



MURDERS THAT MATTER

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Susan Conlon, MLIS and Kim Dorman, Community Engagement Coordinator of Princeton Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Murders that Matter*.

Murders that Matter documents Movita Johnson-Harrell, an African American Muslim mother who, in the aftermath of her youngest son's murder, vows to save all the other black sons on both sides of the gun.



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ADULT NON-FICTION

Burnett-Zeigler, Inger. *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: The Emotional Lives of Black Women*. New York, NY: Amistad Press, 2021. Black women's strength is intimately tied to their unacknowledged suffering. An estimated eight in ten have endured some form of trauma—sexual abuse, domestic abuse, poverty, childhood abandonment, victim/witness to violence, and regular confrontation with racism and sexism. *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen* shows that trauma often impacts mental and physical well-being. It can contribute to stress, anxiety, PTSD, and depression. Unaddressed it can lead to hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, overeating, and alcohol and drug abuse, and other chronic health issues.

Countryman, Matthew J. *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. *Up South* traces the efforts of two generations of black Philadelphians to turn the City of Brotherly Love into a place of promise and opportunity for all. Although Philadelphia rarely appears in the histories of the modern civil rights struggle, the city was home to a vibrant and groundbreaking movement for racial justice in the years between World War II and the 1970s. By broadening the chronological and geographic parameters of the civil rights movement, *Up South* explores the origins of civil rights liberalism, the failure of the liberal program of anti discrimination legislation and interracial coalition-building to deliver on its promise of racial equality, and the subsequent rise of the Black Power movement.

Davis, Angela and Bryan Stevenson, Marc Mauer, Bruce Western, and Jeremy Travis. *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment*. New York, New York: Pantheon, 2017. *Policing the Black Man* explores and critiques the many ways the criminal justice system impacts the lives of African American boys and men at every stage of the criminal process, from arrest through sentencing. Essays range from an explication of the historical roots of racism in the criminal justice system to an examination of modern-day police killings of unarmed black men. The contributors discuss and explain racial profiling, the power and discretion of police and prosecutors, the role of implicit bias, the racial impact of police and prosecutorial decisions, the disproportionate imprisonment of black men, the collateral consequences of mass incarceration, and the Supreme Court's failure to provide meaningful remedies for the injustices in the criminal justice system.

Dawidoff, Nicholas. *The Other Side of Prospect: A Story of violence, injustice, and the American City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022. One New Haven summer evening in 2006, a retired grandfather was shot point-blank by a young stranger. A hasty police investigation culminated in innocent sixteen-year-old Bobby being sentenced to prison for thirty-eight years. New Haven native and acclaimed author Nicholas Dawidoff returned home and spent eight years reporting the deeper story of this injustice, and what it reveals about the enduring legacies of social and economic disparity.

Tracing the histories of three people whose lives meet in tragedy, the result is an immersive portrait of a seminal community in an old American city now beset by division and gun violence.

Elliot, Andrea. *Invisible Child: Poverty, Survival and Hope in an American City*. New York, New York: Random House, 2021. In *Invisible Child*, Pulitzer Prize winner Andrea Elliott follows eight years in the life of Dasani, a girl whose imagination is as soaring as the skyscrapers near her Brooklyn shelter. In this sweeping narrative, Elliott weaves the story of Dasani's childhood with the history of her ancestors, tracing their passage from slavery to the Great Migration north. As Dasani comes of age, New York City's homeless crisis has exploded, deepening the chasm between rich and poor. She must guide her siblings through a world riddled by hunger, violence, racism, drug addiction, and the threat of foster care. Out on the street, Dasani becomes a fierce fighter "to protect those who I love." When she finally escapes city life to enroll in a boarding school, she faces an impossible question: What if leaving poverty means abandoning your family, and yourself?

