

# This List Of Books, Films And Podcasts About Racism Is A Start, Not A Panacea

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As of Friday, 15 of the top 20 bestselling books on Amazon were about race or racism. Earlier this week, *Code Switch* was number one on Apple Podcasts — which, [as host Gene Demby said](#), is "dope," but unfortunately occurred under "soul-crushing circumstances." And *The Help* is trending on Netflix (ahem, a film that [drew immediate ire](#) upon release). We're in the middle of one of those awfully predictable news cycles — a video of police killing a black person goes viral, protests ensue and broader America suddenly realizes *we need to talk about race*. Of course, while [this week has happened before](#), it's also happening on a much larger scale than ever before, with [demonstrations in all 50 states](#).

To help people be better allies, lists of antiracist books, films and podcasts are being published in droves. There's never a bad time to learn, but such a list can become erroneously prescriptive, a balm to centuries-old lacerations that cut deeper than the individual reader. [As Lauren Michele Jackson wrote for \*Vulture\*](#), "The word [anti-racism] and its nominal equivalent, "anti-racist," suggests something of a vanity project, where the goal is no longer to learn more about race, power, and capital, but to spring closer to the enlightened order of the antiracist."

So, with that in mind, we've compiled a list of books, films and podcasts about systemic racism, acknowledging that they are just books, films and podcasts. You'll find research on how racism permeates everything from the criminal justice system to health care. We hope you spend some time with these resources (and that you listen to *Code Switch* — [here's a list of episodes](#) to get you started). Information is power — you decide what you do with it.

## Books

**[Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together In The Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race](#)** by Beverly Daniel Tatum

This classic text on the psychology of racism was re-released with new content in 2017, 20 years after its original publication. By providing straight talk on self-segregation and inequality in schools, Tatum shows the importance — and possibility — of cross-racial dialogues starting young.

**[Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership](#)** by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

A finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in History, *Race for Profit* chronicles how the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 failed to stop racist, exploitative mortgage

lending practices. Since the policy was supposed to be a balm to the 1960s uprisings — much like the ones we're seeing now — it serves as a reminder to remain vigilant when policymakers promise change.

***A Terrible Thing To Waste: Environmental Racism And Its Assault On The American Mind*** by Harriet A. Washington

From lead poisoning to toxic waste, Americans of color are disproportionately harmed by environmental hazards. This is detrimental to physical health — air pollution is linked with higher COVID-19 death rates, [according to Harvard researchers](#). But Washington also argues that environmental racism is causing cognitive decline in communities of color. A deconstruction of IQ and an indictment of EPA rollbacks, *A Terrible Thing To Waste* is a stirring read.

***From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*** by Elizabeth Hinton

The origins of mass incarceration — which disproportionately puts black people behind bars — are often pinned on Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. But Hinton argues the carceral state was erected "by a consensus of liberals and conservatives who privileged punitive responses to urban problems as a reaction to the civil rights movement." The 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act, part of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society plan, led to today's police militarization. This account of history poses relevant questions for today's land of the free.

***Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police and Punish the Poor*** by Virginia Eubanks

Algorithms are made by humans, so they are susceptible to human biases. From deciding which neighborhoods get policed to who gets welfare benefits, discrimination has gone digital. By scrutinizing statistical models and telling personal stories, Eubanks shows that machines do not correct racist systems — they only shift blame.

***The End of Policing*** by Alex S. Vitale

In the wake of high-profile cases of police brutality, the same ideas for reform are trotted out — implicit bias training, body cameras, police-community dialogues. But Vitale argues that this fails to get to the root of the problem — policing itself. While calls to abolish the police are often met with skepticism, academics and activists have long-discussed alternatives to addressing homelessness, domestic disputes and substance abuse. [A free ebook](#) of *The End of Policing* is available now. (And you can read *Code Switch* editor extraordinaire Leah Donnella's conversation with Vitale [here](#).)

***Blackballed: The Black Vote and U.S. Democracy*** by Darryl Pinckney

As young Americans take to the streets to say black lives matter, they're often told to vote. While voting is important, it's also important to remember how black political representation has been chipped away by voter ID laws, gerrymandering and felon disenfranchisement. *Blackballed* addresses the struggle for voting rights and for racial equality more broadly, drawing on Pinckney's own experiences and writings of civil rights leaders to create a complicated picture of black political identity.

***Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*** by Ian Haney López

"Entitlement mentality." "Quotas." "Welfare queens." From Barry Goldwater to Bill Clinton to the Tea Party, politicians have relied on racially coded language to win over

white voters and decimate social programs. *Dog Whistle Politics* makes the case that not only does this strategy endanger people of color, but it also hinders economic mobility for all Americans.

***Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*** by Deirdre Cooper Owens

The foundational knowledge of American gynecology relied on the exploitation of enslaved black women's bodies. In *Medical Bondage*, Cooper Owens centers the stories of black women that have been overshadowed by the "discoveries" of white male doctors who experimented on them. Baseless theories about black inferiority and higher pain tolerance [still permeate medical schools today](#).

***Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*** by Alondra Nelson

The Black Panther Party is most remembered for its militant action, but health care was also a major pillar of its activism. The People's Free Medical Clinics tested for hypertension and assisted with housing and employment. Its outreach also brought attention to rampant discrimination within mainstream medicine. Nelson writes that the Black Panther Party understood health as a human right, echoing today's fight for universal health care. You can [read \*Body and Soul\* online for free](#).

Films

***13th***

The U.S. imprisons more people than any other country in the world, and [a third of U.S. prisoners are black](#). In this infuriating documentary, director Ava DuVernay argues that mass incarceration, Jim Crow and slavery are "the three major racialized systems of control adopted in the United States to date."

***I Am Not Your Negro***

Narrated by the words of James Baldwin with the voice of Samuel L. Jackson, *I Am Not Your Negro* connects the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter. Although Baldwin died nearly 30 years before the film's release, his observations about racial conflict are as incisive today as they were when he made them.

***Whose Streets?***

The 2014 killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Mo. was one of the deaths that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. Frustrated by media coverage of unrest in Ferguson, co-directors Sabaah Foleyan and Damon Davis documented how locals felt about police in riot gear filling their neighborhoods with tear gas. As one resident says, "They don't tell you the fact that the police showed up to a peaceful candlelight vigil...and boxed them in, and forced them onto a QuikTrip lot."

***LA 92***

*LA 92* is about the Los Angeles riots that occurred in response to the police beating of Rodney King. The film is entirely comprised of archival footage — no talking heads needed. It's chilling to watch the unrest of nearly 30 years ago, as young people still take to the streets and shout, "No justice, no peace."

***Teach Us All***

Over 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, American schools are still segregated. *Teach Us All* explains why that is — school choice, residential segregation, biased admissions processes — and talks to advocates working for change. Interspersing

interviews from two Little Rock Nine members, the documentary asks how far we've really come.

***Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise***

In this two-part series, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. chronicles the last 50 years of black history through a personal lens. Released days after the 2016 election, some themes of the documentary took on a deeper meaning amid Donald Trump's win. "Think of the civil rights movement to the present as a second Reconstruction — a 50-year Reconstruction — that ended last night," Gates said [in an interview with Salon](#).

Podcasts

***Floodlines*** from *The Atlantic*

An audio documentary about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, *Floodlines* is told from the perspective of four New Orleanians still living with the consequences of governmental neglect. As COVID-19 disproportionately infects and kills Americans of color, the story feels especially relevant. "As a person of color, you always have it in the back of your mind that the government really doesn't care about you," said self-described Katrina overcomer Alice Craft-Kerney.

***1619*** from *The New York Times*

"In August of 1619, a ship carrying more than 20 enslaved Africans arrived in the English colony of Virginia. America was not yet America, but this was the moment it began." Hosted by recent Pulitzer Prize winner Nikole Hannah-Jones, the *1619* audio series chronicles how black people have been central to building American democracy, music, wealth and more.

***Intersectionality Matters!*** from *The African American Policy Forum*

Hosted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading critical race theorist who coined the term "intersectionality," this podcast brings the academic term to life. Each episode brings together lively political organizers, journalists and writers. [This recent episode](#) on COVID-19 in prisons and other areas of confinement is a must-listen.

***Throughline*** from *NPR*

Every week at *Throughline*, our pals Rund Abdelfatah and Ramtin Arablouei "go back in time to understand the present." To understand the history of systemic racism in America, we recommend "[American Police](#)," "[Mass Incarceration](#)" and "[Milliken v. Bradley](#)."