



**BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE TOWARDS  
EQUITABLE POLICY CHANGE**

**BY DR. MIATHERESA PATE**

We are face to face with an enemy that appears to be invisible. That enemy is racism. Racism has historically thrown everything within its arsenal at us: invalidation, oppression, injustice, terrorism and genocide. Racism historically has unleashed its weapons in hopes to take our rich identities, to lower of self-worth, destroy our communities, segregate of neighborhoods, and increase the school to prison pipeline. Education and knowledge is the great equalizer. As people of color we must *Level-Up* by taking a deep dive into our own history to gain the deepest understanding of the history of racism in America. The Art of War by Sun-Tzu, A Arte da Guerra, said “In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity”

When we *Level-up* we can no longer be told that our perceptions are incorrect or that our concerns and complaints are not supported.

We must render a blow to the enemies gut with new knowledge. With new knowledge we can more effectively engage in race and policy conversations.

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**Problem of Practice:** How can (we) as educators strengthen educational policy reform within the NYCDOE so that policy responds to all students equitably while addressing the crisis at hand?

**Solution:** Educators must first create a shared understanding of the crisis to more effectively address it...

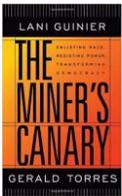
**Step 1:** All educators especially those who create policy must read to discover their personal historical knowledge gaps around the history of racism in America. Below are 20 essential anti-racist books:

Special thanks and owner credit to BREA BAKER for creating this book list...



*Recitatif* by Toni Morrison

This short story powerfully demonstrates the internalization of racism, and how it manifests itself in ways like micro-aggressions.



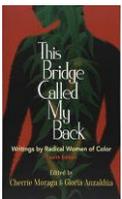
*The Miner's Canary* by Lani Guiner and Gerald Torres

This is an outstanding explanation as to why racism is not a Black problem or a Latinx problem or an Arab problem. Racism is *everyone's* problem, because as Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This text highlights how minority communities have mobilized for and with one another, something present in recent social justice movements and what we will need to expand in this crucial election year.



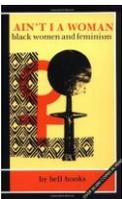
*Possessive Investment In Whiteness* by George Lipsitz

What is white privilege? The term is difficult to explain to individuals, specifically white people who do not feel privileged economically or otherwise. But white privilege is very real, and understanding it is fundamental to being an ally. This text provides an extensive look at white privilege in social, political, and economic arenas.



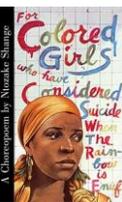
*This Bridge Called My Back* Edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa

This anthology of short stories and essays centers around the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, class, and race. It's a must-read for anyone attempting to understand the plight of women of color who are often left behind in discussions of both racism and sexism.



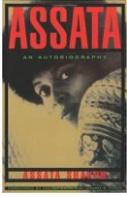
*Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* by bell hooks

An analysis of how the convergence of racism and sexism leads to the treatment of Black women as the lowest members of society. This text also speaks to how feminism often ignores and purposely leaves behind Black women.



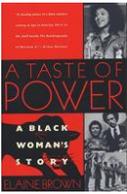
*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* by Ntozake Shange

This series of poetic monologues reads like a play and tells the story of seven Black women and their experiences with society. With racism. With sexism. With Black men who took out their frustrations with oppression on them. Black women are always made out to be so strong that their emotional breakdowns have no outlet. This text is that outlet.



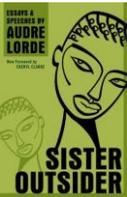
*Assata: An Autobiography* by Assata Shakur

This autobiography was truly life-changing for me. Assata Shakur is an icon of the fight for Black liberation in the 1960s and '70s, and in her powerfully personal autobiography, Shakur details what brought her to the Civil Rights Movement and what she faced as a black woman in a white man's world.



*A Taste of Power* by Elaine Brown

Historically, social justice movements are seen from the perspective of the prominent, charismatic men in leadership. Most people know Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and Huey Newton, but not Ella Baker, Diane Nash, or Elaine Brown—the first and only female leader of the Black Panther Party. Read her story and rectify that.



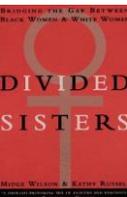
*Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde

Race, class, gender, sexual orientation—Audre Lorde covers them all from her own personal experiences, showing how systems of oppression overlap to create new, marginalized experiences. *Sister Outsider* pushes all the envelopes by looking at identity through the lens of police violence, gender-based violence, colonization, and much more.



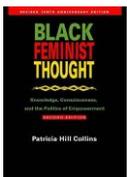
*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

If you're trying to understand how "beauty" is racialized and how Black people are conditioned to aspire to whiteness, this is the novel for you. Through poetic storytelling, Morrison shows how far we go in our desire to cover up trauma and how powerful (and sacred) self-love can be for Black women.