Kaba, Mariame. *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2021. What if social transformation and liberation isn't about waiting for someone else to come along and save us? What if ordinary people have the power to collectively free ourselves? In this timely collection of essays and interviews, Mariame Kaba reflects on the deep work of abolition and transformative political struggle. With a foreword by Naomi Murakawa and chapters on seeking justice beyond the punishment system, transforming how we deal with harm and accountability, and finding hope in collective struggle for abolition, Kaba's work is deeply rooted in the relentless belief that we can fundamentally change the world. As Kaba writes, "Nothing that we do that is worthwhile is done alone."

Kennedy, David M. *Don't Shoot: One man, a street fellowship, and the end of violence in inner-city America*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2011. Gang- and drug-related inner-city violence, with its attendant epidemic of incarceration, is the defining crime problem in our country. In some neighborhoods in America, one out of every two hundred young black men is shot to death every year, and few initiatives of government and law enforcement have made much difference. But when David Kennedy, a self-taught and then-unknown criminologist, engineered the "Boston Miracle" in the mid-1990s, he pointed the way toward what few had imagined: a solution.

Kotlowitz, Alex. *An American Summer: Love and Death in Chicago*. New York, NY: Nan A Talese, 2019. The numbers are staggering: over the past twenty years in Chicago, 14,033 people have been killed and another roughly 60,000 wounded by gunfire. What does that do to the spirit of individuals and community? Drawing on his decades of experience, Alex Kotlowitz set out to chronicle one summer in the city, writing about individuals who have emerged from the violence and whose stories capture the capacity--and the breaking point--of the human heart and soul. The result is a spellbinding collection of deeply intimate profiles that upend what we think we know about gun violence in America. Among others, we meet a man who as a teenager killed a rival gang member and twenty

years later is still trying to come to terms with what he's done; a devoted school social worker struggling with her favorite student, who refuses to give evidence in the shooting death of his best friend; the witness to a wrongful police shooting who can't shake what he has seen; and an aging former gang leader who builds a place of refuge for himself and his friends.

Overton, Iain. *The Way of the Gun: A Bloody Journey Into the World of Firearms*. New York, NY: Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2016. We live in the Age of the Gun. Around the globe, firearms are ubiquitous and define countless lives; in some places, it's even easier to get a gun than a glass of clean water. In others, it's legal to carry concealed firearms into bars and schools. In this book, Iain Overton embarks on a journey to understand how these weapons have become an integral part of twenty-first century life, beyond the economics of supply and demand.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014. Claudia Rankine's bold new book recounts mounting racial aggressions in ongoing encounters in twenty-first century daily life and in the media. Some of these encounters are slights, seemingly slips of the tongue, and some are intentional offensives in the classroom, at the supermarket, at home, on the tennis court with Serena Williams and the soccer field with Zinedine Zidane, online, on TV—everywhere, all the time. The accumulative stresses come to bear on a person's ability to speak, perform, and stay alive.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York, NY: WW Norton, 2017. In this history of the modern American metropolis, Richard Rothstein, a leading authority on housing policy, explodes the myth that America's cities came to be racially divided through de facto segregation – that is, through individual prejudices, income differences, or the actions of private institutions like banks and real estate agencies. Rather, *The Color of Law* incontrovertibly makes clear that it was de jure segregation – the laws and policy decisions passed by local, state and federal governments – that actually promoted the discriminatory patterns that continue to this day.

Siegel, Jane A. *Disrupted Childhoods: Children of women in prison*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011. Millions of children in the United States have a parent who is incarcerated and a growing number of these nurturers are mothers. This book explores the issues that arise from a mother's confinement and provides first-person accounts of the experiences of children with moms behind bars. Based on interviews with nearly seventy youngsters and their mothers conducted at different points of their parent's involvement in the process, the qualitative data reveals the lived experiences of prisoners' children, telling their stories in their own words.

Smith, Mychal Denzel. *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching*. New York, NY: Nation Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, a subsidiary of Hachette Book Group Inc., 2016. How do you

learn to be a black man in America? For young black men today, it means coming of age during the presidency of Barack Obama. It means witnessing the deaths of Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Akai Gurley, and too many more. It means celebrating powerful moments of black self-determination for LeBron James, Dave Chappelle, and Frank Ocean.

