

Reading to End Racism

A Proposal for White People by White People



A Reading List
by the St. John's
African-American
Book Group

*“As many of you as were baptized
into Christ have clothed
yourselves with Christ. There is
no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in
Christ Jesus.”*

—Galatians 3:27-28

Introduction

St. John’s Episcopal Church, on the Northwest Side of Chicago, wanted to embrace the efforts of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago to combat racism. Two years ago, we started a book group to read the essential texts of the African-American experience in America.

That book group served as the catalyst for a larger congregational exploration of institutional racism and what we are going to do about it.

We offer our book group as a model for other majority-white congregations that want to move toward racial reconciliation but don’t know how or where to begin.

In the pages that follow, we will describe the genesis of the book group, how we proceeded, and describe some of the texts we read and how they affected us – personally, as a group, and as people of faith.

We are the African-American Book Group not because we ourselves are black – in fact we are mostly all white people – but because that is what we wanted to read.

Members of the St. John’s African-American Book Group

*Eddie Dzialo, Carolyn Frazier
Nancy Little, Adam Malson
Pepper Miller, Marj Monaghan
Duncan Moore, Laura Singer
Deborah Stewart, Susan Turner
Kara Wagner Sherer*

Preface

By the Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer
Rector of St. John's, Chicago



How do we break racial barriers? How do we get to know people from other racial groups? Living in one of the most segregated cities in the United States, and in a predominately white neighborhood, I struggle with these questions. The African-American Literature Book Group helped me to begin. By immersing myself in another time, place, and culture every month for two years I began to get a sense of what it might mean to think about race every day, which as a white person it has been my privilege not to have to do. We read fiction, non-fiction, poetry, plays, and essays. We admitted our ignorance, guilt, discomfort and anger. We made friends and enemies, learned truths and lies, and started on a path to peace. I highly recommend starting a book group in your church or neighborhood.

Our Story

By Duncan Moore



The St. John's book group grew out of the experience of one parishioner who attended the Chicago ROAR (Regional Organizing for Anti-Racism) two-and-a-half day training in April 2016. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to go back to their institutions and continue the work of raising awareness of how the habits of racism affect all our lives.

We thought a good starting place would be to immerse ourselves in the written word as an expression of how black people have experienced life in our country. Our parish, like many others, has few black members. Our community is highly diverse – we have plenty of gay people, transgendered folks, Hispanics, Asians, young, and old, and we do have black parishioners. But our handful of black parishioners are immigrants from Africa or children who have been adopted or fostered by white families. We have hardly any adult African-Americans descended from slaves. Therefore our book group was entirely white people who wanted to explore this theme and one black person recruited to join us from another church.

We decided to read only works by African-American authors. We were interested to explore how black people had understood and described the experience of being black in America. We were not interested in hearing how white people described black people's experience, so we did not read any white authors.

We read in a variety of genres: novels, plays, poetry, autobiography and memoir, essays, history. Some of the authors are famous, others unknown. We didn't necessarily read the most acclaimed work by the author. In the case of Toni Morrison, we passed on *Beloved* and took up her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, instead.

We confined ourselves to primary sources – the books themselves. Several of our participants brought in commentaries or essays on the primary texts to share with the group. We made up the reading list as we went along, month to month. Sometimes we planned the readings three months in advance; we never scheduled longer ahead than that.

We did not proceed chronologically or in any particular order; we just picked out what people brought to the table and thought might capture the broader interest of the group. A handful of us did come to the group with a background notion of what might be considered the essential contributions to African-American literature and thought, but we did not press this agenda on the rest of the group ... any more than was necessary to get these books into discussion. In the end, we did cover most of these famous texts.

Our reading group lasted twenty four months. We disbanded when monthly attendance started to consistently fall off. By that point the book group had served its purpose. Since then, another reading group has formed in the congregation looking at analysis and commentary on racism by white authors. An anti-racism task force has been assembled to develop a comprehensive approach to educating members of the congregation on how to move toward racial reconciliation. The parish vestry endorsed this plan and we are now developing a strategy toward execution of our goals.

The Books We Read

**Books with a specific connection to Chicago.*

Novels

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison (1952)

A young man from Alabama with intellectual ambitions moves to New York and struggles to understand the political currents of the 1930s.

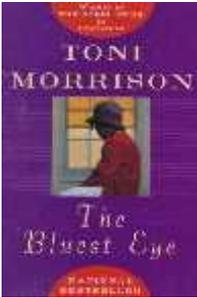
The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead (2016)

A slave escapes a Georgia plantation and makes her way toward freedom, suffering horrifying setbacks along the way. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937)

A young black woman searches for love and stability in Florida of the Jim Crow era.

