehumanization of confinement--physical, social, intellectual--the threat of being bound was real, constant, and lethal. From Harriet Tubman to Assata Shakur, Ida B. Wells to Sandra Bland and Black Lives Matter, black women freedom fighters have braved violence, scorn, despair, and isolation in order to lodge their protests. DaMaris Hill honors their experiences with at times harrowing, at times hopeful responses to her heroes, illustrated with black-and-white photographs throughout.

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

Be Free or Die: the amazing story of Robert Smalls' escape from slavery to Union hero by Cate Lineberry

Cate Lineberry's compelling narrative illuminates Robert Smalls' amazing journey from slave to Union hero and ultimately United States Congressman. This captivating tale of a valuable figure in American history gives fascinating insight into the country's first efforts to help newly freed slaves while also illustrating the many struggles and achievements of African Americans during the Civil War.

Suggested by Dawn Tripp, Research & Information Services

Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self by Danielle Evans

Fearless, funny, and ultimately tender, Evans's stories offer a bold new perspective on the experience of being young and African-American or mixed-race in modern-day America.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Black Fatigue: how racism erodes the mind, body, and spirit by Mary-Frances Winters

This is the first book to define and explore Black fatigue, the intergenerational impact of systemic racism on the physical and psychological health of Black people--and explain why and how society needs to collectively do more to combat its pernicious effects.

Suggested by Glen Samuels, Circulation

Deacon King Kong by James McBride

From James McBride comes a wise and witty novel about what happens to the witnesses of a shooting. In September 1969, a fumbling, cranky old church deacon known as Sportcoat shuffles into the courtyard of the Cause Houses housing project in south Brooklyn, pulls a .45 from his pocket, and in front of everybody shoots the project's drug dealer at point-blank range. McBride brings to vivid life the people affected by the shooting: the victim, the African-American and Latinx residents who witnessed it, the white neighbors, the local cops assigned to investigate, the members of the Five Ends Baptist Church where Sportcoat was deacon, the neighborhood's Italian mobsters, and Sportcoat himself. As the story deepens, it becomes clear that the lives of the characters--caught in the tumultuous swirl of 1960s New York--overlap in unexpected ways. When the truth does emerge, McBride shows us that not all secrets are meant to be hidden, that the best way to grow is to face change without fear, and that the seeds of love lie in hope and compassion.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Different Strokes: Serena, Venus, and the unfinished Black tennis revolution by Cecil Harris

Harris chronicles the rise of the Williams sisters, as well as other champions of color, closely examining how African Americans are collectively faring in tennis, on the court and off. Despite the success of the Williams sisters and the election of former pro player Katrina Adams as the U.S. Tennis Association's first black president, top black players still receive racist messages via social media and sometimes in public. The reality is that while significant progress has been made in the sport, much work remains before anything resembling equality is achieved.

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the power of hope by Jon Meacham

John Lewis, who at age twenty-five marched in Selma and was beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, is a visionary and a man of faith. Using intimate interviews with Lewis and his family and deep research into the history of the civil rights movement, Meacham writes of how the activist and leader was inspired by the Bible, his mother's unbreakable spirit, his sharecropper father's tireless ambition, and his teachers in nonviolence, Reverend James Lawson and Martin Luther King, Jr. A believer in hope above all else, Lewis learned from a young age that nonviolence was not only a tactic but a philosophy, a biblical imperative, and a transforming reality. Integral to Lewis's commitment to bettering the nation was his faith in humanity and in God, and an unshakable belief in the power of hope. Meacham calls Lewis as important to the founding of a modern and multiethnic twentieth- and twenty-first century America as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and Samuel Adams were to the initial creation of the nation-state in the eighteenth century.

Suggested by Richard Harrison, Research & Information Services

Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick by Zora Neale Hurston

An outstanding collection of stories about love and migration, gender and class, racism and sexism that proudly reflect African American folk culture. Brought together for the first time in one volume, they include eight of Hurston's "lost" Harlem stories, which were found in forgotten periodicals and archives. These stories challenge conceptions of Hurston as an author of rural fiction and include gems that flash with her biting, satiric humor, as well as more serious tales reflective of the cultural currents of Hurston's world.

