

First Parish in Lincoln Racial Justice Advocates Annotated Reading List: Some Suggestions (August 2025)

The books are listed according to topic. The first three relate to 2025 themes: Democracy, Human Rights, and Immigration. The remainder are Black history and literature as well as books addressing racism and white supremacy. (* indicates ones that a member of the Racial Justice Advocates or a member of FPL has recommended.)

I. Democracy

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame and the Rise of the Right, 2024.

For all the attempts to understand the state of American politics and the blue/red divide, we've ignored what economic and cultural loss can do to pride. What happens, Arlie Russell Hochschild asks, when a proud people in a hard-hit region suffer the deep loss of pride and are confronted with a powerful political appeal that makes it feel "stolen"?

Hochschild's research drew her to Pikeville, Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachia, within the whitest and second-poorest congressional district in the nation, where the city was reeling: coal jobs had left, crushing poverty persisted, and a deadly drug crisis struck the region. Hochschild focuses on a group swept up in the shifting political landscape: blue-collar men. In small churches, hillside hollers, roadside diners, trailer parks, and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, Hochschild introduces us to unforgettable people, and offers an original lens through which to see them and the wider world. In *Stolen Pride*, Hochschild incisively explores our dangerous times, even as she also points a way forward. A 2024 New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice Pick; A New York Times Book Review Best Book of the Year; One of Barack Obama's Favorite Books of 2024

Levitski, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. *The Tyranny of the Minority: Why American Democracy Reached the Breaking Point, 2023. America is undergoing a massive experiment: It is moving, in fits and starts, toward a multiracial democracy, something few societies have ever done. But the prospect of change has sparked an authoritarian backlash that threatens the very foundations of our political system. With the clarity and brilliance, Harvard professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt offer a coherent framework for understanding these volatile times. They draw on a wealth of examples—from 1930s France to present-day Thailand—to explain why and how political parties turn against democracy. They then show how our Constitution makes us uniquely vulnerable to attacks from within: It is a pernicious enabler of minority rule, allowing partisan minorities to consistently thwart and even rule over popular majorities. Most modern democracies—from Germany and Sweden to Argentina and New Zealand—have eliminated outdated institutions like elite upper chambers, indirect elections, and lifetime tenure for judges. The United States lags dangerously behind.

Palmer, Parker. *Healing the Heart of Democracy, 2011. In *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker J. Palmer quickens our instinct to seek the common good and gives us the tools to do it.

This timely, courageous and practical work -- intensely personal as well as political -- is not about them, "those people" in Washington D.C., or in our state capitals, on whom we blame our political problems. It's about us, "We the People," and what we can do in everyday settings like families, neighborhoods, classrooms, congregations and workplaces to resist divide-and-conquer politics and restore a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

Richardson, Heather Cox. *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America, 2023.* With remarkable clarity and the same accessible voice that brings millions to her newsletter, Letters from an American, Richardson wrangles a chaotic news feed into a story that pivots effortlessly from the Founders to the abolitionists to Nixon to the January 6 insurrection. An essential listen for anyone concerned about the state of America, Democracy Awakening is more than a history book; it's a call to action. Richardson reminds us that democracy requires constant vigilance and participation from all of us, showing how we, as a nation, can take the lessons of the past to secure a more just and equitable future. "Magisterial."—The Washington Post. "An excellent primer for anyone who needs the important facts of the last 150 years of American history—and how they got us to the sorry place we inhabit today."—Guardian

Sandel, Michael: *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good, 2020. "Ahead of its time . . . a blistering critique . . . [Sandel's] book underscores the way elite condescension prompts resentment of higher education and antagonizes many who lack a B.A.—a majority of the electorate. He cites evidence that elites aren't less prejudiced than other people; it's just that they are prejudiced against different people—those with less education." —Nicholas Kristof, The New York Times. A Times Literary Supplement's Book of the Year 2020; A New Statesman's Best Book of 2020; A Bloomberg's Best Book of 2020; A Guardian Best Book About Ideas of 2020

Snyder, Timothy. *On Freedom, 2024. Freedom is the great American commitment, but as Snyder argues, we have lost sight of what it means—and this is leading us into crisis. Too many of us look at freedom as the absence of state power: We think we're free if we can do and say as we please and protect ourselves from government overreach. But true freedom isn't so much freedom from as freedom to—the freedom to thrive, to take risks for futures we choose by working together. Freedom is the value that makes all other values possible.

Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny, Twenty Lessons from the 20th Century, 2017. The Founding Fathers tried to protect us from the threat they knew, the tyranny that overcame ancient democracy. Today, our political order faces new threats, not unlike the totalitarianism of the twentieth century. We are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience. On Tyranny is a call to arms and a guide to resistance, with invaluable ideas for how we can preserve our freedoms in the uncertain years to come. A "bracing" (Vox) guide for surviving and resisting America's turn towards authoritarianism, from "a rising public intellectual unafraid to make bold connections between past and present" (The New York Times)

II. Human Rights

***Alberta, Tim. *The Kingdom, Power and Glory*, 2023.** For millions of conservative Christians, America is their kingdom—a land set apart, a nation uniquely blessed, a people in special covenant with God. This love of country, however, has given way to right-wing nationalist fervor, a reckless blood-and-soil idolatry that trivializes the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Alberta retraces the arc of the modern evangelical movement, placing political and cultural inflection points in the context of church teachings and traditions, explaining how Donald Trump's presidency and the COVID-19 pandemic only accelerated historical trends that long pointed toward disaster. This book is a good accompaniment to the film, **'Til Kingdom Come** that the First Parish screened in 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3YSG8sgU4g>

***Beinart, Peter. *Being Jewish after the Destruction of Gaza*, 2025.** Beinart imagines an alternate narrative, which would draw on other nations' efforts at moral reconstruction and a different reading of Jewish tradition. A story in which Israeli Jews have the right to equality, not supremacy, and in which Jewish and Palestinian safety are not mutually exclusive but intertwined. One that recognizes the danger of venerating states at the expense of human life. *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza* is a provocative argument that will expand and inform one of the defining conversations of our time. It is a book that only Peter Beinart could write: a passionate yet measured work that brings together his personal experience, his commanding grasp of history, his keen understanding of political and moral dilemmas, and a clear vision for the future.

***Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *The Message*, 2024.** New York Times bestselling author of *Between the World and Me* journeys to three resonant sites of conflict to explore how the stories we tell—and the ones we don't—shape our realities. Ta-Nehisi Coates originally set out to write a book about writing, in the tradition of Orwell's classic "Politics and the English Language," but found himself grappling with deeper questions about how our stories—our reporting and imaginative narratives and mythmaking—expose and distort our realities. Written at a dramatic moment in American and global life, this work from one of the country's most important writers is about the urgent need to untangle ourselves from the destructive myths that shape our world—and our own souls—and embrace the liberating power of even the most difficult truths. "Ever since his Baldwin-inflected *Between the World and Me*, Coates has been known for his incisive (and sometimes uncomfortable) cultural and political commentary. Here he journeys from West Africa to the American South to Palestine to examine how the stories we tell can fail us, and to argue that only the truth can bring justice."—The Boston Globe

***Davis, Angela. *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 2016.** Reflecting on the importance of black feminism, intersectionality, and prison abolitionism for today's struggles, Davis discusses the legacies of previous liberation struggles, from the Black Freedom Movement to the South African anti-Apartheid movement. She highlights connections and analyzes