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison (1970)



Morrison's first novel examines the struggles of a young black girl who loathes her own appearance and wishes to be white.

Native Son* by Richard Wright (1940)

An angry young black male with no prospects on the South Side accidentally kills a white girl, setting off a manhunt, trial, and eventual death sentence.

Sing, Unburied, Sing by Jesmyn Ward (2017)

Supernatural observations and lyrical details inform this story of a young mixed-race boy growing up among drug-addicted parents in post-Hurricane Katrina Mississippi. Winner of the National Book Award last year.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982)

A young black woman of limited abilities discovers a world outside the circumstances she was born into.

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines (1993)

An allegory of the Passion, framed around a death penalty meted out to an innocent black man in a plantation community in Louisiana.

Oreo by Fran Ross (1974)

A half-black, half-Jewish adolescent girl undertakes a quest to find her father, occasioning a brilliant comic romp through Philadelphia and New York patterned after the Greek myth of Theseus.

Go Tell It on the Mountain by James Baldwin (1953)

Baldwin's first novel borrows heavily from his own story, as a young man in Harlem born into a Pentecostal family whose sexual and moral and intellectual identity doesn't fit the role assigned to him.

Essays

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)

Growing up in Baltimore, Coates encountered all the forces – physical, legal, social, economic – that make it hard to survive as a black man.

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. DuBois (1903)

A groundbreaking attack on the assumptions underlying Jim Crow and the presumed racial inferiority of black Americans.

Living into God’s Dream: Dismantling Racism in America

by Catherine Meeks (2016)

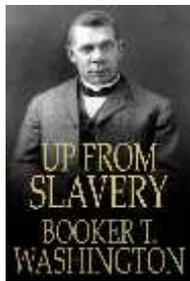
Meeks combines theoretical and theological reflection with tales from the front of anti-racism battles in an effort to initiate a new conversation on race.

Why We Can’t Wait by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1964)

This collection lays out King’s philosophy of non-violent resistance, focusing on the events in Alabama in the early 1960s. It includes his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Memoirs

Up From Slavery by Booker T. Washington (1921)



The most famous and respected black man of his time, Washington believed that once white people saw that black people could acquire skills and make a living, full civil rights would follow. That proved optimistic.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave by Frederick Douglass (1845)

Douglass’s explosive account of his young life as a slave, his escape, and subsequent intellectual development changed white people’s perceptions of blacks.

Negroland* by Margo Jefferson (2015)

Jefferson recounts her upbringing in the top strata of African-American society in Chicago’s Hyde Park, where “achievement, invulnerability, comportment” were the watchwords.

The South Side* by Natalie Y. Moore (2016)

A consideration of the political, social, and economic forces behind the extreme racial segregation in Chicago.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley (1965)

The firebrand Malcolm X occupied the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from the pacifist Martin Luther King in the 1950s and early 1960s. Haley gives the story of Malcolm’s early life, prison time, conversion to Islam and trip to Mecca a literary sheen that makes the 527 pages fly by. An epilogue recounts Malcolm’s assassination.

History

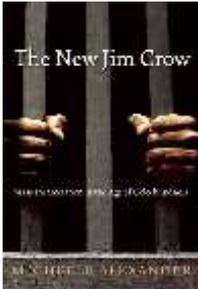
The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*

by Isabel Wilkerson (2010)

The story of the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North between 1915 and 1970, told through the lives of three individuals, one of whom settles in Chicago.

Monograph

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness



by Michelle Alexander (2010)

This is the book that brought into focus how the police and criminal justice system have been systematically jailing millions of black men since the 1990s, often under the pretext of punishing minor drug offenses.

Documentary Film

I Am Not Your Negro by James Baldwin (2017)

Filmmaker Raoul Peck assembles archival footage from the 1950s and 1960s of James Baldwin's attempt to write a book about the lives and assassinations of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Poetry

The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks* by Gwendolyn Brooks (2005)

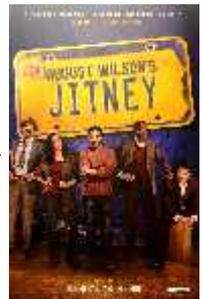


This collection by Chicago's Pulitzer-Prize winning native daughter includes select poems from all of her major books, starting from *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) through *In Montgomery and Other Poems* (2003).

