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Writing for Social Justice

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

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Writing for Social Justice

Words matter. Our WritingMKE team continues to strive to be a create and maintain spaces for decolonizing and deconstructing the various systems of oppression that affect the Milwaukee community, and subsequently, the rhetoric and writing coming out of the city. And while there is no such thing as perfection in social justice work, we have constructed this page, as well as its supporting pages/links to be a resource to us and the community to keep our work centered in equity.

In our writing, we will amplify, engage, and support writing, rhetoric, and other resources promoting transformative justice in our Milwaukee communities including, but not limited to, antiracism work, indigenous rights, LGBTQ+ liberation, disability justice, reproductive justice, and especially those who sit at their intersectionalities. Especially as an organization born through a predominantly white institution, we have continuous work to do in confronting our biases and analyzing how our own identities affect our work. We ask our audience to assist in keeping us held accountable as writers and as community members.

Our focuses moving forward:

- Publishing and amplifying blog posts and resources that focus on social justice work
- Prioritizing collaborations with other community members, focusing on offering a diverse and inclusive range of content
- Using our resources and privileges to reduce the labor asked of marginalized contributors
- Promoting other organizations, events, and resources, through fostering connections in our community with students of rhetoric and writing.

We also would like to recognize the rich and comprehensive history the City of Milwaukee offers in social justice protest, advocacy, community organization and support by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, migrant, and other marginalized communities. Our work should promote and support this history, not overwrite it. We aim to highlight the ways that everyday writing and rhetoric are being used to advance social justice, challenge oppression, and empower.

Moving forward, we have created a set of pages meant to both introduce new accomplices to various social justice issues, as well as offer various texts for those looking to continue their social justice journey. While this list is intended to be comprehensive, it is not exhaustive, and we aim to continue to expand to represent the entire community of rhetoric and writing in Milwaukee.

Antiracist Literature



The term '**antiracist**' refers to people who are actively seeking not only to raise their consciousness about race and racism, but also to **take action** when they see racial power inequities in everyday life.

ANNELIESE A. SINGH

The fight for equality and racial justice is everyone's fight.

It's not enough for allies to say they're "not racist"— instead, we need to actively adopt a commitment to antiracism. One way of beginning the work of dismantling systemic racism is through education: learning about the history of oppression and racism in our country; learning about the underlying issues driving the current racial tensions in America; learning about the implicit bias and unconscious prejudice enforced by structural racism; and learning about how to be an actively anti-racist ally.

This list of antiracist literature is intended to provide book recommendations to help readers take the first step toward adopting a commitment to anti-racism by learning about

the histories, policies, and systems in place in contemporary U.S. society responsible for the persistence of inequality as well as shed light on the daily realities experienced by people of color across the nation. However, scholars, activists, and booksellers are quick to point out that the work may start with reading a book, but it can't end there. To be truly antiracist, we must take action and demand actual racial justice and equality in education, jobs, health care, and housing even after the protests have died down.

For easier navigation, our antiracist literature list is organized into the following categories: (1) History of Race in America, (2) Black Feminism, (3) Introduction to Antiracism, (4) BLM Movement, (5) Persistence of Racism, and (6) Additional Anti-racist Resources.

History of Race in America

[*A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*](#)

Ronald Takaki

Takaki addresses minority perspectives of multicultural America by providing histories of different ethnic groups; public attitudes, policies, and laws toward minorities during certain periods; and perceptions of the minority group members toward their own situation.

[*An African American and Latinx History of the United States*](#)

Paul Ortiz

Ortiz draws on rich narratives and primary source documents to illustrate the intersectional history of the shared struggle for African American and Latinx civil rights and, ultimately, offers a way forward in the continued struggle for universal civil rights.

[*Blackballed: The Black Vote and US Democracy*](#)

Darryl Pinckney

Through the combination of memoir, historical narrative, contemporary political analysis, and personal experience, Pinckney investigates the struggle for Black voting rights from Reconstruction through the Civil Rights Movement to the election of America's first Black president.

[Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations](#)

Joe Feagin

Feagin illustrates the origins of racism in the U.S. and how it still pervades white culture today.

[Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#)

Ibram X. Kendi

Kendi chronicles the entire history of how racist ideas were created, spread, and deeply rooted in American society, and he also offers us the tools we need to expose racist thinking in our own lives.

