

Marblehead LWV lists books on the Black experience

UPCOMING EVENTS

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Posted Jul 21, 2020 at 11:20 AMUpdated Jul 21, 2020 at 11:20 AM

Two years ago I was researching books on the history of the League of Women Voters for our 100th anniversary celebration, and I came across information that white women leaders in the suffrage movement pushed aside Black women in the movement to gain support in the South. Although the league has acknowledged and disavowed those actions, it is a stain that galvanizes many of us to stand up and not fail our Black fellow-citizens in this moment.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts Board has issued a statement about the murder of George Floyd:

“As the Massachusetts League, we grieve and share the horror at the brutal acts toward our fellow Black citizens. We demand accountability at all levels of our government, which is ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people.’ Here in Massachusetts we commit as individuals and as a league to hold ourselves accountable: to listen to Black voices in our communities and the Commonwealth, to educate ourselves better and stand against the racism prevalent in our society, and to advocate for policies and practices to eliminate systemic racism in Massachusetts.

“We dedicate ourselves: to vigorously advocate for the opportunity for everyone to vote safely in this fall’s elections, to ensure that each member of our communities, statewide, is counted in the census, to address the inequities in our society that the coronavirus pandemic has so dramatically exposed, and to speak out against racism. Every resident in Massachusetts deserves equal protection and safety as we

go about our daily lives. Every member of our communities should be welcomed with open hearts into our institutions and our organizations.

“As civically engaged members of our communities from every corner of the Commonwealth, we must set the example with our words and actions for our children and grandchildren to demand a Massachusetts which is just and fair for all. And we amplify this call to action: the road to change lies at the ballot box, and the most significant change can happen in elections closest to home. We must exercise our rights to safeguard them. Protecting rights for everyone means standing against injustice toward anyone. Vote.”

Beginning in 2017, the League of Women Voters of Marblehead has held a book group every couple of months. We have reviewed a number of books related to the Black experience in America that might interest others:

1. “The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters” by Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins

The author Dr. Jenkins, a former president of the League of Women Voters of the United States, writes based on her years of research and interviews.

2. “The Warmth of Other Suns” by Isabel Wilkerson

Traces the migration of Southern Blacks from the South between WWI and the 1960’s /70s by following three individuals as they left for a variety of reasons and settled elsewhere in the US.

3. “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander

A must-read that explores how incarceration today has become a way of “keeping Blacks in their place”.

4. “Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption” by Bryan Stevenson

Stories about the Equal Justice Initiative, that illuminates how “brutality, unfairness, and racial bias continue to infect criminal law in the U.S.” justice system.

5. “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates

This book is in the form of a letter from a father to his son about growing up Black in America. It includes the story of attainment of money for the founding of Harvard from the selling of slaves.

6. “I Am Not Your Negro”

This is a movie based on work by James Baldwin on the experience of being Black in America.

7. “The Hate You Give” by Angie Thomas

This is a young adult book, a story about a young Black girl in a car with a Black youth who is arrested and shot. It is not a political book, but gives an inside view of race issues in the United States.

8. “The Color of Law” by Richard Rothstein

This book walks through US history detailing how the institutions of the US, including the Supreme Court, reflecting the tone of the times, were complicit in discrimination and segregation.

9. “When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir” by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and asha bandele

This is a story of a young woman growing up in the ghetto in California.

10. “The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration” by Isabel Wilkerson

The book details the movement of Black Americans taking place over decades, from the South to cities in the north and west to find a better life.

11. “Becoming” by Michelle Obama

This book covers Michelle Obama’s life, background in Chicago, Princeton, Harvard and her life in the White House.

12. “One Person, No Vote” By Carole Anderson

This is a concise, well-written history of voter disenfranchisement and current vote suppression. *Shelby County v. Holder*, a 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court, opened the floodgates for more Jim Crow style voter suppression laws as well as allowed old ones to flourish. Some states have moved in the other direction and increased voter participation by expanding voter registration and access to the polls. Anderson concludes that the Russians piggy backed onto the years of efforts to disenfranchise and suppress the vote of African Americans and others. The author quotes Lincoln, “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave, half free.”

13. “Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge” by Erica Armstrong Dunbar

This is the story of a slave owned by Martha Washington who ran away when she was going to be given to another woman as a wedding present. She made her way to New Hampshire and made a life with a seaman. Although the Washingtons implored her to return, she refused. She told her story and it was recorded.

14. “Sojourner Truth’s America” by Margaret Washington

This is the story of Sojourner Truth’s remarkable life set firmly in the history of the 1800s. She was a compelling orator who could neither read nor write but battled slavery along with Fredrick Douglass and others. She utilized her deep faith and spirituality as a source of inspiration.

15. “How to Be an Antiracist” by Ibram X. Kendi

A nonfictional book that dissects racism in all its incarnations, revealing over and over how we cannot just not be a racist, but we

need to be antiracist and alert to its various forms. Written by a young Black man who, in a series of insights, comes to understand his own innate racism, including the seductive dead end of “Black exceptionalism.” Author Kendi denies that racism stems from ignorance or immorality. Instead, he believes that racism results from economic policy that places one racial group above another. He also believes the answer to racism is to truly treat all equally, beginning with policy.

16. “Solitary” by Albert Woodfox

Albert Woodfox was imprisoned for 40 years for a crime he did not commit. It is a story of the horrendous conditions in today’s prison system. Woodsfox grew up in New Orleans a poor Black man in a poor neighborhood, without ambitions or expectations in life. He engaged in petty crime that landed him in prison. There, he came in contact with three Black Panthers and found friendship. They taught him values: to be kind to others and to stand up for himself. He was framed for the death of a guard at Angola prison that landed him in solitary for 40 years until the sentence was overturned.