Drama

Jitney by August Wilson (1979)

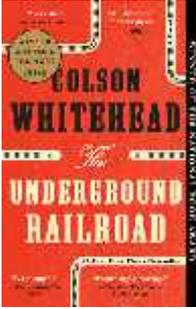
A motley group of black men operate a car service in Pittsburgh. Their established rhythms are upset by urban renewal, the aftermath of the Vietnam War, prison, generational conflict, and death.



Reflections

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead (2016)

Reflection by Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer: I never liked history until I read my first really excellent work of historical fiction and then I was hooked; *The Underground*



Railroad might have the same effect on you. You can open this book with a childlike wonder, remembering the first time you heard about the Underground Railroad and imagined that it was a real train on tracks that sped slaves to freedom.

And then the story gets grim and stranger, more horrible and more hopeful, and you realize you are living through years of American history, stop by stop, visiting the attitudes and personalities that struggled, survived, perpetrated, and stood by as history trudged on or fled by. Magical realism? This book was both magical and mind-opening.

Native Son by Richard Wright (1940)

Reflection by Nancy Little: I read *Native Son* for the first time in 1970 at a small Catholic school in Evanston. The teacher, one of the first lay men to teach at the school, had sent a permission slip home with all of the students. Parents had to sign the permission slips in order for students to be able to participate in the class. Far as I knew, all of the parents signed the slips. I told my mother she had to sign. I was not going to be the odd one out.



As a sheltered 12-year-old, I had never read anything as titillating as these books. They hinted at sex and illustrated graphic violent scenarios. No other book I had read was so bold. And *Native Son* talked about race. Race issues were a mystery to me. They frightened me. I saw violence on TV, and tsk tsk from my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. And although about 15% of my class was African-American, no African-Americans were in my reading class.

The central character in *Native Son* is Bigger Thomas, a young black man from Bronzeville trying to make it in late 1930s Chicago. I was drawn to Bigger's struggle. I knew what it was to pretend in order to get by. I could relate to that. Not on the scale that Bigger had to, certainly, but I could relate. I remember having awakening sexual feelings. I was aroused in a pre-teen way by the passage between Mary, the wealthy white girl, and Bigger in her bedroom. I did not sense the inevitable. I was shocked by Mary's murder. I read it over and over again. I understood that one must cover up one's mistakes so as not to suffer the punishment. Doesn't every Catholic school kid learn that? And yet, I was horrified by it at the same time. In my little white classroom with my white teacher who was trying to tell us something important, I had little empathy for Bigger. I didn't know how to feel empathy for him. I both understood him and hated him at the same time. His actions were inevitable. I couldn't reconcile the two.

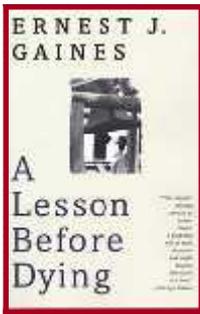
As an adult, I re-read this masterpiece with the African-American Literature group at St. John's. How differently I see the plot and narrative now, after almost 40 years as a social worker, with many African-American co-workers and clients. I can now understand Bigger's actions as empowering. The fact that he could hide in plain sight with Mary's family, in their home, with the other African-American employees, produced in Bigger an adrenaline rush of empowerment. I got it. As a tween, I thought racist practices and effects were inevitable. I was fascinated by Bigger's attempts to bob and weave and run away from the racism. I also knew he couldn't get away with it forever.

As an adult, I was able to exult with him in the effect of his actions. Bigger seems to feel for the first time: "Yes, I am smart, I am capable, I can OWN you. Ha!" But I also knew the ending, knew it couldn't go on forever.

I can now see Bigger in the people I love and know well, and can put his experiences in the context of their experiences. Today, I see the struggle continue by seeing African-Americans be treated with hatred and suspicion. People trying to live their lives with goals no different than anyone else's. We read about the tragic endings just about every day in the paper.

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines (1993)

Reflection by Marj Monaghan: In 1940s rural Louisiana, a mentally deficient and uneducated black man is on trial for a murder he did not commit. His attorney uses



mental disability as a defense and so compares his client's intelligence to that of a hog's, a humiliating degradation spoken in this racist court of law. The black man is wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death by electrocution.

Here begins author Ernest J. Gaines's departure from the story of a trial and outcome we may have read about in other novels or in the news we read today. Mr. Gaines's personal knowledge of oppressed black life in rural Louisiana and its complexities are masterfully interpreted. His characters show an abiding love for one another and a deep sense of community in the days before the execution.