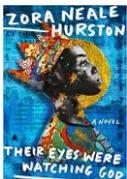
*Divided Sisters* by Midge Wilson & Kathy Russell

This one is for the white women working to be allies who don't fully understand their contentious and sometimes distrustful relationships with Black women. Black women carry so much pain passed down from former generations and derived from our own lives. In order to bridge these gaps, you must first know and understand Black women's experiences.



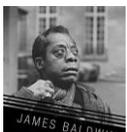
*Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins

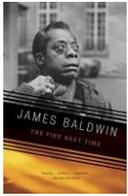
There's a lot of talk about white feminism and the ways it falls short of representing all women. Patricia Collins presents the theories and ideologies Black women have developed as alternatives to serve the breadth of our communities.



*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

How can you hold an appreciation for Blackness and our culture without engaging with our greats? Our writers are not electives and it should be everyone's mission to become acquainted with Black icons. Zora Neale Hurston is one of the greatest Black writers across time, and for that reason alone, this book is necessary reading





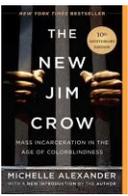
*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin

James Baldwin is known for his storytelling, but it’s so important for people to get into his nonfiction essays. Addressing race, religion, and how they’ve intersected in American history, *The Fire Next Time* was one of the most influential texts on race from the 1960s—and remains so.



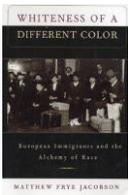
*Passing* by Nella Larsen

Colorism is the system by which light-skinned Black people have the privilege to transcend their race—and often, class—due to their phenotype (that is, how they present to the world). This novel takes us through the ways identity is both fluid and strategic, depending on your proximity.



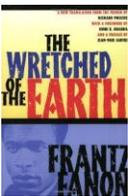
*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

This is required reading for anyone looking to understand how our criminal justice system is racialized and weaponized against people of color and especially Black people. (A great companion to this book is Ava DuVernay’s documentary *13th* on [Netflix](#).)



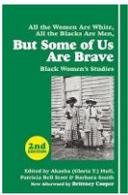
*Whiteness of a Different Color* by Matthew Frye Jacobson

Most of us know that race is a social construct, which means the concept of race was created out of a convenience for explaining hierarchy. This read—while a thick one—goes deep into how white people were re-racialized from their European roots into white Americans in order to create one large ruling racial category. Knowing this history can help us avoid being complicit in systems of oppression.



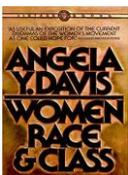
*The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon

The reason we haven’t eradicated racism is because most people underestimate it. Racism and colonization are deeply entrenched in every part of our society and even our psyche. Fanon makes the case in a way that feels dense but is so comprehensive and accurate, painting the blueprint for what it will take from all of us to finally build a society *made* for all of us.



*But Some of Us Are Brave* Edited by Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, & Barbara Smith

Intersectional became quite the buzzword following the 2016 Women’s March, but it’s important to acknowledge that intersectionality doesn’t equal diversity. This anthology drives that message home while sharing the experiences of those at the margins.



*Women, Race, & Class* by Angela Y. Davis

Angela Davis provides the gender, racial, and class analysis the world truly needs—in only the way Ms. Davis can. This is a great follow-up for those looking to dive

deeper into intersectionality and how various issues are compounded for low income women of color.

**Step 2:** All educators especially those who create policy must watch footage to discover their personal knowledge gaps around the history of racism in America. No! We can't go back in time, but we can engage in visual explorations through documentaries that help to deepen ones understanding and compassion towards why people protest and are outraged by historical police brutality and racial injustice. Below are 10 essential must views:

Special thanks and owner's credit to MALCOM VENABLE for creating this viewing list... 9 and 10 were not recommended by MALCOM VENABLE.

***When They See Us*** (Netflix, 2019)

The gripping miniseries from Ava DuVernay dramatized the case of the Exonerated Five (previously called the "Central Park Five") — a group of black and Latino teens who were wrongfully convicted in 1989 of raping and assaulting a woman in Central Park. That conviction was overturned in 2002 only after the real assailant came forward, but the case became a real-time study in how police, the criminal justice system, and the news media tried and convicted boys of color despite a glaring lack of evidence. It's a sobering, upsetting, and phenomenal piece of television, and Jharrel Jerome's Emmy-winning performance will haunt you.