today's struggles against state terror, from Ferguson to Palestine. Facing a world of outrageous injustice, Davis challenges us to imagine and build the movement for human liberation. And in doing so, she reminds us that "Freedom is a constant struggle." "Angela Davis new book made me think of what Dear Nelson Mandela kept reminding us, that we must be willing to embrace that long walk to freedom. Understanding what it takes to really be free, to have no fear, is the first and most important step one has to make before undertaking this journey. Angela is the living proof that this arduous challenge can also be an exhilarating and beautiful one."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Jewish Voice for Peace, *On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice, 2017. Jewish Voice for Peace has curated a collection of essays that provides a diversity of perspectives and standpoints. Each contribution explores critical questions concerning uses and abuses of antisemitism in the twenty-first century, focusing on the intersection between antisemitism, accusations of antisemitism, and Palestinian human rights activism. This anthology provides a much-needed tool for Palestinian solidarity activists, teachers, as well as Jewish communities. Featuring contributions from Omar Barghouti, Judith Butler, and Rebecca Vilkomerson, as well as activists, academics, students, and cultural workers, *On Political Solidarity and Justice* includes the voices of Palestinian students and activists, and Jews that are often marginalized in mainstream discussions of antisemitism, including Jews of Color and Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews. **Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)** is a national, grassroots organization inspired by Jewish tradition to work for a just and lasting peace according to principles of human rights, equality, and international law for all the people of Israel and Palestine.

III. Immigration

Das, Alina. *No Justice in the Shadows: How America Criminalizes Immigrants, 2020.* This provocative account of our immigration system's long, racist history reveals how it has become the brutal machine that upends the lives of millions of immigrants today. Each year in the United States, hundreds of thousands of people are arrested, imprisoned, and deported, trapped in what leading immigrant rights activist and lawyer Alina Das calls the "deportation machine." The bulk of the arrests target people who have a criminal record — so-called "criminal aliens" — the majority of whose offenses are immigration-, drug-, or traffic-related. These individuals are uprooted and banished from their homes, their families, and their communities. Through the stories of those caught in the system, Das traces the ugly history of immigration policy to explain how the U.S. constructed the idea of the "criminal alien," effectively dividing immigrants into the categories "good" and "bad," "deserving" and "undeserving." As Das argues, we need to confront the cruelty of the machine so that we can build an inclusive immigration policy premised on human dignity and break the cycle once and for all.

Hinojosa, Maria. *Once I was You*, 2020. The Emmy Award–winning journalist and anchor of NPR’s Latino USA tells the story of immigration in America through her family’s experiences and decades of reporting, painting an unflinching portrait of a country in crisis in this memoir that is “quite simply beautiful, written in Maria Hinojosa’s honest, passionate voice” (BookPage). In *Once I Was You*, Maria shares her intimate experience growing up Mexican American on the South Side of Chicago. She offers a personal and illuminating account of how the rhetoric around immigration has not only long informed American attitudes toward outsiders but also sanctioned willful negligence and profiteering at the expense of our country’s most vulnerable populations—charging us with the broken system we have today. This book is an urgent call to fellow Americans to open their eyes to the immigration crisis and understand that it affects us all, this honest and heartrending memoir paints a vivid portrait of how we got here and what it means to be a survivor, a feminist, a citizen, and a journalist who owns her voice while striving for the truth.

IV. History, Racism, and White Supremacy

Anderson, Carol. *White Rage: the Unspoken Truth of the Racial Divide*, 2016. Anderson, an historian, writes that when African Americans make strides—in education, voting, employment, home ownership—those strides sparked intense, well-organized blow back.

***Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*, 2015.** This book, a New York Times best seller and National Book Award winner, is written in the form of a letter from Coates, a Black American father, to his fifteen-year-old son, Samori. His letter provides the reader with explicit and jarring knowledge of the difficulties of bringing up black teenagers in white America. **FPL choice for summer-fall, 2020.**

***Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be an Anti-Racist*, 2019.** Kendi is on a mission to push those of us who believe we are not racists to become something else: antiracists, who support ideas and policies affirming that “the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences — that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group.” **Book choice by FPL, 2020.**

***Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: the Definitive History of Racist Ideas*, 2017.** The book is structured around five historical guides: 17th-century Puritan minister Cotton Mather, founding father Thomas Jefferson, 19th-century abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, author and activist WEB Du Bois and 1960s radical Angela Davis. The title of the book is drawn from a speech given in the US Senate in 1860 by Mississippi senator Jefferson Davis, who announced that the “inequality of the white and black races” was “stamped from the beginning.”