Mr. Gaines's narrator, Grant Wiggins, is an educated black man and a teacher raised in the same community as Jefferson, the convicted man. Jefferson's godmother summons Grant to visit Jefferson in jail to try and restore his humanity to be able to walk to the "chair" as a man with dignity. Grant does not want to have anything to do with this but out of love and respect for his aunt and Jefferson's godmother, he tries.

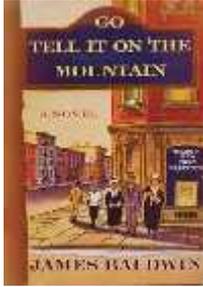
It is Grant's and Jefferson's relationship at the heart of this novel. One could question who gives the lesson before dying, who learns what dignity is?

Go Tell It on the Mountain by James Baldwin, (1953)

Reflection by Eddie Dzialo: Injustice has always pained me. And yet, my way of dealing with that pain has generally been far more passive than active. It became harder to remain passive when my husband and I left the Northwest Side of Chicago for the near-west suburbs in the fall of 2015. Both areas are served by the same Blue Line L

train, but it is a vastly different experience to daily ride through the West Side of the city than it is to make your way to the Irving Park stop. “Take the Green line”, friends would say, “or drive.” I couldn’t, though. That regular witness of the racial injustice in this city caused internal stirrings that demanded that I contend with them. I felt compelled, required to speak up and out, to do something. I just didn’t know how.

I approached our priest at St. John’s after church one Sunday and told her what I was experiencing. I was afraid to do so. I feared what I’d be called on to do or be if I openly spoke of my inner unrest. Her initial response, tinged with humor, was, “Are you ready to hit the streets with me?”



Ultimately we agreed that I should seek discernment about how my action and words might manifest. At about the same time, the African-American Book Club was forming at St. John’s. Although I am generally not a fiction reader, joining the group seemed like a small way to both take some action and challenge my aversion to fiction.

About a year into our group, we read James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. It has been the book most meaningful to me.

Right or wrong, with nearly all we’ve read, I’ve tended to see myself, to look for my shared experience in each author’s writing and characters. It happened most profoundly while reading this novel.

First, with the protagonist, John, a sensitive young man, struggling with issues of sexuality, family, and the benefits and difficulties inherent in a life touched by religious passion. John’s long-suffering mother, Elizabeth; his father, or the man he believes to be his father, Gabriel, ever-sinning and hurtful, yet holy; John’s Aunt Florence, leaving her mother, the South and tradition behind to go to New York. She is strong, so strong, yet it is a strength that comes from within, or truly from God, not from holy proclamations. There were Deborah and Esther, the poor women Gabriel hurts. And then there is Elisha, whom John loves. Elisha, who is also saved, who bestows a holy kiss on John after he is later saved.

Even more than the reading of the book, what I so vividly recollect is the night we discussed it. It was not unusual for our discussions to go on for about two hours. The discussion this night, however, was shortened to allow us to watch the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro*, about the life of James Baldwin. The documentary specifically focused on Baldwin’s attempt to write about the lives and tragic deaths of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s.

After the viewing, as we sat in this comfortable North Side home, sipping wine or sparkling pomegranate fruit juice, I took in the shaking heads of my fellow book group members. They lamented the fact that things don’t look or sound so different for people of color from the times pictured in the documentary. Feelings began to rise up in me that I couldn’t contain. As I later described it, I became “hot, angry and loud”, what one of our fellow book group members referred to as having an “authentic response.” I was boiling, raging to witness once again what we men and women do to one another.

“Do you feel shame?” I asked. “What are we doing? We know this. We don’t need to be educated about the atrocities and injustices, the lynchings, abuse, denial of rights, education, and basic human comforts. What are we doing?”

This passion that erupted, I soon realized, had less to do with my condemnation of others and more with a sense of hopelessness that I can do anything about it. I was as much, perhaps more so, asking myself what *I* am doing. I also realized, though, that I have a voice and that I deeply, deeply care. And that though I am pained by injustice and inequity, I no longer just want to feel. I may still struggle, far too often, with the uncertainty of what to do and how. However, I can no longer choose to take advantage of my privilege, the luxury I have as a middle-aged white man, to passively and more easily sit back, feel and not do.

