

Johnson, Charles Richard. *Dreamer: A Novel* (1998) **K**

This novel is a fictional excursion into the last two years of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, when the political and personal pressures on this country's preeminent moral leader were the greatest. While in Chicago for his first northern campaign against poverty and inequality, King encounters Chaym Smith, whose startling physical resemblance to King wins him the job of official stand-in. Matthew Bishop, a civil rights worker and loyal follower of King, is given the task of training the smart and deeply cynical Smith for the job. In doing so, Bishop must face the issue of what makes one man great while another man can only stand in for greatness.

McFadden, Bernice L. *Sugar* (2000) **W**

Set in a small Arkansas town in the 1950s, a tale of loyalty and friendship between two African American women, Sugar and Pearl. Sugar is a dark, beautiful black woman with a bitter past and a life of prostitution. Sugar bears a disturbing resemblance to Pearl's daughter who was sexually assaulted and killed 15 years earlier.

See also: *This Bitter Earth* (2002) **K**

Sequel to *Sugar*

Book selections and annotations from:

African American Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests

Edited by Alma Dawson and Connie Van Fleet

Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004.

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African-American Historical Fiction

The focus of this booklist is on the African-American experience including such significant events as slavery, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement.

All authors listed are African-American.

**Piscataway Adult/YA Services Dept.
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SLAVERY

1619 to 1860

Baker, Calvin. *Dominion* (2006)

K

Recently freed from slavery at the end of the seventeenth century, Jasper Merian leaves Virginia for the uncharted territory to the west, where he plans to carve out a new life for himself, leaving behind two sons, one free and one a slave, in a novel that chronicles the lives of three generations of an African-American family in the years leading up to the American Revolution.

Briscoe, Connie. *A Long Way Home* (1999)

K/W

Relates the story of three generations of slaves, house slave Susie, her daughter, Clare and her granddaughter all of whom work at Montpelier, the plantation of President James Madison and his wife Dolley. Susie is comfortable at the Madison's home believing she and her family will never be sold while Clare yearns to escape to the North to find freedom.

Crafts, Hannah. *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (2002)

K

This unpublished manuscript was discovered in an auction catalog by Henry Louis Gates, Harvard chair of African-American studies. Gates believes this manuscript, dated to the 1850's, is the first novel written by a black woman in America as well as by a fugitive slave. The novel, which is edited by Gates, tells of the everyday life of a slave from her childhood through her adulthood and her journey to freedom.

Durham, David Anthony. *Walk through Darkness* (2002)

K

Tells the parallel tales of two men in antebellum America: William, a young fugitive slave, and Morrison, a white man hired to track him. William escapes from Maryland and makes his way toward Philadelphia in search of his pregnant wife, Dover, who has been spirited away by her owner. Morrison, an older Scottish immigrant, has lived a hard, violent life he is not proud of. His story emerges as the story unfolds.

Gaines, Ernest. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971)

K/W

This *fictional* biography tells the story of hundred-year-old Miss Jane Pittman, an escaped slave who lived to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. Miss Jane recalls her struggles from her childhood as a slave on a Louisiana plantation, through the Civil War and Reconstruction up to her participation in the 20th century civil rights demonstrations.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

TO THE PRESENT

1950's to 2000's

Bunkley, Anita Richmond. *Starlight Passage* (1996)

K/W

Kiana Sheridan begins to investigate her family's past for her doctoral dissertation. Aided by photojournalist Rex Tandy, she retraces her ancestors' odyssey from slavery to freedom and uncovers closely guarded family secrets that many would like to keep hidden.

Ellison, Ralph. *Juneteenth: A Novel* (1999)

K

A novel of race and racial identity, the story revolves around the relationship between Reverend Alonzo Hickman, former jazzman, and Bliss, the little boy he raises, who is of "indefinite" race but looks white, and who, after he has run away from Hickman passes and becomes not only a filmmaker but then a U.S. senator. Their relationship is resumed when Hickman fearing for Bliss' safety, goes to Washington to warn him of possible doom, witnesses an assassination attempt, and, at Bliss' bedside, remembers with him the life they had together. Ellison's second novel is published posthumously from hundreds of pages of a manuscript he was working on when he died in 1994.

Grooms, Anthony. *Bombingham: A Novel* (2001)

K

Walter Burke grew up in a middle-class family in a Birmingham suburb. Following the death of his mother and at the suggestion of his father he joins the military. The memory of Birmingham and duty in Vietnam are much alike; they are both battlefields.

Hill, Ernest. *Satisfied with Nothin': A Novel* (1996)

K

Fifteen years after court imposed desegregation, Jamie Ray Griffin is among the first students at his Louisiana high school to integrate. By virtue of his talent on the football field he finds himself thrust into a white world of privilege and possibility. Encouraged by the façade of acceptance from the white community, Jamie strives to succeed but finds himself thwarted at every turn.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

1900 to 1949

Baker, Calvin. *Once Two Heroes* (2003) K

Mather Rose, denied his Medal of Honor because he is black, is on his way to Washington, D.C. in an attempt to collect his medal. On his drive home to Los Angeles, Mather has a violent confrontation with a racist, Nathan Hampton, in Mississippi that results in the white man's death. Hampton's brother, Lewis, also a veteran, vows revenge on Mather Rose.