Suggested by Sandy Avila, Research & Information Services

Race, Sports, and Education: improving opportunities and outcomes for black male college athletes by John N. Singer

Through his analysis of the system and his attention to student views and experiences, Singer crafts a valuable, nuanced account and points in the direction of reforms that would significantly improve the educational opportunities and experiences of these athletes. At a time when collegiate sports have attained unmistakable institutional value and generated unprecedented financial returns-all while largely failing the educational needs of its athletes-this book offers a clear, detailed vision of the current situation and suggestions for a more equitable way forward.

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

Real Life by Brandon Taylor

A novel of rare emotional power that excavates the social intricacies of a late-summer weekend -- and a lifetime of buried pain. Almost everything about Wallace, an introverted African-American transplant from Alabama, is at odds with the lakeside Midwestern university town where he is working toward a biochem degree. For reasons of self-preservation, Wallace has enforced a wary distance even within his own circle of friends -- some dating each other, some dating women, some feigning straightness. But a series of confrontations with colleagues, and an unexpected encounter with a young straight man, conspire to fracture his defenses, while revealing hidden currents of resentment and desire that threaten the equilibrium of their community.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by 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.

Suggested by Emily Horne, Rosen Library

The Privileged Poor: how elite colleges are failing disadvantaged students by Abraham Jack

College presidents and deans of admission have opened their doors--and their coffers--to support a more diverse student body. But is it enough just to let them in? Anthony Jack reveals that the struggles of less privileged students continue long after they've arrived on campus. In their first weeks they quickly learn that admission does not mean acceptance. In this bracing and necessary book, Jack documents how university policies and cultures can exacerbate preexisting inequalities, and reveals why these policies hit some students harder than others. Jack provides concrete advice to help schools reduce these hidden disadvantages--advice we cannot afford to ignore.

Suggested by Peggy Nuhn, UCF Connect Libraries

The Sun Does Shine: how I found life and freedom on death row by Anthony Ray Hinton, with Lara Love Hardin

In 1985, Anthony Ray Hinton was arrested and charged with two counts of capital murder in Alabama. Stunned, confused, and only twenty-nine years old, Hinton knew that it was a case of mistaken identity and believed that the truth would prove his innocence and ultimately set him free. But with no money and a different system of justice for a poor black man in the South, Hinton was sentenced to death by electrocution. He spent his first three years on Death Row at Holman State Prison in agonizing silence, full of despair and anger toward all those who had sent an innocent man to his death. But as Hinton realized and accepted his fate, he resolved not only to survive, but find a way to live on Death Row. For the next twenty-seven years he was a beacon, transforming not only his own spirit, but those of his fellow inmates, fifty-four of whom were executed mere feet from his cell. With the help of civil rights attorney and author Bryan Stevenson, Hinton won his release in 2015.

Suggested by Lily Dubach, UCF Connect Libraries

This is Major: notes on Diana Ross, dark girls, and being dope by Shayla Lawson

Shayla Lawson is major. You don't know who she is, yet, but that's okay. She is on a mission to move black girls like herself from best supporting actress to a starring roles in the major narrative. With a unique mix of personal stories, pop culture observations, and insights into politics and history, Lawson sheds light on the many ways black femininity has influenced mainstream culture. Timely, enlightening, and wickedly sharp, Lawson shows how major black women and girls really are.

Suggested by Glen Samuels, Circulation

We Want Our Bodies Back by Jessica Care Moore

Over the past two decades, Jessica Care Moore has become a cultural force as a poet, performer, publisher, activist, and critic. Reflecting her transcendent electric voice, this searing poetry collection is filled with moving, original stanzas that speak to both Black women's creative and intellectual power, and express the pain, sadness, and anger of those who suffer constant scrutiny because of their gender and race. Fierce and passionate, she argues that Black women spend their lives building a physical and emotional shelter to protect themselves from misogyny, criminalization, hatred, stereotypes, sexual assault, objectification, patriarchy, and death threats.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Tumblr post: <https://ucflibrary.tumblr.com/post/641923793631297536/the-national-celebration-of-african-american>

Blog post: <https://library.ucf.edu/news/featured-bookshelf-black-history-month-2021/>