

“United States: Decades of Social Change” List for Teens

Fiction

[The Moves Make the Man](#) by Bruce Brooks

Jerome Foxworthy, the token black in his newly integrated junior high school, is an exceptional student and athlete who knows all the right moves on and off the basketball court. His friendship with Bix Rivers begins in homemaking class and continues on the court, where Jerome attempts to teach Bix about moves. Bix, who feels that such fakes are lies, is ultimately forced to make some moves that result in his disappearance. Jerome is left to tell the truth about Bix.

[The Tequila Worm](#) by Viola Canales

This novel is filled with cheerful characters and funny stories from the Mexican barrios in Texas where Sofia is growing up among an interesting and loving group of family and friends. When she is called a “taco head” by a student at her school, she decides to “kick that girl” by getting better grades, and being a better soccer player than her tormentor. As a result of this determination, Sofia is offered a scholarship to the elite Saint Luke’s school in Austin. Can she survive family separation and homesickness, and what does she learn about herself?



[Sweetgrass Basket](#) by Marlene Carvell

Mohawk sisters Mattie and Sarah try to be good when after their mother’s death their father sends them to Pennsylvania's Carlisle Indian Boarding School at the turn of the twentieth century. He believes it's best, but the children suffer cruel abuse. Mattie, falsely accused of stealing, is beaten and publicly shamed, and things only get worse. The sisters tell their story in alternating first-person, free-verse narratives, which reveal their close bond, their longing for home, and the vicious pressure to assimilate.



[Jericho Walls](#) by Kristi Collier

The Clawson family has moved from Illinois to Jericho, Josephine's father's hometown, where he's accepted a call to the ministry. For Josephine, the adjustment is very difficult. In addition to the normal problems faced by any girl of her age, like trying to fit in and make friends in a new town, she must face her own personal demons. She lies in an attempt to become popular and struggles with internal and external pressures to conform. She also faces the confusion and conflicts posed by the times and culture, including Jim Crow laws and strict constraints imposed on females.

[Mississippi Trial, 1955](#) by Chris Crowe

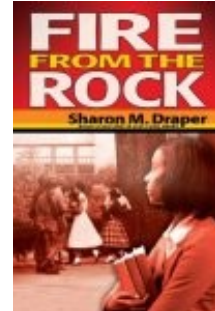
Hiram Hillburn has resented his civil-rights-minded father ever since the age of nine, when his parents moved him from his adored grandfather's home in Greenwood, Miss., to the more liberal climate of an Arizona college town. Now that he is 16, Hiram has finally been permitted to visit Grampa Hillburn again. He soon meets Emmett Till from Chicago, who is also visiting relatives for the summer. Hiram suspects a childhood friend of being involved with Emmett’s subsequent murder, and becomes a witness in the nationally influential court case. For a more factual account of this real event, see [Getting Away With Murder](#) also by Chris Crowe at the end of this list.

[The Watsons go to Birmingham, 1963](#) by Christopher Paul Curtis

Ten-year-old Kenny's tale of his trouble making teenage brother Byron and his family is at times a side-splitting humorous tale of an African American family living in Flint, Michigan. That drastically changes as they drive through segregated states to deliver Byron to Grandma Sands in Birmingham, Alabama to see if she can straighten him out over the summer. In the summer of 1963 Birmingham is a dangerous place.

[Fire from the Rock](#) by Sharon M. Draper

Sylvia is excited about going to the local high school with all her friends, but all that changes when she is selected to be one of the students selected to be the first African-Americans to attend the all white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. She has important decisions to make that will affect not only Sylvia but all African-Americans. If she attends her segregated school, she's guaranteed a good education as well as an abundance of activities and an assured social life. If she goes to Central, she will be prohibited from participating in clubs, sports and all social events, and will definitely be subjected to threats and danger to herself and her family.



[The Liberation of Gabriel King](#) by G.L. Going

It's the summer of 1976 in a small town in Georgia. Gabriel King has just finished fourth grade and is scared about fifth. In fact, he's scared of many things: spiders, alligators, falling into the toilet, killer robots, corpses, swinging off the rope swing, his neighbor Mr. Evans and bullies at school. His best friend Frita is out to liberate Gabriel from his fears. She has him make a list of them and work through them one at a time. However, Frita, who is African-American, has fears of her own and the story becomes a study of standing up to fears and to bullies, from the schoolyard to the Ku Klux Klan.

