



Suggested Readings on Racism and Reform, From Members of the HxA Advisory Council

A long series of horrific news stories about African Americans killed by police has shocked most Americans and led to broad shifts in attitudes about racism, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the need to reform policing practices. In an increasingly divided country, there is growing agreement that change must come.

But changing systems is hard. Many well-intentioned reforms have failed, or even backfired. Effective change requires clear thinking and careful attention to evidence. When passions are high there is a heightened risk of groupthink, particularly for “wicked problems.” It is precisely in such cases where those who truly want to solve problems would most benefit from exploring multiple perspectives, welcoming new insights that can correct for the problem of confirmation bias and refining their proposals for reform.

To make a contribution to such constructive change, and to the many discussions that will soon be held in classrooms across the country and around the world, we asked the Heterodox Academy Advisory Council this question:

What books, articles, or videos do you recommend to help students and professors better understand this historic moment and the possibilities for change with regard to race, racism, policing and the criminal justice system, or the everyday experiences of African Americans?

Here are suggestions from seven of the Advisory Council members: Xavier de Souza Briggs, Robby George, Irshad Manji, Eboo Patel, Judith Shapiro, Nadine Strossen, and Cornel West.



**Xavier de Souza
Briggs**
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“Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do.” Jennifer Eberhardt, 2019.

Eberhardt helps us understand bias, not just privilege or white supremacy as ideology and institutional structure.

“The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism.” Edward Baptist, 2014.

Baptist provides a historical perspective on key advances in economic history, inviting us to think more critically, and without caricatures, about slavery’s enormous role in building national wealth and linking institutions and interest groups across a much broader swath of the nation and the world than we traditionally learned.

“The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present.” David Treuer, 2019.

With respect for past accounts, including many by white Americans, Treuer -- an Ojibwe anthropologist and professor of English -- points out how destructive it is to simply flatten the history of this land, including the agency and resilience of Native Americans, with the narrow broken-Indian, broken-promises narrative. At the same time, he makes the extent of expropriation clear and its human impacts vivid and real.

“Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class.” Karyn Lacy, 2007.

“The Hunger for Memory.” Richard Rodriguez, 1982.

“Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do.” Claude Steele, 2010.

Few have illuminated, in a deep and empirical way, what it means to have money and advanced education — the markers of “making it” in any society — in black or brown skin. We know social science doesn’t study ‘up’ all that much. Three exceptions: Lacy, Rodriguez, and Steele.

"Created Equal: Clarence Thomas In His Own Words." Manifold Productions, Inc., 2020.
Michael Pack's new PBS documentary on the life of Justice Clarence Thomas describes his growing up in poverty in the rural Jim Crow south, and living through the 60s and the cultural upheavals of the era. I found it riveting. He doesn't try to win everybody over to his views, but he explains the experiences and reflections that brought him to the perspective he came to have.

"The Viruses." Glenn Loury and John McWhorter. Bloggingheads.tv, June 10, 2020.

"Racist Police Violence Reconsidered." John McWhorter. Quillette. June 11, 2020.



Robby George
Princeton
University



Irshad Manji
Founder, Moral
Courage

"13th." Ava DuVernay, Netflix, 2016.

An Oscar-nominated documentary about mass incarceration in America.

"Don't Label Me: How To Do Diversity Without Inflaming the Culture Wars." Irshad Manji, 2019.

A primer on effective ways to fight systemic racism, among other forms of discrimination, without using punitive tactics such as shaming. Written as a feisty Socratic dialogue, this book pro-actively addresses the doubts and suspicions that progressives have about pluralism, ultimately showing that the messy liberal project advances more durable solutions to inequality than dogmas do.

"How Protestors Can Reclaim the Movement." Irshad Manji, New York Daily News, June 4, 2020.

Manji suggests ways that her fellow activists can stand their ground as well as find common ground, both with law enforcement and with the voting public.

"Confederate Flag -- Heritage or Hate?" Moral Courage Project, 2017.

In Mississippi, two young people -- one an African-American hip-hop artist who wants the state flag to change and the other a working-class white guy who wants the flag to stay as is -- find out what can happen when they listen to one another. A multiple award-winner, this video is produced by the Moral Courage Project.

"I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street." Matt Taibbi, 2017.

An analysis of the structural flaws in modern policing, seen through the lens of one man, Eric Garner, and his murder at the hands of the New York Police Department. Taibbi says it's important for white journalists to own part of the responsibility for telling such stories, since these are also the stories of institutions created mostly by white people for white people. An excellent NPR interview with Taibbi can be found here.

"A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches." Martin Luther King Jr., 1968/2003.

"Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation." Eboo Patel, 2010.



Eboo Patel
President, Interfaith
Youth Core



Judith Shapiro
Past President,
Barnard College &
Past President, the
Teagle Foundation

["Frederick Douglass, Slavery, and the Constitution, 1845."](#) Mark Higbee and James Brewer Stewart, 2019.

["Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"](#) Beverly Tatum, 1997/2017.

["Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World."](#) David Walker, 1829.

["The Liberator."](#) William Lloyd Garrison, 1831-1865.

["Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass."](#) Frederick Douglass, 1845.

["The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness."](#) Michelle Alexander, 2010

["Final Report: The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing."](#) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015.

Produced by the Obama Administration. Much of it has been adopted by the NYPD (Wikipedia summary).

[Graham v. Connor, U.S. Supreme Court, 1989.](#)

A Supreme Court decision in which the Court lays out the parameters for determining whether police used excessive force or not (Wikipedia summary).

["Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption."](#) Bryan Stevenson, 2015.

["The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South."](#) Osha Gray Davidson, 1996.

This has also been turned into a film available on Netflix.

["The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life, Freedom, and Justice."](#) Anthony Ray Hinton, 2019.

["Becoming."](#) Michelle Obama, 2018.



Nadine Strossen
New York Law
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Cornel West
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["The Fire Next Time."](#) James Baldwin, 1963.

["The Strange Career of Jim Crow."](#) C. Vann Woodward, 1955.

["Autobiography."](#) Malcolm X, 1964.

["Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination."](#) Toni Morrison, 1992.