

A Handful of Resources on Race, Diversity, Equality and Justice, Told in the First Person.

Culbertson, Peggy Barrow. *White Girl: A Memoir of Race and Gender* (2015)

White Girl A Memoir of Race and Gender The world was a different place when Peggy Barrow Culbertson was growing up in a small Alabama town during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Over time, things changed. Economics changed for the average family. Race relations changed. Women and their roles changed. All those shifts in the world changed the little girl who grew up to be Peggy Culbertson—a woman who also worked to change her corner of the world. White Girl is the memoir of a woman who lived through changes few people could have imagined in that small-town South during the 1930s.

Conley, Garrard. *Boy Erased: A Memoir of Identity, Faith, and Family* (2017)

The son of a Baptist pastor and deeply embedded in church life in small town Arkansas, as a young man Garrard Conley was terrified and conflicted about his sexuality.

When Garrard was a nineteen-year-old college student, he was outed to his parents, and was forced to make a life-changing decision: either agree to attend a church-supported conversion therapy program that promised to “cure” him of homosexuality; or risk losing family, friends, and the God he had prayed to every day of his life. Through an institutionalized Twelve-Step Program heavy on Bible study, he was supposed to emerge heterosexual, ex-gay, cleansed of impure urges and stronger in his faith in God for his brush with sin. Instead, even when faced with a harrowing and brutal journey, Garrard found the strength and understanding to break out in search of his true self and forgiveness.

By confronting his buried past and the burden of a life lived in shadow, Garrard traces the complex relationships among family, faith, and community. At times heart-breaking, at times triumphant, this memoir is a testament to love that survives despite all odds.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* (2006)

Who is Ruth McBride Jordan? A self-declared "light-skinned" woman evasive about her ethnicity, yet steadfast in her love for her twelve black children. James McBride, journalist, musician, and son, explores his mother's past, as well as his own upbringing and heritage, in a poignant and powerful debut, *The Color Of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. The son of a black minister and a woman who would not admit she was white, James McBride grew up in "orchestrated chaos" with his eleven siblings in the poor, all-black projects of Red Hook, Brooklyn. "Mommy," a fiercely protective woman with "dark eyes full of pep and fire," herded her brood to Manhattan's free cultural events, sent them off on buses to the best (and mainly Jewish) schools, demanded good grades, and commanded respect. As a young man, McBride saw his mother as a source of embarrassment, worry, and confusion—and reached thirty before he began to discover the truth about her early life and long-buried pain.

In *The Color of Water*, McBride retraces his mother's footsteps and, through her searing and spirited voice, recreates her remarkable story. The daughter of a failed itinerant Orthodox rabbi, she was born Rachel Shilsky (actually Ruchel Dwara Zylska) in Poland on April 1, 1921. Fleeing pogroms, her family emigrated to America and ultimately settled in Suffolk, Virginia, a small town where anti-Semitism and racial tensions ran high. With candor and immediacy, Ruth describes her parents' loveless marriage; her fragile, handicapped mother; her cruel, sexually-abusive father; and the rest of the family and life she abandoned.

At seventeen, after fleeing Virginia and settling in New York City, Ruth married a black minister and founded the all-black New Brown Memorial Baptist Church in her Red Hook living room. "God is the color of water," Ruth McBride taught her children, firmly convinced that life's blessings and life's values transcend race. Twice widowed, and continually confronting overwhelming adversity and racism, Ruth's determination, drive and discipline saw her dozen children through college—and most through graduate school. At age 65, she herself received a degree in social work from Temple University.

Interspersed throughout his mother's compelling narrative, McBride shares candid recollections of his own experiences as a mixed-race child of poverty, his flirtations with drugs and violence, and his eventual self-realization and professional success. *The Color of Water* touches readers of all colors as a vivid portrait of growing up, a haunting meditation on race and identity, and a lyrical valentine to a mother from her son.