[The Burning House: Jim Crow and the Making of Modern America](#)

Anders Walker

Walker re-examines the history of civil rights in the U.S. through the lens of a generation of prominent intellectual scholars and demonstrates with great clarity and insight that racial segregation fostered not simply terror and violence, but also diversity.

[The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America](#)

Richard Rothstein

Rothstein exposes how American governments deliberately imposed, as well as continuously reinforced, racial segregation in neighborhoods nationwide, forcing us to face the obligation to remedy our unconstitutional past.

[The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority](#)

Ellen D. Wu

Wu explains the emergence of Asian Americans as the "model minority" stereotype—peoples distinct from the white majority but praised as well-assimilated, upwardly mobile, and exemplars of traditional family values—during the mid-twentieth century, and she reveals how this influential process continues to have profound implications for how Americans understand race, opportunity, and nationhood today.

[The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#)

Michelle Alexander

Alexander breaks down the historic "war on crime" and how the explosive increase in the number U.S. citizens incarcerated, namely Black men, is just another trickier, evolved, version of slavery and Jim Crow.

Black Feminism

[Ain't I A Woman? Black Women & Feminism](#)

bell hooks

Hooks investigates the effect of racism and sexism on Black women, the Civil Rights Movement, and feminist movements from suffrage to the 1970s, arguing that the convergence of sexism and racism during slavery contributed to Black women having the lowest status and worst conditions of any group in American society.

Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment

Patricia Hill Collins

Collins explores the words and ideas of prominent Black feminist intellectuals, using an interpretive framework to share the under-recognized rich intellectual tradition of African American women, to provide the first synthetic overview of Black feminist thought.

Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower

Brittney Cooper

Cooper argues that Black women's anger has been distorted into an ugly and destructive force that threatens the civility and social fabric of American democracy, but that anger is a powerful source of energy that can give us the strength to keep on fighting.

How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

In this collection of essays and interviews, Taylor brings together the voices of contemporary activists and the founding members of the Combahee River Collective, a ground-breaking group of radical Black feminists, as they reflect on the legacy of the organization's contributions to Black feminism today.

In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens

Alice Walker

Walker speaks out as a Black woman, writer, mother, and feminist in this anthology of early essays and other nonfiction pieces ranging from the personal to the political as she sets out to define the concept of a "womanist".

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More

Janet Mock

Mock courageously relays her experiences of growing up young, multiracial, poor, and trans in America, offering readers accessible language while imparting vital insight about the unique challenges and vulnerabilities of a marginalized and misunderstood population.

Road Map for Revolutionaries: Resistance, Activism, and Advocacy for All

Elisa Camahort Page, Carolyn Gerin, & Jamia Wilson

Page, Gerin, and Wilson deliver lessons on practical tactics for navigating and protecting one's personal democracy in a politically volatile country in this handbook for effective activism, advocacy, and social justice for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Sister Outsider

Audre Lorde

In this collection of essays, Lorde confronts sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, and class to advocate for social difference as a vehicle for action and change.

The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison

In this novel, Morrison examines our society's obsession with beauty and conformity, while also asking powerful questions about race, class, and gender, as she tells the distressing story of a young Black girl.

[Women, Race & Class](#)

Angela Y. Davis

Davis examines the history of the women's liberation movement in the U.S. to demonstrate how the fight for freedom has always been hampered by the racist and classist biases of its leaders.

Introduction to Antiracism

[How to be an Antiracist](#)

Ibram X. Kendi

Kendi describes concepts of racism and their intersection with demographics like gender, class, and sexuality; summarizes historical eras of racial segregation in the U.S.; and proposes models for antiracist individual actions and systemic changes.

[How to Be Less Stupid About Race: On Racism, White Supremacy, and the Racial Divide](#)

Crystal Fleming

Meant to serve as a primer on the topics of racial oppression and white supremacy, Fleming helps people understand the historical roots of white supremacy, draw connections between past and present racism, and learn concrete steps that can be taken to help dismantle systemic racism.

[Killing Rage: Ending Racism](#)

bell hooks

Responding to the lack of female voices in public discourse on race, hooks pens twenty-three essays from a Black and feminist perspective that tackle the bitter difficulties of racism by envisioning a world without it.