When I got home that night, I wrote out a prayer in my journal:

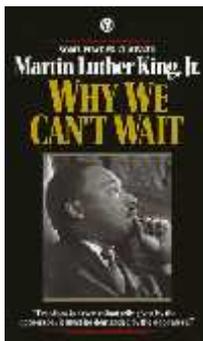
God, continue to, please continue to, illuminate, push me along, walk alongside me on a path in which my words, actions, and overall choices seek to bring justice, equality, peace, wholeness, and deep knowledge of these things for all men, women & children ... Amen, Amen & Amen!

About a month after our reading *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, my husband and I became dads. After four-and-a-half years in the adoption process, we received word that we'd been chosen to parent a baby girl. She is a person of color. The impulse to take action against our society and culture's injustices was present before this blessing in our lives. It is now even more deeply personal.

In January of this year I also attended the CROAR/anti-racism training that ultimately led to the founding of this book group. Partnered with others, I am learning to speak up, to take action in my communities and in the city of Chicago. Perhaps, in some small way, I can help to heal and bring justice and equality where it is so painfully lacking.

Why We Can't Wait by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1964)

Reflection by Adam Malson: *Why We Can't Wait* describes how the non-violent movement against racial segregation in the United States was organized. It focuses



specifically on the 1963 Birmingham campaign, led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). At that time Birmingham, Alabama, was one most segregated cities in America. The book includes King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Dr. King, an American Baptist minister, wrote the letter in response to eight white Alabama clergy, including Alabama Episcopal bishop Charles C. J. Carpenter, who criticized Dr. King's leadership and who were concerned that the civil rights campaign would cause racially-charged violence in the streets of Birmingham.

King speaks of the effectiveness of well-organized, non-violent resistance. King also condemns tokenism (the concept of recruiting one or a small number of people from an under-represented group to give the appearance of racial equality in systems, including the Church).

King offers lamentation and an open lack of confidence in the political leaders, government systems, and white Christian systems and leaders of 1963. King also offers the possibility and hope that working, poor whites and the labor unions would join in solidarity with black people in America to work toward universal human rights and for access to jobs and other resources.

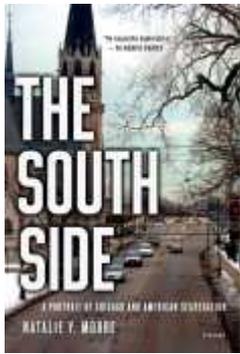
As I reflect on the book, I can't help but see the parallels between Bull Connor's 1963 Birmingham and Rahm Emanuel's 2018 Chicago. Fifty-five years later, the struggle for full equality in America for African-Americans – basic human rights, access to jobs, access to resources, etc. – continues.

As of late October 2018, 457 people have been murdered in the streets of our city of Chicago. We know that the overwhelming majority of those killed are young black men. We know that most of the violence continues to occur in predominantly black neighborhoods in our notoriously segregated city. We know that the majority of those incarcerated in Chicago are young black men. We also know that black men are the primary targets and the victims of violence committed by officers of the Chicago Police Department.

King's *Why We Can't Wait* offers us models and tools to combat the racial segregation and white supremacy that surround us today in greater Chicago.

The South Side by Natalie Y. Moore (2016)

Reflection by Pepper Miller, parishioner at Trinity United Church of Christ: I love, love, the St. John's African-American Book Group. The group is relentless about learning and understanding the history of Black America and the Black experience. That makes me particularly happy being the only Black person in the group.



Once a month, we would tackle a book that provided us with insights about Black history to understand Black life today. And we would have courageous conversations.

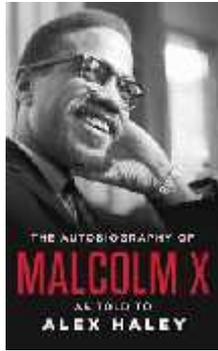
I recommended Natalie Moore's book, *The South Side*, and invited her to come and give a lecture to the group. Given that Moore is an NPR journalist at WBEZ radio, the group had a bigger idea. They decided to invite her to give a talk at St. John's. We weren't anticipating a large crowd – maybe 25 to 30 people. It's a small church. When more than 70 folks showed, filling the church on a Tuesday night, we were delighted. Natalie and I were two of three Black people there, and she sold all of the copies of the book she had brought that night!

Shortly after the Natalie Moore event, I dropped out of the group. Grinding through pages and pages of Black pain was too much for me, given that I live the Black experience every day. I work as a marketing consultant to major companies that want to sell their products to Black consumers. I advocate for Black value and help large corporations understand Black America. I love my work, but it is very, very challenging. It's a constant cycle of using Black cultural insights to counter myths and stereotypes to many uncompromising business leaders who are reluctant to see the value that Blacks have in society and the marketplace.