Smith, Tracy K. *Ordinary Light: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015. In *Ordinary Light*, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Tracy K. Smith tells her remarkable story, giving us a quietly potent memoir that explores her coming-of-age and the meaning of home against a complex backdrop of race, faith, and the unbreakable bond between a mother and daughter. Here is the story of a young artist struggling to fashion her own understanding of belief, loss, history, and what it means to be black in America.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2021. The eruption of mass protests in the wake of the police murders of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City have challenged the impunity with which officers of the law carry out violence against Black people and punctured the illusion of a post racial America. The Black Lives Matter movement has awakened a new generation of activists. Taylor surveys the historical and contemporary ravages of racism and persistence of structural inequality such as mass incarceration and Black unemployment. In this context, she argues that this new struggle against police violence holds the potential to reignite a broader push for Black liberation.

Winfrey Harris, Tamara. *The Sisters Are Alright: Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015. What is wrong with Black women? Not a damned thing but the biased lens most people use to view them, says Tamara Winfrey Harris. When African women arrived on American shores, the three-headed hydra of asexual and servile Mammy, angry and bestial Sapphire, and oversexed and lascivious Jezebel followed close behind. In the '60s, the Matriarch, the willfully unmarried baby machine leeching off the state, joined them. These caricatures persist – even in the ‘enlightened’ 21st century – through newspaper headlines, Sunday sermons, social media memes, cable punditry, government policies, and Top 40 lyrics. Using progressive author analysis brought to life by the stories of real women, it reveals the effects of anti-black woman propaganda and how real black women are living their lives and pushing back against distorted cartoon versions of themselves.

Wolfinger, James. *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. In a detailed study of life and politics in Philadelphia between the 1930s and 1950s James Wolfinger demonstrates how racial tensions in working-class neighborhoods and job sites shaped the contours of mid-twentieth-century liberal and conservative politics. As racial divisions fractured the working class, he argues, Republican leaders exploited these racial fissures to reposition their party as the champion of ordinary white citizens besieged by black demands and overwhelmed by liberal government orders.

Younge, Gary. *Another Day in the Death of America: A Chronicle of ten short lives*. New York: Nation Books, 2016. On an average day in America, seven children and teens will be shot dead. Journalist Gary Younge tells the stories of the lives lost during one such day. It could have been any day, but he chose November 23, 2013. Black, white, and Latino, aged nine to nineteen, they fell at sleepovers, on street corners, in stairwells, and on their own doorsteps. From the rural Midwest to the barrios of Texas, the narrative crisscrosses the country over a period of twenty-four hours to reveal the full human stories behind the gun-violence statistics and the brief mentions in local papers of lives lost.

ADULT FICTION

Bennet, Brit, *The Mothers*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2016. It is the last season of high school life for Nadia Turner, a rebellious, grief-stricken, seventeen-year-old beauty. Mourning her own mother's recent suicide, she takes up with the local pastor's son. Luke Sheppard is twenty-one, a former football star whose injury has reduced him to waiting tables at a diner. They are young; it's not serious. But the pregnancy that results from this teen romance—and the subsequent cover-up—will have an impact that goes far beyond their youth. As Nadia hides her secret from everyone, including Aubrey, her God-fearing best friend, the years move quickly. Soon, Nadia, Luke, and Aubrey are full-fledged adults and still living in debt to the choices they made that one seaside summer, caught in a love triangle they must carefully maneuver, and dogged by the constant, nagging question: What if they had chosen differently? The possibilities of the road not taken are a relentless haunt.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003. Dana's torment begins when she suddenly vanishes on her 26th birthday from California, 1976, and is dragged through time to antebellum Maryland to rescue a boy named Rufus, heir to a slave owner's plantation. She soon realizes the purpose of her summons to the past: protect Rufus to ensure his assault of her Black ancestor so that she may one day be born. As she endures the traumas of slavery and the soul-crushing normalization of savagery, Dana fights to keep her autonomy and return to the present.