Njeri, Itabari. *The Last Plantation: A Memoir of Race, Conflict, and Healing* (1997)

In the 1980s, when most Americans considered "black" a racial reference, many multiracial people began to see themselves as part of a heterogeneous ethnic group linked by history, culture, and blood - a distinction that has led to considerable conflict. Prompted by the comment "You look like an ordinary Negro to me," Itabari Njeri, the author of the critically acclaimed memoir *Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone* and a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, decided to take a look at her own family in order to explore racism within her community. What she discovered is disturbing. Referring to incidents in the news - the Rodney King beating, the black boycott of Korean grocers in Los Angeles, the killing of a black teenager by a Korean immigrant - as well as to her family, Njeri lays out with precision and power how limited racial definitions contribute to the psychological slavery that makes the mind the last plantation.

Khan-Cullors, Patrisse, Asha Bandele. *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (2018)

Raised by a single mother in an impoverished neighborhood in Los Angeles, Patrisse Khan-Cullors experienced firsthand the prejudice and persecution Black Americans endure at the hands of law enforcement. For Patrisse, the most vulnerable people in the country are Black people. Deliberately and ruthlessly targeted by a criminal justice system serving a white privilege agenda, Black people are subjected to unjustifiable racial profiling and police brutality. In 2013, when Trayvon Martin's killer went free, Patrisse's outrage led her to co-found Black Lives Matter with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi.

Garz, Linda. *Redlined: A Memoir of Race, Change, and Fractured Community in 1960s Chicago* (2018)

Set against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement, *Redlined* exposes the racist lending rules that refuse mortgages to anyone in areas with even one black resident. As blacks move deeper into Chicago's West Side during the 1960s, whites flee by the thousands. But Linda Gartz's parents, Fred and Lil choose to stay in their integrating neighborhood, overcoming previous prejudices as they meet and form friendships with their African American neighbors. The community sinks into increasing poverty and crime after two race riots destroy its once vibrant business district, but Fred and Lil continue to nurture their three apartment buildings and tenants for the next twenty years in a devastated landscape—even as their own relationship cracks and withers.

After her parents' deaths, Gartz discovers long-hidden letters, diaries, documents, and photos stashed in the attic of her former home. Determined to learn what forces shattered her parents' marriage *and* undermined her community, she searches through the family archives and immerses

herself in books on racial change in American neighborhoods. Told through the lens of Gartz's discoveries of the personal and political, *Redlined* delivers a riveting story of a community fractured by racial turmoil, an unraveling and conflicted marriage, a daughter's fight for sexual independence, and an up-close, intimate view of the racial and social upheavals of the 1960s.

Wise, Tim. *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* (2011)

With a new preface and updated chapters, *White Like Me* is one-part memoir, one-part polemical essay collection. It is a personal examination of the way in which racial privilege shapes the daily lives of white Americans in every realm: employment, education, housing, criminal justice, and elsewhere.

Using stories from his own life, Tim Wise demonstrates the ways in which racism not only burdens people of color, but also benefits, in relative terms, those who are "white like him." He discusses how racial privilege can harm whites in the long run and make progressive social change less likely. He explores the ways in which whites can challenge their unjust privileges, and explains in clear and convincing language why it is in the best interest of whites themselves to do so. Using anecdotes instead of stale statistics, Wise weaves a narrative that is at once readable and yet scholarly, analytical and yet accessible.

Brown, Austin Channing. *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (2018)

Austin Channing Brown's first encounter with a racialized America came at age 7, when she discovered her parents named her Austin to deceive future employers into thinking she was a white man. Growing up in majority-white schools, organizations, and churches, Austin writes, "I had to learn what it means to love blackness," a journey that led to a lifetime spent navigating America's racial divide as a writer, speaker and expert who helps organizations practice genuine inclusion.

In a time when nearly all institutions (schools, churches, universities, businesses) claim to value "diversity" in their mission statements, *I'm Still Here* is a powerful account of how and why our actions so often fall short of our words. Austin writes in breathtaking detail about her journey to self-worth and the pitfalls that kill our attempts at racial justice, in stories that bear witness to the complexity of America's social fabric--from Black Cleveland neighborhoods to private schools in the middle-class suburbs, from prison walls to the boardrooms at majority-white organizations.