But this book group, God bless them, has been a ray of hope! They will always hold a special place in my heart.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley (1965)

Reflection by Susan Turner: I liked that book. I didn't know of Malcolm X's switch at the end, his change in philosophy toward the white world, in the last few years of his life.



I didn't remember that he was assassinated in 1965. I was in high school. Why didn't I ever hear about that?

It made him more of a person to me, his agonies as he got involved with Elijah Muhammad out of prison, and as he developed his leadership skills and then his hatred for whites, and what he envisioned the black nation to be. The split came because he disapproved of the immoral way that Elijah Muhammad was living, sexually and with his power. Malcolm lived a stricter life. He left the Brotherhood. He didn't agree with Martin Luther King, either. He thought he was too conciliatory.

Excepting what we read in the last two years, I hadn't read an autobiography in years. I used to read them when I was young. I found that whole book enlightening. As a piece of literature, it was very satisfying. It felt honest. Alex Haley is a good writer. When somebody writes a true autobiography, sometimes it's difficult to read. Sometimes the language isn't rich.

Because it was later in our reading, I had a better background of the era and the issues and some of the other people that were involved in this. They seemed like old friends. People he quoted, whether in agreement or disagreement, were familiar faces to me – people like W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington – some of the people who I had just recently met in their works.

It brought a lot of things together. I liked it because Malcolm X changed, and he let us see his change, the development of his philosophy as a leader and as a person, what his personal values were.

It was important to me in light of all the reading we had done in the previous year and a half. I was glad we had read all those other things before we came to that one, because it made much more sense. The previous reading set the stage. It was really interesting for me to see that – that I had gone through a body of literature that educated me about something I knew very little about and I needed to learn about.

I also really liked *The Warmth of Other Suns*. Because it talked about different kinds of people coming from different places and going to different places. They had very different experiences of the Great Migration, which I had never heard of. My son thought it was the great migration from Asia to North America.

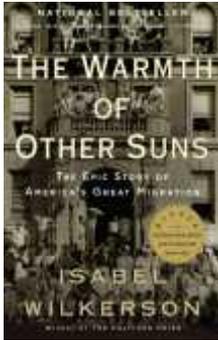
What was especially interesting to me was the woman who ended up in Chicago, Ida Mae Brandon Gladney. She was a person who had tried to move into Cicero. That was where I lived. I had no idea. Less than fifteen miles away, and I had no idea of the black belt. So that book was especially interesting to me in setting the stage from when I was a youngster.

Then we got into some of the other books, and I can't really put a finger on what specifically affected me. But I began to identify some of the racist instincts that had been buried in me – 'Well, yeah, that's racist,' but I have thought that forever. It was sort of an awakening.

The new books we've read in the follow-on book group, *White Fragility* and *Waking Up in a White World*, they have really dug down into those racist feelings, the ones that were inculcated in me as a young person. For instance, I had no idea that black women couldn't vote until the 1960s. I did not know that. My really smart sister didn't know that. When I was in high school, black women couldn't vote. That is jaw-dropping to me. That is what white supremacy is, the privilege of not having to know.

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson (2010)

Reflection by Laura Singer: What I really appreciate about this book is the amazing amount of research that Wilkerson completed and then deftly wove into three narratives about the migration of African-Americans from the South to the North or West from the early 1900s through the 1960s.



Wilkerson interviewed more than 1,200 people who participated in the Great Migration. Her book then focuses in detail on three stories. Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, a sharecropper's wife, migrated from Mississippi in 1937 to Chicago with her family, where she experiences the effects of redlining, gang and drug violence and participates in the early community organizing activities of Barack Obama. George Swanson Starling eventually makes it to New York after escaping being lynched in the orange fields of Florida after organizing for fair wages. Life began in

Louisiana for Robert Joseph Pershing Foster, who migrated to California so that he could practice medicine, which he was allowed to do in the Army, but not in his hometown hospital. He becomes the personal physician of singer Ray Charles.

Wilkerson describes the life of these three migrants and to the reader it feels like you are sitting in their homes hearing them share their stories. All escaped difficult and terrible conditions in the South, but Wilkerson shows how they still faced many challenges in the North and West and did not benefit from the same formal and informal systems in place to assist immigrants from places like Europe to succeed in the U.S.

This book will give the reader a new appreciation of the Great Migration with the depth of research and a lasting life lesson with the memorable narrative accounts.

*For more information on St. John's
African-American Book Group, please contact
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