Juneteenth and Freedom:  
Reading Across Time, and Space

The Rockbridge Historical Society’s Mission is grounded in educational outreach: K-12 classrooms, lifelong learning, virtual programming and standing resources. Here, we complement our core focus on local history, with historical and thematic ties that broaden African-American histories: nationally, chronologically, and thematically. Many of those Rockbridge histories can be explored through RHS programs, articles, image galleries, and videos gathered in our virtual portal:

RHS Local Black Histories

Juneteenth Narratives traditionally center on transitions from enslavement to emancipation. While those experiences are well represented here, in non-fiction and fiction, these reading recommendations from RHS highlight the integrity and interconnection of a wider sweep of African American cultural experience. These books’ artistic variety and their reach through time jointly help to illuminate visions of freedom (and its constraints and contradictions), bringing both color and currency to historical journeys, kaleidoscoping others’ pasts, with our present perspectives.

This reading list gathers over 50 titles, subdivided by genre, era, and themes. Two sections more specifically highlight fiction, non-fiction and illustrated books for children & YoungAdult readers.

Other institutions have also collaborated to shape a community-wide Juneteenth Reading List, tailoring their own range of topical, age-leveled suggestions: from university libraries, to our public libraries and children’s reading lists.

For other local and national overviews of Juneteenth, as a sustained and growing civic holiday:

Eric Wilson, Celebrating Juneteenth in Lexington, 2021
Project Horizon and Nelson Gallery, Juneteenth Art Show 2020:
Eric Wilson, Journeys to Juneteenth, 2018
Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & PBS, What is Juneteenth?
New York Times Interactive, How We Juneteenth

Click the Hotlinked Titles Below to Explore Further
On Juneteenth (Annette Gordon-Reed)

Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African-America, 1619-2019 (I. Kendi, Keisha Blain)

Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War (Chandra Manning)

The Thin Light of Freedom: The Civil War and Emancipation in the Herat of America (Ed Ayers)

Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom and Equality in the Twilight of Slavery (Joseph Reidy)

Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Freedom, 1790s through the Civil War (Melvin Patrick Ely)

The Negro’s Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union (James McPherson)

The Black Civil War Soldier: A Visual History of Conflict and Citizenship (Deborah Willis)

Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War’s Most Persistent Myth (Kevin Levin)
Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, the Rise of Jim Crow (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.)
The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication & White Supremacy in Confederate Memory (Adam Domby)
A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching (Paula J. Giddings)

The African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.)
Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom (David Blight)
Harriet Jacobs: A Life (Jean Fagin Yellin)
The Souls of Black Folk  (W.E.B. Du Bois)

The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance  (Alain Locke)

The Original Black Elite: Daniel Murray and the Story of a Forgotten Era  (Elizabeth D. Taylor)

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

The Overground Railroad: The Green Book & Roots of Black Travel in America  (Candacy Taylor)

Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights  (Gretchen Sorin)

Nobody Turn Me Around: A People’s History of the March on Washington  (Charles Euchner)

All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half Century of Brown v. Board  (Charles Ogletree, Jr)

Locked Out: Finding Freedom and Education after Prince Edward County Closed its Schools  (Alfred Cobb)
The Fire Next Time (James Baldwin)
The Fire This Time (Jesmyn Ward)
Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America (Ibram X. Kendi)

More Titles Follow:

Fiction, Folktales, Poems
Young Adult Fiction and Non-Fiction
Chapter Books and Illustrated Books for Young Readers
Fiction, Folktales, Poems:

Beloved (Morrison)

The Known World (Edward P. Jones)

Juneteenth (Ralph Ellison)

Invisible Man (Ralph Ellison)

The Underground Railroad (Colson Whitehead)

The Good Lord Bird (James McBride)

The Annotated African American Folktales (Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Maria Tatar)

African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song (Kevin Young)
Young Adult Fiction & Non-Fiction

**Stamped: Racism, Anti-Racism and You** (Jason Reynolds, Ibram X. Kendi)

**The Dream Keeper and Other Poems** (Langston Hughes)

**Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow** (Henry Louis Gates, Tonya Bolden)

**Dear Martin** (Nic Stone)

**Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass** (Frederick Douglass)

**Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl** (Harriet Jacobs)

**She Persisted: Harriet Tubman** (Andrea Davis Pinkney, Chelsea Clinton)

**Their Eyes Were Watching God** (Zora Neale Hurston)
Autobiography of Malcom X (as told to Alex Haley)

X (Ilyasah Shabazz)

Betty Before X (Ilyasah Shabazz, Renee Watson)

Finding Langston (Lesa Cline-Ransome)

Brown Girl Dreaming (Jacqueline Woodson)

Remember: The Road to School Integration (Toni Morrison)

The Girl from the Tar Paper School: Barbara Johns and the Advent of the Civil Rights Movement (Teri Kanefield)
Young Readers

That is My Dream: Illustrated Dream Variations  (Langston Hughes)

Little Dreamers: Visionary Women Around the World  (Toni Morrison)

Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom  (Carole Boston Weatherford)

Rosa  (Nikki Giovanni)

Overground Railroad: A Girl in the Great Migration  (Lesa Cline-Ransome)

Martin Luther King and the March on Washington  (Frances Ruffin)

For More Resources and Educational Links:
RHS Local Black Histories