For readers who have engaged with America's legacy on race through the writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Michael Eric Dyson, *I'm Still Here* is an illuminating look at how white, middle-class, Evangelicalism has participated in an era of rising racial hostility, inviting the reader to confront apathy, recognize God's ongoing work in the world, and discover how blackness--if we let it--can save us all.

Irving, Debby. *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (2014)

For twenty-five years, Debby Irving sensed inexplicable racial tensions in her personal and professional relationships. As a colleague and neighbor, she worried about offending people she dearly wanted to befriend. As an arts administrator, she didn't understand why her diversity efforts lacked traction. As a teacher, she found her best efforts to reach out to students and families of color left her wondering what she was missing. Then, in 2009, one "aha!" moment launched an adventure of discovery and insight that drastically shifted her worldview and upended her life plan. In *Waking Up White*, Irving tells her often cringe-worthy story with such openness that readers will turn every page rooting for her--and ultimately for all of us.

Trotter, Otis and Joe William Trotter, Jr. *Keeping Heart: A Memoir of Family Struggle, Race, and Medicine (Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia) (2015)*

"After saying our good-byes to friends and neighbors, we all got in the cars and headed up the hill and down the road toward a future in Ohio that we hoped would be brighter," Otis Trotter writes in his affecting memoir, *Keeping Heart: A Memoir of Family Struggle, Race, and Medicine*.

Organized around the life histories, medical struggles, and recollections of Trotter and his thirteen siblings, the story begins in 1914 with his parents, Joe William Trotter Sr. and Thelma Odell Foster Trotter, in rural Alabama. By telling his story alongside the experiences of his parents as well as his siblings, Otis reveals cohesion and tensions in twentieth-century African American family and community life in Alabama, West Virginia, and Ohio.

This engaging chronicle illuminates the journeys not only of a black man born with heart disease in the southern Appalachian coalfields, but of his family and community. It fills an important gap in the literature on an underexamined aspect of American experience: the lives of blacks in rural Appalachia and in the nonurban endpoints of the Great Migration. Its emotional power is a testament to the importance of ordinary lives.

Quan Lee, Sherry. *Love Imagined: A Mixed Race Memoir (2014)*

"Joining the long history of women of color fighting to claim literary space to tell our stories, Sherry Quan Lee shares her truth with fierce courage and strength in *Love Imagined*. ... Quan Lee crafts a riveting tale of Minnesota life set within the backdrop of racial segregation, the Cold War, the sexual revolution while navigating it all through the lens of her multi-layered identities. A true demonstration of the power of an intersectional perspective."

--Kandace Creel Falcón, Ph.D., Director of Women's and Gender Studies, Minnesota State University, Moorhead

Lukasik, Gail. *White Like Her: My Family's Story of Race and Racial Passing (2017)*

White Like Her: My Family's Story of Race and Racial Passing is the story of Gail Lukasik's mother's "passing," Gail's struggle with the shame of her mother's choice, and her subsequent journey of self-discovery and redemption.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me (2015)*

In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation's history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of "race," a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

Between the World and Me is Ta-Nehisi Coates's attempt to answer these questions in a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children's lives were taken as American plunder. Beautifully woven from personal narrative, reimagined history, and fresh, emotionally charged reportage, *Between the World and Me*

clearly illuminates the past, bravely confronts our present, and offers a transcendent vision for a way forward.

Jerkins, Morgan. *This Will Be My Undoing: Living at the Intersection of Black, Female, and Feminist in (White) America* (2018)

Morgan Jerkins is only in her twenties, but she has already established herself as an insightful, brutally honest writer who isn't afraid of tackling tough, controversial subjects. In *This Will Be My Undoing*, she takes on perhaps one of the most provocative contemporary topics: What does it mean to "be"—to live as, to exist as—a black woman today? This is a book about black women, but it's necessary reading for all Americans.

Doubly disenfranchised by race and gender, often deprived of a place within the mostly white mainstream feminist movement, black women are objectified, silenced, and marginalized with devastating consequences, in ways both obvious and subtle, that are rarely acknowledged in our country's larger discussion about inequality. In *This Will Be My Undoing*, Jerkins becomes both narrator and subject to expose the social, cultural, and historical story of black female oppression that influences the black community as well as the white, male-dominated world at large.

