

Delve Deeper into American Promise

A film by Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson

This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Erica Bess, Susan Conlon and Hanna Lee of Princeton Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *American Promise*.

In *American Promise*, African-American parents Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson film their son and his friend, who attend one of the country's most prestigious private schools. Winner, U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award, 2013 Sundance Film Festival. A co-production of Rada Film Group, ITVS and POV's Diverse Voices Project, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Part of *American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen*, made possible by CPB. Produced in association with *American Documentary* | POV. A co-presentation with the National Black Programming Consortium.

ADULT NONFICTION

Brewster, J., Stephenson, M., & Beard, H. *Promises Kept: Raising Black Boys to Succeed in School and in Life*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014. The producers of the documentary film, *American Promise*, offer a complimentary guide to instruct parents on how to empower their sons, affect change among educators, and help to close the achievement gap between black and white youth.

Delpit, L. D. *"Multiplication is for White People": Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*. New York: New Press, 2012. Delpit, a MacArthur Fellow and education professor, discusses the elements of modern-day public education that continues to perpetuate the achievement gap between black and white students, addressing the topic at four stages: infancy, early childhood, adolescence, and college-age.

Hrabowski, Freeman A., Kenneth I. Maton, and

Geoffrey L. Greif. *Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Males*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

The result of extensive and innovative research, *Beating the Odds* goes beyond mere analysis--and beyond the relentlessly negative media images--to show us precisely how young Black men can succeed despite the roadblocks of racism, the temptations of crime and drugs, and a popular culture that values being "cool" over being educated.

Noguera, P. & Wing, J. Y. *Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006. Berkeley High School, named by the *New York Times* as the most diverse high school in the country, is at the center of this investigative and groundbreaking book. Noguera and Wing uncover the hidden practices - including culture, curriculum, after-school activities, and progress-tracking - that contribute to the very apparent achievement gap among the diverse population of students.

Slaughter-Defoe, D. T., & Johnson, D.J. *Visible Now: Blacks in Private Schools*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988. While much has been written on black students in American public schools, this text offers an academic, systematic look at the rising populations of black students selecting private education. Topics discussed include parochial schools, other independent schools, and parent perspectives and engagement.

Steele, C. M. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do (Issues of Our Time)*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011. Claude M. Steele, who has been called "one of the few great social psychologists," offers a vivid first-person account of the research that supports his groundbreaking conclusions on stereotypes and identity. He sheds new light on American

social phenomena from racial and gender gaps in test scores to the belief in the superior athletic prowess of black men, and lays out a plan for mitigating these "stereotype threats" and reshaping American identities.

Tatum, B. D. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations about Race*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Beverly Daniel Tatum, a renowned authority on the psychology of racism, asserts that we do not know how to talk about our racial differences: Whites are afraid of using the wrong words and being perceived as "racist" while parents of color are afraid of exposing their children to painful racial realities too soon. Using real-life examples and the latest research, Tatum presents strong evidence that straight talk about our racial identities-whatever they may be-is essential if we are serious about facilitating communication across racial and ethnic divides. We have waited far too long to begin our conversations about race.

Thompson, Gail L. *African-American Teens Discuss Their Schooling Experiences*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2002. Print. The purpose of this study--based on interviews and questionnaire results from nearly 300 African-American students--is to provide educational policymakers, teachers, counselors, and administrators with feedback that can improve the schooling experiences of all African-American students. African-American teens have high expectations for themselves, their teachers, and their counselors, and they want challenge and rigor instead of a low level of instruction.

Thurston, B. *How to Be Black*. New York, Harper, 2012. Raised by a pro-black, Pan-African single mother during the crack years of 1980s Washington, DC, and educated at Sidwell Friends School and Harvard University, Baratunde Thurston has over thirty years' experience being black. With honest storytelling and biting



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wit, Baratunde plots a path not just to blackness, but one open to anyone interested in simply "how to be."

is about the white world he negotiates the rest of the year, he thinks that maybe this summer things will be different.

comes to a realization that changes his perspective on his ability to succeed in life.

ADULT FICTION

Oates, J. C. *Black Girl/White Girl*. New York: Ecco, 2006. In 1975, Minette, a black girl enrolled at an exclusive, predominantly white college, was found dead, the mysterious case having never been solved. Fifteen years later, her college roommate, Genna, whose upbringing in a privileged, upper class home differed greatly from that of her friend, launches an investigation into the death and uncovers many secrets, including the racial conflicts on campus that contributed to her roommate's downfall.

Southgate, M. *The Fall of Rome: A Novel*. New York: Scribner, 2002. Racial and class divides are at the center of this thoughtful and literary novel set at a predominantly white prep school. The story is told through three central characters: Jerome Washington, an African American teacher who has fully assimilated into the school's white culture, Rashid Bryson, a new African American student who is searching for a mentor, and a new, white teacher who tries to bring them together. When Rashid begins having trouble in school, Jerome blames his lack of discipline. However, when Rashid calls him out on assigning him a purposefully bad grade in class, Jerome realizes his own personal biases and self-hatred are affecting the success of his student.

Whitehead, Colson. *Sag Harbor*. New York: Doubleday, 2009. Benji Cooper is one of the only black students at an elite prep school in Manhattan. After a tragic mishap on his first day of high school, his social doom is sealed for the next four years. But every summer, Benji escapes to the Hamptons, to Sag Harbor, where a small community of African American professionals have built a world of their own. And although he's just as confused about this all-black refuge as he

NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Aronson, M. *Race: A History Beyond Black and White*. New York: Ginee Seo Books, 2007. Aronson tackles the tricky challenge of chronicling the history of race in the western world for younger readers. This historical, philosophical, and theoretical exploration is sure to provoke discussion and debate.

Suskind, R. *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League*. New York: Broadway Books, 2005. At Ballou Senior High, a Washington, D.C. public school troubled by crime and violence, honor students have learned to keep their heads down. But Cedric Jennings will not swallow his pride, and with unwavering support from his mother, he studies and strives as if his life depends on it--and it does. The summer after his junior year, at a program for minorities at MIT, he gets a fleeting glimpse of life outside, a glimpse that turns into a face-on challenge one year later: acceptance into Brown University, an Ivy League school.

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

Flake, S. G. *You Don't Even Know Me*. New York: Jump at the Sun, 2010. In 9 stories and 15 poems, Sharon G. Flake provides insight into the minds of a diverse group adolescent African American males.

Myers, W. D. *Slam!* New York: Scholastic Press, 1996. Seventeen-year old "Slam" Harris is close to graduating high school and depending on his basketball talents to take him far away from the dangers and temptations of the inner city he's known all his life. His struggles in school and difficulties with his home life begin leading him down the wrong path, until he

Woodson, J. *If You Come Softly*. New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1998. After meeting at their private school in New York, fifteen-year-old Jeremiah, who is black and whose parents are separated, and Ellie, who is white and whose mother has twice abandoned her, fall in love and then try to cope with people's reactions.