Bunkley, Anita Richmond. *Wild Embers* (1995) K/W

Reporting to duty when the bombing of Pearl Harbor lifts the U.S. War Department's prohibition against Black nurses, Janelle Taylor begins an adventure that draws in her rebellious brother and a Black fighter pilot

Due, Tananarive. *The Black Rose: the magnificent story of Madam*

***C. J. Walker, America's first black female millionaire* (2001) K/W**

A fictional biography chronicles the story of Madame C.J. Walker, who rose from the poverty of her former slave parents to found a marketing empire that made her America's first black female millionaire.

Gaines, Ernest. *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) K/W

A young illiterate African American man witnesses two black robbers kill a white storeowner in Louisiana in the late 1940s, and he is the one convicted and sentenced to die by electrocution for the murder.

McBride, James. *Miracle at St. Anna* (2002) K/W

Set in Italy during World War II, *Miracle at St. Anna* is the story of four Negro soldiers enduring racial prejudice in the 92nd all-black, segregated Buffalo Division. One of the soldiers befriends a six-year-old Italian boy who leads the soldier and his squad to the site of a tragic massacre.

Gurley-Highgate, Hilda. *Sapphire's Grave* (2003) K

This saga of several generations of black women begins with the capture of an unnamed woman kidnapped in Sierra Leone and sold as a slave in South Carolina in 1749. The enslaved woman is pregnant and defiant, evidencing strength and perseverance that will mark the generations of women that follow her.

Haley, Alex. *Roots* (1976) W

This compelling saga traces the life of Kunta Kinte who was captured in West Africa in 1767 and taken to Virginia as a slave, his ancestors in Africa, as well as the lives of seven generations of his descendants in America.

Johnson, Charles Richard. *Middle Passage* (1991) K

Rutherford Calhoun, a newly freed slave living in New Orleans, is forced into marrying a Boston schoolteacher but escapes that horror for another when he stows away on a ship bound for Africa. Calhoun is not prepared for the horrors he sees when the ship picks up its human cargo.

Jones, Edward P. *The Known World* (2003) K/W

Henry Townsend, born a slave, is purchased and freed by his father, yet he remains attached to his former owner, even taking lessons in slave owning and eventually buys his own slaves. When Henry dies, his household falls apart in the wake of a slave rebellion and corrupt underpaid patrollers who enable free black people to be sold into slavery.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel* (1987) K/W

The novel tells the story of Sethe, an escaped slave, who is haunted by the ghost of her baby daughter, Beloved. Eighteen years earlier, Sethe killed Beloved when her former owner came after her in Cincinnati, because she would rather see her children dead than returned to slavery.

Walker, Margaret. *Jubilee* (1966) K

Walker transforms the oral history learned from her grandmother into a powerful work of historical fiction. Vyry is the daughter of a slave owner and his favorite house slave. Orphaned as a child, Vyry is faced with difficult choices throughout her life which spans the antebellum years, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. When presented with the opportunity to escape to freedom with her husband, she chooses to stay with her children.

Wideman, John Edgar. *The Cattle Killing* (1996) **K**

When Philadelphia is hit with the yellow fever epidemic in 1793, white citizens place the blame on the blacks in the city who they believe brought the fever to America.

Williams, Sherley Anne. *Dessa Rose* (1987) **K**

Based on the true lives of two nineteenth-century women, this portrait of the South during slavery focuses on the fictional meeting of a slave Dessa Rose who instigated a slave revolt in 1829 and a white North Carolina woman, Miss Rufel, who sheltered runaways on her farm.

CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

1861 to 1900

Bradley, David. *The Chaneyville Incident* (1981) **K**

John Washington, an African American historian, begins to examine the past after he finds out that Jack, the man who raised him is dying. In their last conversation, Jack tells him about a legendary incident in which 13 slaves were killed as they tried to escape from the South. John begins researching the incident only to find that his own family history is tied to the event.

Cooper, J. California. *The Wake of the Wind* (1998) **K**

The lives of two former slaves, Mordecai and Lilee, are chronicled from their marriage through freedom from slavery, through the birth of their children, to their deaths.

Dash, Julie. *Daughters of the Dust* (1997) **K**

In 1902, the Gullah Peazant family, descendants of slaves, lives on the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. The family is moving to the mainland and to the North. Their departure causes upheaval within the family.

Durham, David Anthony. *Gabriel's Story* (2001) **K**

Gabriel Lynch, a fifteen-year-old African American boy living in the West of the 1870s, escapes the racial strife of the Reconstruction Era by running away from home to become a cowboy.

McEachin, James. *Tell Me A Tale: A Novel of the Old South* (1996) **K**

Years after the Civil War, Moses, a 17-year-old former slave, the son of a white plantation owner and his black mistress journeys back to North Carolina and poses as a proslavery journalist and listens to the stories of four white men who want slavery to return.

Meriwether, Louise. *Fragments of the Ark* (1994) **K**

In 1862, Peter Mango loads his family and friends into a Confederate gunboat and sails out of Charleston harbor to deliver himself to the Union, saying that he may have been born a slave but he thinks of himself as a man.

Tademy, Lalita. *Cane River* (2001) **K/W**

Cane River is an isolated community that lies on a small river in central Louisiana. There in the early 19th century, slaves, free people of color, and Creole French planters lived and worked, loved and bore children. The author discovered her amazing heritage there and chronicles four generations of strong, determined black women.

See also: *Red River* (2007) **K/W**

Continuation of Tademy Family Chronicles