[Me and White Supremacy](#)

Layla Saad

Saad describes the common reasons why white people aren't actively antiracist and includes tangible steps for being a better ally.

[Race and Racisms: A Critical Approach](#)

Tanya Golash Boza

An excellent overview of systemic and institutionalized racism, Boza tackles crucial topics including the history and development of race as well as how structural racism has created inequality.

[So You Want to Talk About Race](#)

Ijeoma Oluo

Oluo answers often unspoken questions about race and racism; prompts people of all races to start having honest conversations about race; and provides readers phrases and questions to start unpacking racism within their own social networks.

[The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing](#)

Anneliese A. Singh

Singh offers powerful and practical tools to help us understand the role history plays in racial stereotypes, navigate experiences of racism, challenge privilege, manage stress and trauma, develop racial consciousness and conscientiousness, and begin to heal.

[Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race](#)

Beverly Daniel Tatum

Tatum explains the psychology of racism underlying the dynamics of race in America and argues that straight talk about our racial identities is essential if we are serious about enabling communication across racial and ethnic divides.

BLM Movement

[Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement](#)

Angela Davis

Reflecting on the importance of black feminism, intersectionality, and prison abolitionism for today's struggles, Davis discusses the legacies of previous liberation struggles and highlights connections to today's struggles against state terror, from Ferguson to Palestine.

[From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation](#)

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

In this stirring and insightful analysis, Taylor surveys the historical and contemporary damages of racism and persistence of structural inequality, arguing that this new struggle against police violence holds the potential to reignite a broader push for Black liberation.

[Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond](#)

Marc Lamont Hill

Hill provides a thoughtful analysis of state-sanctioned violence and incidents of gross negligence by governments to uncover patterns and policies of authority that allow some citizens to become disempowered, disenfranchised, poor, uneducated, exploited, vulnerable, and disposable. He also examines the effects of unfettered capitalism, mass incarceration, and political power while urging us to consider a new world in which everyone has a chance to become somebody.

[The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea](#)

Christopher LeBron

LeBron presents a condensed and accessible intellectual history of the ideas that have built into the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and argues that the plea that "Black Lives Matter" comes out of a much older and richer tradition arguing for the equal dignity of Black people.

[When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir](#)

Patrisse Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele

Khan-Cullors describes the experiences and events leading up to her co-founding #BlackLivesMatter (with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi), which began the movement to demand accountability from the authorities who continually turn a blind eye to the injustices inflicted upon people of color.

Persistence of Racism

[*American While Black: African Americans, Immigration, and the Limits of Citizenship*](#)

Niambi Carter

Carter argues that African American's use the issue of immigration as a way to understand the nature and meaning of their American citizenship—specifically the way that white supremacy structures and constrains their place in the American political landscape—and draws on original interviews and empirical data on African American political opinion to offer the first theory of Black public opinion toward immigration.

[*Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*](#)

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

Bonilla-Silva makes a powerful argument against the idea that race doesn't exist, or that being "colorblind" is an appropriate solution to racism, by helping readers understand how the rhetoric of colorblindness reinforces the racial status quo.

[*The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*](#)

Khalil Gibran Muhammad

Muhammad chronicles the emergence of deeply embedded notions of Black people as a dangerous race of criminals and reveals the influence such ideas have had on urban development and social policies.

[*White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*](#)

Carol Anderson

Anderson provides a critical reflection on why racism persists in the U.S. and explores how each time blacks in America have made progress, there has been strong white backlash.

Additional Antiracist Resources

[*America's Black Holocaust Museum \(ABHM\)*](#)

ABHM is a memorial museum dedicated to building public awareness of the harmful legacies of slavery in America and promoting racial repair, reconciliation, and healing. Visit ABHM at 401 W. North Ave. in Milwaukee, WI, or visit their website's 3200+ page [Virtual Museum](#).

[*"14 Resources to Educate Yourself on Racism and Anti-Racism"*](#)

Elizabeth Johnson, *Milwaukee Magazine*

[*"A Detailed List of Anti-Racism Resources"*](#)

Katie Couric, *Medium*

[*"Anti-Racist Resource Guide"*](#)

Victoria Alexander

[*"Do the Work: An Anti-Racist Reading List"*](#)

Layla Saad, *The Guardian*

[*"The False Promise of Anti-Racism Books"*](#)

Saida Grundy, *The Atlantic*

"The Black Women Who Launched the Original Anti-Racist Reading List"

Ashley Dennis, *The Washington Post*

"What Is An Anti-Racist Reading List For?"