***McGhee, Heather. *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, 2021.** Heather McGhee’s specialty is the American economy—and the mystery of why it so often fails the American public. From the financial crisis of 2008 to rising student debt to collapsing public infrastructure, she found a root problem: racism in our politics and policymaking. But not just in the most obvious indignities for people of color. Racism has costs for white people, too. It is the common denominator of our most vexing public problems, the core dysfunction of our democracy and constitutive of the spiritual and moral crises that grip us all. But how did this happen? And is there a way out?

***Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste*, 2020.** Wilkerson's central thesis is that caste, while a global occurrence, achieves its most violent manifestation in the treatment of American Blacks, set at the lowest level in society through historical and contemporary oppression, marginalization and violence — all legally maintained through systems of law and order.

***Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 2011.** Pulitzer Prize winning author, Isabel Wilkerson details the “great migration” the exodus of the southern blacks to the North in this century. She “follows the journey of three Southern blacks, each representing a different decade of the Great Migration as well as a different destination. What linked them together, Wilkerson writes, was their heroic determination to roll the dice for a better future. Recommended by local readers including Joan Kimball and, Barbara Slayter.

V. Policing and Prisons

***Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*, 2010.** “Two years after Obama’s election, Alexander put the entire criminal justice system on trial, exposing racial discrimination from lawmaking to policing to the denial of voting rights to ex-prisoners. This bestseller struck the spark that would eventually light the fire of Black Lives Matter.” —Ibram X. Kendi, *The New York Times*; “[The New Jim Crow] transformed forever the way thinkers and activists view the phenomenon of mass incarceration.” —Slate

***Stevenson, Bryon. *Just Mercy*, 2014.** After Harvard law school, Stevenson began representing poor clients in the South, where he was a co-founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. The book—and the film-- is the story of Walter McMillian, whom Stevenson represented in the late 1980s, when McMillian was on death row for killing a young white woman in Monroeville, Alabama.
Film, shown by FPL in summer, 2020.

VI. Personal Accounts

***Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*, 1963.** "Basically the finest essay I’ve ever read . . . Baldwin refused to hold anyone’s hand. He was both direct and beautiful all at once. He did not seem to write to convince you. He wrote beyond you.” --Ta-Nehisi Coates

Bass, Amy. *ONE GOAL: A Coach, A team, and the Game That Brought a Divided Town Together*, 2018.

Bass describes how the high school soccer team, and the Somali refugee community became integrated into Lewiston, Maine town. Bass offers a case study “that is heartwarming, and well written, conveying much about the city, its varied ethnic and economic history, and the strength, generosity and good will of many individuals, especially the soccer coach, who inhabit the story.”

Eig, Jonathan. *King, A Life*, 2023. “Supple, penetrating, heartstring-pulling and compulsively readable . . . The first comprehensive biography of King in three decades . . . and it supplants David J. Garrow’s 1986 biography *Bearing the Cross* as the definitive life of King, as Garrow himself deposed recently . . . [Eig’s is] a clean, clear, journalistic voice, one that employs facts the way Saul Bellow said they should be employed, each a wire that sends a current . . . Eig’s book is worthy of its subject.” —**Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* (Book Review Editors’ Choice)**

***King, Martin Luther, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, 1963.** King’s famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” published in *The Atlantic* as “The Negro Is Your Brother,” was written in response to a public statement of concern and caution issued by eight white religious leaders of the South. It stands as one of the classic documents of the civil-rights movement. Can be downloaded from several sites including

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/letter-from-a-birmingham-jail/552461/>

***McKibben, Bill. *The Flag, the Cross and the Station Wagon*, 2022.** In this revelatory cri de coeur, McKibben digs deep into our history (and his own well-meaning but not all-seeing past) and into the latest scholarship on race and inequality in America, on the rise of the religious right, and on our environmental crisis to explain how we got to this point. He finds that he is not without hope. And he wonders if any of that trinity of his youth—The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon—could, or should, be reclaimed in the fight for a fairer future.