[New Boy](#) by Julian Houston

Houston convincingly gets inside a young man's mind as he grapples with major issues confronting him and his race. Wanting something better than a segregated education in 1950s Virginia, high school sophomore Rob Garrett enrolls as the first African-American student at an exclusive Connecticut boarding school. Alone--in many ways--for the first time, Rob searches his soul about issues that still divide American society.



[The Strength of Saints](#) by A. LaFaye

In 1936, fourteen-year-old Nissa takes a stand against racial prejudice and for her own integrity and independence, drawing on the support of her individualistic mother, her father, stepmother, and some of the inhabitants of their Louisiana town. Prequels are [The Year of the Sawdust Man](#) and [Nissa's Place](#).

[The Stones of Mourning Creek](#) by Diane Les Becquets

This tragic and violent novel is set in Alabama in the 1960s. Following her mother's death Francie develops a controversial and dangerous friendship with a colored girl her own age. Francie first meets Ruthie after the heroine is bitten by a poisonous snake on the banks of Mourning Creek, and Ruthie alerts her mother, who provides a healing remedy. The story unfolds of a town in the grip of an evil and powerful man, Harvey Mansfield, and the complicity of the local law-enforcement establishment that allows racism and violence to go unpunished.

Devil on my Heels by Joyce McDonald

It is 1958 and the townspeople of Benevolence, Florida, are coping with anxieties brought on by the Cold War and the recent Civil Rights Movements. Fifteen-year-old Dove has spent her life as the sheltered daughter of a respected orange grove owner. Dove opens a Pandora's box when she tries to protect Gator, an African-American picker and childhood friend, from white bullies. Dove soon discovers that many people in Benevolence adhere to a code of silence when it comes to treatment of the nonwhite workers.

White Lilacs by Carolyn Meyer

In a story based on the actual events that occurred in Quakertown, Texas, in the 1920s, the residents of an entire African-American community known as Freedomtown are forced to relocate so that a park can be built in the area. The Freedomtowners' indignation dwindles down to a trickle of unrest and, eventually, resignation after a Klan cross-burning, the destruction of the local school and several other frightening, dispiriting events. Ultimately, this story is about relationships and the difficulties that can be endured when caring people come together. The sequel is *Jubilee Journey*.



A Summer of Kings by Han Nolan

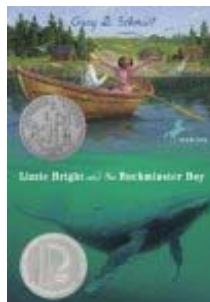
Overshadowed by perfect siblings and saddled with a reputation as a slow, stubborn, late bloomer, 14-year-old Esther expects the summer of 1963 to be life-changing. Her hopes are fulfilled when her parents offer a room in their Westchester, New York, mansion to an African American refugee from southern racial violence, whom some call a murderer, others a “victim of prejudice and circumstance.”

Hiding Mr. McMulty by Berniece Rabe

In southern Missouri in 1937, Rass Whitley is frustrated by his stern father's injustices. For solace he visits with kindly Mr. McMulty, a black sharecropper who lives nearby. When a drainage dike gives way and sweeps a huge wall of water upon the Whitleys, Rass ignores his father's order to save the mules and saves his father instead. With the house destroyed and, far worse, no way to plow without mules, the family is reduced to sharecropper status and little hope. Their landlord orders Mr. McMulty to vacate his house for the Whitleys and to leave the land he had hoped to buy. When the landlord's prized calf is destroyed, everyone knows McMulty is guilty, but only Rass knows where the wounded man is hiding, and he must decide what to do.

Under the Blood-Red Sun by Graham Salisbury

Tomikazu Nakaji's biggest concerns are baseball, homework, and a local bully, until life with his Japanese family in Hawaii changes drastically after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Sequel is *House of the Red Fish*.



Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy by Gary D Schmidt

The year is 1912, and Turner Buckminster III has a mighty cross to bear: his family has just moved from Boston to Phippsburg, Maine; no one in Maine seems to throw a baseball so he can hit it; and, worst of all, he is the minister's son. That is until he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, an African-American girl from nearby Malaga Island, who teaches him how to hit a Maine baseball and doesn't hold his parentage against him. But the tide is turning against Malaga Island, a settlement of some 50-plus outcasts, very poor and mostly black: the

good elders of Phippsburg want to replace the failing ship-building industry with tourism, and the collective eyesore that is the Malaga community will just have to go. Based on real events.