Lauren Michele Jackson, *Vulture*

Taking Action

There are many ways to take action for racial justice. Even something as seemingly small as a [hashtag](#) can grow into a global movement for change. Now, in the midst of nationwide movements for racial justice, many organizations are using writing and rhetoric to unite people for the same cause through petitions, training programs, memberships, and community events. Check out some of the organizations below to find out how you can get involved. If you have any organizations, actions, or movements you feel should be included on this page, email us at writingandrhetoricmke@gmail.com, or connect with us on Twitter [@writingmke](#).

[ACLU \(American Civil Liberties Union\) of Wisconsin](#)

The ACLU of Wisconsin is a state affiliate of the national ACLU. The ACLU defends the civil rights of all citizens through “public policy analysis, lobbying, and advocacy efforts that advance individual rights in our state and federal legislature.”

- Sign the ACLU of Wisconsin’s current [petition](#) to make changes to our voting system that will protect the health of citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Donate to the ACLU of Wisconsin [here](#).
- Become a member of the ACLU of Wisconsin [here](#).

[Black Lives Matter](#)

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a global organization “whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.”

Supporting BLM:

- Find and sign BLM’s active petitions [here](#).
- Donate to BLM [here](#).
- Sign up to receive important updates from BLM on their website’s [homepage](#).
- Shop BLM merchandise [here](#).

[BLOC \(Black Leaders Organizing Communities\)](#)

BLOC aims to give citizens political power, coordinate political action, and “empower black leaders with the tools, training, and resources needed to organize and guarantee that their issues, concerns, and values are represented at all levels of government.” You can read BLOC’s full agenda [here](#).

Supporting BLOC:

- Donate [here](#).
- Follow BLOC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) for important updates. BLOC frequently holds Facebook Live Town Halls in which participants can speak with candidates for office in the city of Milwaukee and Wisconsin at large.
- [Buy a shirt](#) to further support the Black Lives Matter Movement here in Milwaukee. All of the proceeds will be donated to BLOC.
- Take part in BLOC’s [silent canvassing](#) program.

[Color of Change](#)

Color of Change leads campaigns that help them accomplish their mission to “challenge injustice, hold corporate and political leaders accountable, commission game-changing research on systems of inequality, and advance solutions for racial justice.

- Find Color of Change’s active campaigns and find out how you can get involved [here](#).
- Donate to Color of Change [here](#).

[LIT \(Leaders Igniting Transformation\)](#)

LIT is a grassroots organization led by youth of color here in Milwaukee. According to their website, LIT is “building an organization with a continuously expanding base of young people through both issue-organizing and civic engagement.”

Supporting LIT:

- Donate [here](#).
- Follow LIT on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) for updates on events, programs, and calls to action.
- Register for [Black Hogwarts](#): Digital Action, Organizing, and Training, LIT’s leadership development program “to help expand and continue our work of political education for high school students, college students, creatives, and other young individuals.” This training is free, but registration is required.

[MKE Black](#)

MKE Black houses a directory of local black-owned businesses and provides funding and resources to these businesses.

Supporting MKE Black:

- Explore the [directory](#) and find restaurants, shops, artists, and more to support.
- Donate [here](#) to help black-owned businesses in Milwaukee with things like startup costs, events, marketing, and more.
- Download MKE Black’s [app](#), which features a lite version of the business directory. The app updates every Wednesday.
- Sign up for MKE Black’s monthly newsletter for updates and news. You can find the signup link of MKE Black’s website [homepage](#).
- Explore the organization’s [blog](#), which features business spotlights.
- Follow MKE Black on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

[Voces de la Frontera](#)

Voces de la Frontera is “a membership-based community organization led by low-wage workers, immigrants and youth whose mission is to protect and expand civil rights and workers’ rights through leadership development, community organizing, and empowerment.” Voces has also supported the recent BLM protests and movement in Milwaukee.

Supporting Voces de la Frontera:

- Get involved as a [volunteer](#)
- Donate [here](#)
- Take part in their campaigns for social justice [here](#)
- You can also support YES: Youth Empowered in the Struggle, the youth-led group of Voces de la Frontera by following them on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).