Whether she's writing about Sailor Moon; Rachel Dolezal; the stigma of therapy; her complex relationship with her own physical body; the pain of dating when men say they don't "see color"; being a black visitor in Russia; the specter of "the fast-tailed girl" and the paradox of black female sexuality; or disabled black women in the context of the "Black Girl Magic" movement, Jerkins is compelling and revelatory.

Peltier, Leonard. *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance* (2000)

In 1977, Leonard Peltier received a life sentence for the murder of two FBI agents. He has affirmed his innocence ever since—his case was made fully and famously in Peter Matthiessen's bestselling *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*—and many remain convinced he was wrongly convicted. *Prison Writings* is a wise and unsettling book, both memoir and manifesto, chronicling his life in Leavenworth Prison in Kansas. Invoking the Sun Dance, in which pain leads one to a transcendent reality, Peltier explores his suffering and the insights it has borne him. He also locates his experience within the history of the American Indian peoples and their struggles to overcome the federal government's injustices.

Crow Dog, Mary. *Lakota Woman*

Mary Brave Bird grew up fatherless in a one-room cabin, without running water or electricity, on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Rebelling against the aimless drinking, punishing missionary school, narrow strictures for women, and violence and hopelessness of reservation life, she joined the new movement of tribal pride sweeping Native American communities in the '60s and '70s. Mary eventually married Leonard Crow Dog, the American Indian Movement's chief medicine man, who revived the sacred but outlawed Ghost Dance.

Originally published in 1990, *Lakota Woman* was a national best seller and winner of the American Book Award. It is a unique document, unparalleled in American Indian literature, a story of death, of determination against all odds, of the cruelties perpetuated against American Indians, and of the Native American struggle for rights. Working with Richard Erdoes, one of the 20th century's leading writers on Native American affairs, Brave Bird recounts her difficult upbringing and the path of her fascinating life.

Arjo, Joy, *Crazy Brave: A Memoir*

In this transcendent memoir, grounded in tribal myth and ancestry, music and poetry, Joy Harjo, one of our leading Native American voices, details her journey to becoming a poet. Born in Oklahoma, the end place of the Trail of Tears, Harjo grew up learning to dodge an abusive stepfather by finding shelter in her imagination, a deep spiritual life, and connection with the natural world. She attended an Indian arts boarding school, where she nourished an appreciation for painting, music, and poetry; gave birth while still a teenager; and struggled on her own as a single mother, eventually finding her poetic voice. Narrating the complexities of betrayal and love, *Crazy Brave* is a memoir about family and the breaking apart necessary in finding a voice. Harjo's tale of a hardscrabble youth, young adulthood, and transformation into an award-winning poet and musician is haunting, unique, and visionary.

Momaday, N. Scott, *The Names* (1987)

Of all of the works of N. Scott Momaday, *The Names* may be the most personal. A memoir of his boyhood in Oklahoma and the Southwest, it is also described by Momaday as "an act of the imagination. When I turn my mind to my early life, it is the imaginative part of it that comes first and irresistibly into reach, and of that part I take hold."

Jefferson, Margo, *Negroland: A Memoir* (2016)

Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic Margo Jefferson was born in 1947 into upper-crust black Chicago. Her father was head of pediatrics at Provident Hospital, while her mother was a socialite. In these pages, Jefferson takes us into this insular and discerning society: "I call it Negroland," she writes, "because I still find 'Negro' a word of wonders, glorious and terrible."

Negroland's pedigree dates back generations, having originated with antebellum free blacks who made their fortunes among the plantations of the South. It evolved into a world of exclusive sororities, fraternities, networks, and clubs—a world in which skin color and hair texture were relentlessly evaluated alongside scholarly and professional achievements, where the Talented Tenth positioned themselves as a third race between whites and "the masses of Negroes," and where the motto was "Achievement. Invulnerability. Comportment." At once incendiary and icy, mischievous and provocative, celebratory and elegiac, *Negroland* is a landmark work on privilege, discrimination, and the fallacy of post-racial America.