Clemmons, Zinzi. *What We Lose*. New York, NY: Viking, 2017. Clemmons creates a portrayal of what it means to choose to live, after loss. An elegiac distillation, at once intellectual and visceral, of a young woman's understanding of absence and identity that spans continents and decades.

Evans, Danielle. *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*. New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2011. This book offers a bold new perspective on the experience of being young and African-American or mixed-race in modern-day America. In each of her stories, Danielle Evans explores the non-white American experience with honesty, wisdom, and humor. They are striking in their emotional immediacy, based in a world where inequality is a reality, but the insecurities of young adulthood and tensions within family are often the more complicating factors.

Flournoy, Angela. *The Turner House*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. *The Turner House* brings us a colorful, complicated brood full of love and pride, sacrifice and unlikely inheritances. It's an examination of the price we pay for our dreams and futures, and the ways in which our families bring us home.

Hill, Lawrence. *The Book of Negroes*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007. Abducted as an 11-year-old child from her village in West Africa and forced to walk for months to the sea in a coffle – a string of slaves – Aminata Diallo is sent to live as a slave in South Carolina. But years later, she forges her way to freedom, serving the British in the Revolutionary War and registering her name in the historic, “Book of Negroes.” This book, an actual document, provides a short but revealing record of freed Loyalist slaves who requested permission to leave the US for resettlement in Nova Scotia, only to find that the haven they sought was steeped in an oppression all of its own.

Jones, Tayari. *An American Marriage*. New York, NY: Algonquin Books, 2018. An American Marriage is an intimate look into the souls of people who must reckon with the past while moving forward – with hope and pain – into the future.

Mathis, Ayana *Twelve Tribes of Hattie*. New York, NY: Random House, 2012. In 1923, fifteen-year-old Hattie Shepherd, swept up by the tides of the Great Migration, fled Georgia and headed north. Full of hope she settles in Philadelphia to build a better life. Instead she marries a man who will bring her nothing but disappointment and watches helplessly as her first born twins are lost to an illness that a few pennies could have prevented. Hattie gives birth to nine more children, whom she raises with grit, mettle and not a trace of the tenderness they crave. She vows to prepare them to meet a world that will not be kind. Their lives, captured here in twelve threads, tell a story of a mother’s monumental courage and a nation’s tumultuous journey.

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

Behnke, Alison. *Racial Profiling: Everyday Inequality*. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2017. In the United States, racial profiling affects thousands of Americans every day. Both individuals and institutions such as law enforcement agencies, government bodies, and schools routinely use race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of an offense. The book explores the history, the many manifestations, and the consequences of this form of social injustice.

Cart, Michael, editor. *Taking Aim: Power and Pain, Teens and Guns*. New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2015. This anthology of stories from acclaimed young adult authors examines the thought-provoking issues of gun violence, gun control, and gun ownership.

Fargang, Adam. *Everything You Need to Know About Gun Violence*. New York, NY: Rosen YA, 2018. This book explores the history of guns as it applies to the Second Amendment and the effects of gun violence on society. Gun control and legislation in the United States on federal, state, and local levels are thoughtfully addressed without taking sides on this controversial issue. Sidebars highlight the NRA, the ongoing debate about gun control legislation, and what today's youth can do to help.

Moore, David Barclay. *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. In the wake of his older brother's murder, 12-year-old Wallace – also known as “Lolly” – is desperate for some kind of respite from his grief. He finds solace in an unlikely place: a trash bag filled to the brim with Legos. Thanks to Lolly's creativity, patience, and kindness, his art might just somehow bring his family and his community together in the aftermath of tragedy

New York Times Company. *Gun Rights: Finding the Balance*. New York, NY: New York Times Educational Publishing, 2021. As the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the right to bear arms may be considered a founding tenet of American life. The expression of that right, however, has generated no end of debate. The association of guns with injury, murder, suicide, and accidents has prompted activists and lawmakers alike to propose and pass regulations about who can buy guns and how they can be used.