***The Central Park Five*** (PBS, 2012)

Acclaimed documentarian Ken Burns' work on the aforementioned New York City case contains tons of archival footage and first-person testimony from reporters, people involved in the case, and historical context that explains how bias against people of color allowed five teenage boys to be sent to prison for a crime they didn't commit. It originally aired on PBS but is now available on Amazon and iTunes.

***Time: The Kalief Browder Story*** (Netflix, 2017)

This six-part series, which has Jay-Z as one of its executive producers, examines the case of Kalief Browder, who was a 16-year-old kid from the Bronx accused of stealing a backpack in 2009. He was sent to the notorious Rikers Island without trial, and, unable to afford bail, placed in solitary confinement for two years of a three-year stay. Upon his release at age 22, he died by suicide — a death advocates say was due to the mental, physical and sexual abuse he endured in prison. His family settled a suit with New York City for \$3.3 million in 2019 but, as this series explains, his imprisonment highlighted troubling ways black and Latino people are severely punished in the judicial and correctional systems.

***16 Shots*** (Showtime, 2018)

This documentary looks at the 2014 shooting death of Laquan McDonald by Chicago police and the cover-up that followed. As the film shows, police initially said the shooting was justified, but pressure from activists and journalists forced police to release footage that sent the Chicago Police Department and local Chicago government officials into upheaval as the community demanded justice.

***Rest In Power: The Trayvon Martin Story*** (Paramount, 2018)

The case that sparked the Black Lives Matter Movement — the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black boy who was killed by George Zimmerman in so-called self-defense — is pried open in this series. His parents, activists, and others central to the case detail how Zimmerman, accusing Martin of a crime that never happened, chased him and ultimately ended his life but remained uncharged with criminal offenses due to Florida's "Stand your ground" laws.

***Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement*** (BET, 2016)

Black Lives Matter has been called the new civil rights movement; it's been called a terrorist organization. This series, initially released on BET but now available on Amazon, explains the origins of the movement and what it's really all about.

***Let it Fall: Los Angeles 1982-1992*** (Netflix, 2017)

John Ridley, the masterful producer and director behind *12 Years a Slave* and ABC's incredible series *American Crime*, examines the turbulent decade in Los Angeles after four police officers caught on tape beating Rodney King were acquitted. The film takes on the 1992 riots — which left more than 60 people dead and caused a reported billion dollars in damage — that happened immediately after, but puts that devastation into greater context, including the long-standing tensions with police that boiled over after the verdict.

***Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland*** (HBO, 2018)

What happened to Sandra Bland? That chilling story, which begins with the young black woman pulled over for a simple lane change and ends with her mysterious death inside a Texas prison, is examined in this HBO series. Bland — a politically active woman who recorded her own frightening interaction with an officer — somehow ended up hanging in a cell, supposedly from suicide. But as this doc shows, the circumstances and evidence are more than suspicious, and raise unsettling questions about what we don't know. (Disclosure: TV Guide is owned by CBS Interactive, a division of ViacomCBS.)

***Understanding My Privilege: A TEDx Talk*** By Susan E. Borrego

In her TEDx Talk, University of Michigan Flint professor Susan E. Borrego explains white privilege. While some white people may not be actively racist, many do not understand the systems they benefit from simply because of the color of their skin. And while being not racist is a good start, it's not enough anymore. White people must be actively anti-racist and understand the systems they benefit from. “We have to be able to breathe through our defensiveness about the fact that, ‘that’s not talking about me,’” she said.

***The Dangers Of Whitewashing Black History: A TEDx Talk*** By David Ikard

History books have a tendency to protect the reputation of white Americans in its retellings of the past. In his TEDx Talk, David Ikard, professor of African American and diaspora studies at Vanderbilt University, explains the dangers of whitewashing Black history. He explains that while schools teach us about Black history, they don't give the full story.

**Step 3:** All educators especially those who create policy must engage in accountable practices to explore new learnings and misconceptions around the readings and footage. Below are 2 essential practices that must accompany reading books and viewing movies.

- ***Create or Join a Critical Friends Discussion Group***  
Discourse around new topics can help us to process what we’ve read or viewed. A Critical Friends group can provide an outlet for the heaviness of the topics. It should be an open forum where biases, beliefs, and questions can be discussed and explored.
- ***Create or Join an Organizational Book/Video Club***  
Accountability is necessary to remain active in our own learning, misconceptions and ideals. If educators who create policy are to engage in heart explorations, there should be time set aside for the courageous work of exploration and discussion.
- ***Engage in Protocol-Guided Discussion Before Engaging in Policy Making***  
Everyone has experiences that lead to biases, pre-judgments and misconceptions. It is important that biases are established before engaging in important policy making work. A protocol that asks: Do I know enough about the experiences of the individuals this will impact? Do I have a relatable experience that drives my decision making? Am I operating from a point of privilege, pain, passion, or possession?