Grande, Reyna, *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* (2013)

Reyna Grande vividly brings to life her tumultuous early years in this "compelling . . . unvarnished, resonant" (BookPage) story of a childhood spent torn between two parents and two countries. As her parents make the dangerous trek across the Mexican border to "El Otro Lado" (The Other Side) in pursuit of the American dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced into the already overburdened household of their stern grandmother. When their mother at last returns, Reyna prepares for her own journey to "El Otro Lado" to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

Funny, heartbreaking, and lyrical, *The Distance Between Us* poignantly captures the confusion and contradictions of childhood, reminding us that the joys and sorrows we experience are imprinted on the heart forever, calling out to us of those places we first called home.

Guerrero, Diane, *In the Country We Love: My Family Divided* (2016)

Diane Guerrero, the television actress from the megahit *Orange Is the New Black* and *Jane the Virgin*, was just fourteen years old on the day her parents were detained and deported while she was at

school. Born in the U.S., Guerrero was able to remain in the country and continue her education, depending on the kindness of family friends who took her in and helped her build a life and a successful acting career for herself, without the support system of her family.

In the Country We Love is a moving, heartbreaking story of one woman's extraordinary resilience in the face of the nightmarish struggles of undocumented residents in this country. There are over 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the US, many of whom have citizen children, whose lives here are just as precarious, and whose stories haven't been told. Written with bestselling author Michelle Burford, this memoir is a tale of personal triumph that also casts a much-needed light on the fears that haunt the daily existence of families like the author's and on a system that fails them over and over.

Arana, Marie, *American Chica: Two Worlds, One Childhood* (2002)

In her father's Peruvian family, Marie Arana was taught to be a proper lady, yet in her mother's American family she learned to shoot a gun, break a horse, and snap a chicken's neck for dinner. Arana shuttled easily between these deeply separate cultures for years. But only when she immigrated with her family to the United States did she come to understand that she was a hybrid American whose cultural identity was split in half. Coming to terms with this split is at the heart of this graceful, beautifully realized portrait of a child who "was a north-south collision, a New World fusion. An American Chica."

Santiago, Esmeralda, *When I Was Puerto Rican: A Memoir* (2006)

Esmeralda Santiago's story begins in rural Puerto Rico, where her childhood was full of both tenderness and domestic strife, tropical sounds and sights as well as poverty. When her mother, Mami, a force of nature, takes off to New York with her seven, soon to be 11 children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually take on a new identity. Here Santiago recreates the idyllic landscape and tumultuous family life of her earliest years and her tremendous journey from the barrio to Brooklyn, from translating for her mother at the welfare office to high honors at Harvard.

Hernandez, Daisy, *A Cup of Water Under My Bed: A Memoir* (2015)

Daisy Hernández chronicles what the women in her Cuban-Colombian family taught her about love, money, and race. These lessons—rooted in women's experiences of migration, colonization, and *cariño*—define in evocative detail what it means to grow up female in an immigrant home. A heartfelt exploration of family, identity, and language, *A Cup of Water Under My Bed* is ultimately a daughter's story of finding herself and her community, and of creating a new, queer life.

González, Rigoberto *Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa* (2011)

Growing up among poor migrant Mexican farmworkers, Rigoberto González also faces the pressure of coming-of-age as a gay man in a culture that prizes machismo. After losing his mother at the age of 12, González confronts his father's abandonment and an abiding sense of cultural estrangement, both from his adopted home in the United States and from a Mexican birthright. By finding his calling as a writer, and by revisiting the relationship with his father during a trip to Mexico, González finally claims his identity at the intersection of race, class, and sexuality.

Cepeda, Raquel *Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina* (2014)

In 2009, when Raquel Cepeda almost lost her estranged father to heart disease, she was terrified she'd never know the truth about her ancestry. Every time she looked in the mirror, Cepeda saw a mystery—a tapestry of races and ethnicities that came together in an ambiguous mix. With time running

out, she decided to embark on an archaeological dig of sorts by using the science of ancestral DNA testing to excavate everything she could about her genetic history. Digging through memories long buried, she embarks upon a journey not only into her ancestry but also into her own identity.