My Mother the Cheerleader by Rob Sharenow

Thirteen-year-old Louise thinks that her life simply couldn't be any more boring. The year is 1960, and her mother has yanked her out of school because an African-American child, Ruby Bridges, has been enrolled in first grade. So Louise has nothing to do except tons of chores in her mother's run-down New Orleans boardinghouse. Her mother Pauline spends her mornings with the "Cheerleaders," the local women who gather to heckle Ruby and shout racial epithets at her as she enters the school. One day, a handsome man steps out of a late-model Chevy Bel Air and rents a room. Morgan Miller, who has supposedly come down from New York to visit family, has ties to *The Daily Worker*. Through conversations with Morgan and firsthand observations, Louise begins to wonder about the morality of the Cheerleaders' activities.

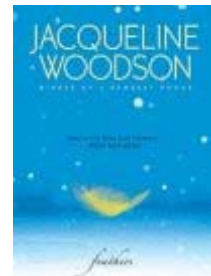
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

This 1977 Newbery Medal winner tells the saga, part of the series about the Logan Family from the 1860's through the 1940's. Most of the stories take place in the 1930's in Mississippi, and show a family dealing with racial discrimination, and parents leading them to understand their own self worth, and how to safely maneuver through the social climate they live in. The "Logan Family Saga" includes: *The Land*, *The Well*, *Mississippi Bridge*, *Song of the Trees*, *The Friendship*, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, *Let the Circle be Unbroken*, and *The Road to Memphis*.

Feathers by Jacqueline Woodson

When a new, white student nicknamed "The Jesus Boy" joins her sixth grade class in the winter of 1971, Frannie's growing friendship with him makes her start to see some things in a new light.

"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, And sings the tune—without the words, And never stops at all." The words of Emily Dickinson, mixed with the exquisite, spare prose of this short novel, float through this gentle story like a feather. On one hand, this is a book about bullies and good girls and social and racial stratification. On the other, it is the story of a family holding itself together through many trials.



Face Relations: 11 Stories about Seeing Beyond Color by Marilyn Singer (Short Stories 808.831 Si643)

"White men taught us how to be Indians. Before that, we were just people," says a character in Joseph Bruchac's "Skins," one of the 11 stories in this anthology of tales about characters confronting race. Writers including Ellen Wittlinger, M. E. Kerr, Rita Williams-Garcia, and Naomi Shihab Nye. The stories ask challenging questions about what role race plays in family life, at school, in friendships, and in love. The characters come from a wide range of backgrounds: in one story, a high-school journalist tries to expose the discrimination that Haitian students feel from other black students; in another, a young Palestinian immigrant in Texas copes with the backlash of prejudice that immediately followed 9/11. This is a provocative collection will encourage you to think and talk about what race means.

Nonfiction

[*A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968*](#) by Diane McWhorter (J 323.1196 M4599) Explores the sacrifices and triumphs of African Americans in their pursuit of social and political equality, and examines the often violent resistance they met from white Americans.



[*Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*](#) by Chris Crowe (364.1523 C8861)

Most American history books don't include Emmett Till, the black 14-year-old from Chicago who was brutally murdered while visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta in 1954. But the gruesome, racially motivated crime and the court's failure to convict the white murderers was a powerful national catalyst for the civil rights movement. Crowe details what happened on the horrible night, the court proceedings, and how the nation responded-- the "aftershocks" of the unbelievable ruling. Crowe is particularly successful in placing the murder within its larger historical context. Four months after Till was killed, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus, and the wheels of the civil rights movement were set in motion.

[*Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*](#) by Ellen Levine (973.0496 L578)

Participants in historic events of the Civil Rights movement share their own experiences with segregation and participating in integration of schools, boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives.

[*Rosa*](#) by Nikki Giovanni (Picture Book—P Giovanni)

With passionate, direct words and large watercolor and collage illustrations, this winner of both the Caldecott and Coretta Scott King Medals is a picture book biography which shows Rosa Parks as a political activist whose refusal to give up her seat on the bus in 1955 helped spark the crucial bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

[*Indian School: Teaching the White Man's Way*](#) by Michael L. Cooper (J 370.8997 C7869)

From the late 1800s to the 1930s thousands of American Indian children were educated in government-run boarding schools, which were scattered around the Northeast and Western United States. Carlisle, Pennsylvania, had the most well-known school because of its superior athletic teams and the notoriety of Jim Thorpe and Pop Warner. It was a federally supported school set up to teach Indian children to live as white men. There are times in American history that are not at all flattering, this is one of them.