Reported by the March for Our Lives Organization. *Glimmer of Hope: How Tragedy Sparked a Movement*. New York, NY: Razorbill, 2018. This collection of essays by friends and family of the

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre in Parkland, Florida. The victims tell the story of how a group of teenagers channeled their rage and sorrow into action and went on to create one of the largest youth-led movements in history.

Smith, Elliott. *Gun Violence and the Fight for Public Safety*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 2022. Gun violence has had a continued impact on public safety. This title takes a closer look at the effects of gun violence on specific demographics and American society.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Coles, Jay. *Tyler Johnson Was Here*. Boston, MA; New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.

When Marvin Johnson's twin brother, Tyler, is shot and killed by a police officer, Marvin must fight injustice to learn the true meaning of freedom.

Hopkins, Ellen. *People Kill People*. New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2018. The book follows six teenagers as they are brought into close contact over the course of one tense week, in a town with political and personal tensions that build until one fires a fatal gunshot.

Medina, Tony. *I Am Alfonso Jones*. New York NY: Tu Books, an imprint of Lee & Low Books Inc., 2017.

The ghost of fifteen-year-old Alfonso Jones travels in a New York subway car full of the living and the dead, watching his family and friends fight for justice after he is killed by an off-duty police officer while buying a suit in a Midtown department store.

Oshiro, Mark. *Anger is a Gift*. New York, NY: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, 2018. Six years ago, Moss Jefferies' father was murdered by an Oakland police officer. Along with losing a parent, the media's vilification of his father and lack of accountability has left Moss with near crippling panic attacks. Now, in his sophomore year of high school, Moss and his fellow classmates find themselves increasingly treated like criminals at their own school.

Reynolds, Jason. *Long Way Down*. New York, NY: Atheneum, 2017. As Will, fifteen, sets out to avenge his brother Shawn's fatal shooting, seven ghosts who knew Shawn board the elevator and reveal truths Will needs to know.

Rhodes, Jewel Parker. *Ghost Boys*. New York, NY; Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.

Twelve-year-old Jerome is shot by a police officer who mistakes his toy gun for a real threat. As a ghost, he observes the devastation that's been unleashed on his family and community in the wake of what they see as an unjust and brutal killing. Soon Jerome meets another ghost: Emmett Till, a boy from a very different time but similar circumstances. Emmett helps Jerome process what has happened, on a journey towards recognizing how historical racism may have led to the events that ended his life.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Bowling, Dusty. *Canyon's Edge*. New York : Little, Brown and Company, 2020. One year after a random shooting changed their family forever, Nora and her father are exploring a slot canyon deep in the Arizona desert, hoping it will help them find peace.

Celano, Marianne. *Something Happened In Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice*. Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2018. After discussing the police shooting of a local Black man with their families, Emma and Josh know how to treat a new student who looks and speaks differently than his classmates.

Doerrfeld, Cori. *The Rabbit Listened*. New York, NY : Dial Books for Young Readers, 2018. When Taylor's block castle is destroyed, all the animals think they know just what to do, but only the rabbit quietly listens to how Taylor is feeling.

McGhee, Holly M. *Come With Me*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2017. Frightened by news of angry people around the world, a young girl gets her parents' help in learning to be compassionate and brave a little at a time.

Perkins, Useni Eugene. *Hey Black Child*. New York, NY: LB Keys/Little, Brown and Company, 2017. A poem that celebrates black children and seeks to inspire all young ones to dream big and achieve their goals.

Roberts, Justin. *The Smallest Girl in the Smallest Grade*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin Group, 2014. Sally McCabe is a very little girl, and nobody notices her, although she notices everything that goes on around her – but when she speaks out about the unkindness she sees, people start to pay attention.