

The Virtual Dickens Universe 2020
Readings on Anti-Racism and Anti-Racist Pedagogy
Introduced and Annotated by Brigitte Fielder and Ryan Fong

Introduction:

An antiracist reading list is, by definition, an insufficient form for addressing racism. We present this list nonetheless, as a potentially useful resource, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with these topics. The necessity and usefulness of this list illustrates a gap in education about race and racism. Education about these topics has primarily been attended to by nonwhite people themselves — people with experiential expertise in racism’s workings and effects. While white people may turn to such resources in a moment of crisis, nonwhite people have been in a perpetual moment of crisis in which they have not been able to safely avoid attending to these topics. Historically, we have taught ourselves and our children about racism’s dangers and workings, educated ourselves and one another in the absence of access to formal education about our histories, literatures, and experiences, and created writing and art and entire fields of scholarship in which we can center our lives, as a counter to the historical degradation and erasure of nonwhite people within mainstream media forms.

While antiracism and antiracist writing are not new, this genre’s prominence in our current moment signals a certain kind of attention to writing and education about race and racism. Such education emerges from the failures of educational systems — inside and beyond the US, from primary to higher education — to sufficiently address the histories, literatures, and experiences of nonwhite people. As we take up Frances Harper’s final novel *Iola Leroy* (1892) for the 2021 Dickens Universe, we recognize that our communities will need to attend to issues of race and racism — from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first — in ways that we may not have previously.

This list is meant to offer a hopefully useful entry into reading and thinking about race, racism, and antiracism, particularly for those who have had the privilege not to have had to learn about these things previously. It is also one that has been generated and organized with the context of the Dickens Universe and our Victorianist colleagues in mind. Please keep in mind, it is not, by any means, meant to be exhaustive. We have not, for instance, included many of the bestselling books on anti-racism that are geared toward a general audience, such as Carol Anderson’s *White Race*, Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to Be Anti-Racist*, and Ijeoma Olou’s *So You Want to Talk About Race*, among others, which feature on many anti-racist reading lists. Rather, this list looks ahead to our discussions at next year’s Universe and serves as a relatively small supplement to other reading suggestions to come in Frances Harper studies, transatlantic Black studies, Black Victorian studies, and work in Dickens studies on race and racism—all of which will make available after the Virtual Dickens Universe and in the lead up to the 2021 Universe. It was also made knowing that many of us are thinking about our teaching amidst the ongoing global protests against anti-Black violence and in the hopes that these readings might inform choices about syllabus construction and pedagogical approaches.

Frames and Key Questions:

Lauren Michele Jackson, “What is an Anti-Racist Reading List For?” *Vulture*. (4 June 2020).
<https://www.vulture.com/2020/06/anti-racist-reading-lists-what-are-they-for.html>

This short essay in many ways expands on the points made in the introduction above. It also lucidly articulates the complex issues that surround the production of anti-racist reading lists and how they have become a genre in themselves. It highlights the need to think deeply about how one engages with texts about anti-racism and about how one cultivates a sense of responsibility and accountability to them.

Pirette McKamey. "What Anti-Racist Teachers Do Differently". *The Atlantic*. (17 June 2020). <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2020/06/how-be-anti-racist-teacher/613138/?fbclid=IwAR238cFFTGygmYJhiUcbYEvyzKoQ9ePyokOCFEyp07Hd1n2I0x1I0Cr2BRy>

This brief piece is written primarily about the high school context, but McKamey uses her decades of experience as a Black teacher serving Black students to outline salient principles of anti-racist teaching. It usefully centers the questions around how we meet Black student needs especially, and the importance of centering those needs in our work in the classroom.

Robin D.G. Kelley. "Black Study, Black Struggle." *The Boston Review*. (7 March 2016). http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle?fbclid=IwAR2Bhvzt0U_UGknT6yCZZwj-XHhzmkefBr7kV_QTUNI-HMWeVbsiCIryMCg

Kelley grapples with the tension that often arises for us and our students around the relationship between activism and academics. Kelley's expertise as a historian of Black freedom struggles and Black radical thought grounds his own work as an activist, and forms the backdrop for his insightful and inspiring approach to study and critical engagement.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigidity, Education and Society* 1.1 (2012): 1-40.

<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554>

As "decolonization" becomes a buzzword in Victorian studies circles, especially, Tuck and Yang offer a powerful critique of way the term is deployed in academic contexts and how these uses divorce it from its radical political underpinnings. The essay has received some pushback, especially in its discussion of slavery, but it has also generated an important set of conversations academic institutions and practices nonetheless.

Race and Racism in Victorian Studies

Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, and Amy Wong. "Undisciplining Victorian Studies." *Los Angeles Review of Books*. (10 July 2020).

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/undisciplining-victorian-studies/>

Many have likely read this piece, which will be published in an expanded form, as the introduction to a special issue of *Victorian Studies* (forthcoming September 2020). Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong outline the belatedness with which our field has engaged with race and racism as one of its central concerns, and urges us to remedy this fact, by making connections with other fields and by recuperating previous interventions.

Carolyn Betensky. "Casual Racism in Victorian Literature," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 47.4 (2019): 723–751.

This article is also one that many are already familiar with. In it, Betensky offers an account of the ways in which racism comes to be casually accepted as the constitutive background of our understandings of the Victorian period and our practices for studying it. She shows how this impacts our scholarship and research, Betensky incorporates an analysis and examination of teaching and pedagogy as well.

Black Studies and BIPOC Scholars in the Academy

P. Gabrielle Foreman, “A Riff, A Call, and A Response: Reframing the Problem That Led to Our Being Tokens in Ethnic and Gender Studies; or, Where Are We Going Anyway and with Whom Will We Travel?” *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 30.2 (2013): 306-322. Foreman’s essay makes it clear that we cannot do Black studies work responsibly without including Black scholars. It underscores the necessity of citing Black scholars and centering their perspectives in research about Black literature and culture, as a way of addressing the structural racism of the academy.

Patricia A. Matthew, “Here on the Margins: My Academic Home.” *PMLA* 130.5 (2015): 1510-14.

Matthew offers a set of personal and political reflections that consider, in part, how her experiences of racism and mentoring in resistance to it inspired her edited collection, *Written / Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure* (UNC Press, 2016). Matthew offers these insights in the context of her work on British literature in the early nineteenth century.

Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke UP, 2012. Part of her larger body of work on structural racism in the academy, Ahmed’s book undertakes a cogent and unflinching analysis of “diversity work” in academic contexts, especially, and shows how it can reinforce structures of racism and white supremacy in the name of addressing it.

Best Practices for Teaching Early Black and African American Literature

Koritha Mitchell, “The N-word and the Classroom: Just Say No.”

<https://soundcloud.com/c19podcast/nword>

In this C19 Podcast, Mitchell clearly outlines the reasons why racist slurs should not be used in the classroom, even if they appear in the text. She offers a useful set of guidelines for still engaging with these materials productively in the course discussion and building an anti-racist ethos within a classroom community. See also the materials on her website:

<http://www.korithamitchell.com/teaching-and-the-n-word/>

P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al, “Writing About Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help.”

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A4TEdDgYsIX-hlKezLodMIM71My3KTN0zxRv0IQTOQs/edit>

This document was sourced by leading experts in Black and African American studies about using more anti-racist terminologies when writing and teaching about slavery. It helped inform the community guidelines around appropriate language for The Virtual Universe.