

This column is by Lily Collins, a staff member at the Kirkland Town Library and a rising senior at Clinton Central School.

Hundreds of thousands of people around the nation are attending Black Lives Matter protests and demonstrations following the death of George Floyd. With peaceful protests held in Utica and Clinton, issues of racism and equality feel close to home and leave many wondering “how can I help?” Two of the many ways that you can be an ally are to educate yourself and support work produced by black creators. There are countless fantastic books written by black authors that often don’t receive the same recognition as work from white authors - nonfiction books that explore racism in our society, stories that depict race in fictional contexts, and fiction novels that simply provide much needed diversity to the genre. Please note that for the purpose of this column, I focused on more contemporary authors, and left out some remarkable authors like Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. Below are a few of my favorite books by black authors, ranging from incredible nonfiction to captivating fiction.

A book you may have heard a lot about recently- for good reason- is *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. This book is an incredible read that helped define the antithesis of racism not as passivism, but as antiracism. Even further, he says that political actions must be either racist, upholding a system that oppresses black people, or antiracist, working to dismantle that system. He uses deeply personal connections to his own struggle with cancer to tie together how racism is a cancer. Kendi’s book is a powerful read on the importance of action and considering how actions that one may not consider to be racist or antiracist could have greater effects.

One of my favorite authors is Ta-Nehisi Coates. His work ranges from collections of essays on racism in *We Were Eight Years in Power*, which includes powerful pieces on race, and an interesting perspective on the Obama presidency to historical-science fiction. His first novel, *The Water Dancer*, is a beautifully written novel set in the Antebellum-era South. A young black man learns he has the power to travel great distances by water. This novel is a powerful storytelling vessel, and I highly recommend reading it. Coates has also written memoirs, such as *The Beautiful Struggle*, as well as several *Black Panther* comics.

For more fiction, another fantastic author is Justina Ireland. One of her most well known books, *Dread Nation*, is a YA historical fiction novel, depicting the story of Jane McKnee, born in the aftermath of an alternate history/sci-fi version of the Civil War. In this timeline, zombies rise from the battlefields of Gettysburg. Jane is trained to fight zombies alongside other young POC, but yearns to escape a life that discounts her because of her race. Ireland combines fascinating science fiction with a dark historical context to make for a great read.

While coming up with this list, I looked at my bookshelf and realized that the amount of books by white authors outnumbered books by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). I've been inspired to actively seek out more books by black authors. Going forward, I'm making it a point to consume content from more diverse creators - not just books, but TV shows, movies, and podcasts. As a white person, I've learned a lot from listening to the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement and other black voices, and I encourage others to do the same.