***Noah, Trevor. *Born a Crime*, 2016.** Trevor Noah’s unlikely path from apartheid South Africa to the desk of *The Daily Show* began with a criminal act: his birth. Trevor was born to a white Swiss father and a black Xhosa mother at a time when such a union was illegal. “Powerful prose . . . told through stories and vignettes that are sharply observed, deftly conveyed and consistently candid.”—*Mail & Guardian* (South Africa)

Shepard, Ray. *A Long Time Coming: A Lyrical Biography of Race in America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama*, 2023. This YA biography-in-verse of six important Black Americans from different eras, including Ona Judge, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr., and Barack Obama, chronicles the diverse ways each fought racism and shows how much—and how little—has changed for Black Americans since our country’s founding. All of Shepard’s protagonists fight valiantly for justice for themselves and all Black Americans in any way that they can. But it is also a highly personal book, as Shepard — whose maternal grandfather was enslaved — shows how the grand sweep of history has touched his life,

reflecting on how much progress has been made against racism, while also exhorting readers to complete the vast work that remains to be done.

***Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 1949.** Famously known as the text that Martin Luther King Jr. sought inspiration from in the days leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott, Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* helped shape the civil rights movement and changed our nation's history forever. This book was a FPL book read sponsored by RJA. In this classic theological treatise, the acclaimed theologian and religious leader Howard Thurman (1900-1981) demonstrates how the gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus is a partner in the pain of the oppressed and the example of His life offers a solution to ending the descent into moral nihilism. Hatred does not empower--it decays. Only through self-love and love of one another can God's justice prevail.

VI. Fiction

***Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, *Americanah*, 2013.** The story of two Nigerians making their way in the U.S. and the UK, raising universal questions of race and belonging, the overseas experience for the African diaspora, and the search for identity and a home. She describes her experiences in both the U.S. and Nigeria. Selected by The New York Times, NPR, Chicago Tribune, The Washington Post, The Seattle Times and others as A Best Book of the Year.

***Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Reissued, 2009.** Described as a book as joyous and painful, as mysterious and memorable, as childhood itself. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* captures the longing of lonely children, the brute insult of bigotry, and the wonder of words that can make the world right.

***Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 1953.** "With vivid imagery, with lavish attention to details, Mr. Baldwin has told his feverish story." —The New York Times; "Brutal, objective and compassionate." —San Francisco Chronicle; "It is written with poetic intensity and great narrative skill." —Harper's; "A sense of reality and vitality that is truly extraordinary . . . He knows Harlem, his people, and the language they use." —Chicago Sun-Times

***Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes were Watching God*, 1937.** A beautifully written and enduring 1937 novel acclaimed as an African American feminist classic.

Jones, Tamari. *An American Marriage*, 2018. Roy, a young black man, is tried and wrongly convicted of rape while his wife, Celestial, waits for his return.... NYT Book Review, Feb. 2018. A New York Times and Washington Post Notable Book. "A moving portrayal of the effects of a wrongful conviction on a young African American couple." —Barack Obama.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*, 1987. Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The work examines the destructive legacy of slavery as it chronicles the life of a Black woman named Sethe, from her pre-Civil War days as a slave in Kentucky to her time in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873. Although

Sethe lives there as a free woman, she is held prisoner by memories of the trauma of her life as a slave.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*, 1970. The Nobel Prize-winner's debut novel, published in 1970 and set in the post-Depression era, tells the story of an African American girl from an abusive home who equates beauty with whiteness

Alice Walker. *The Color Purple*, 1987. A Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning classic, set in rural Georgia in 1930, centered on two African American sisters and told through their letters.

***Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*, 2016.** An alternate history that won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. As Whitehead brilliantly re-creates the unique terrors for black people in the pre-Civil War era, his narrative seamlessly weaves the saga of America from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day.