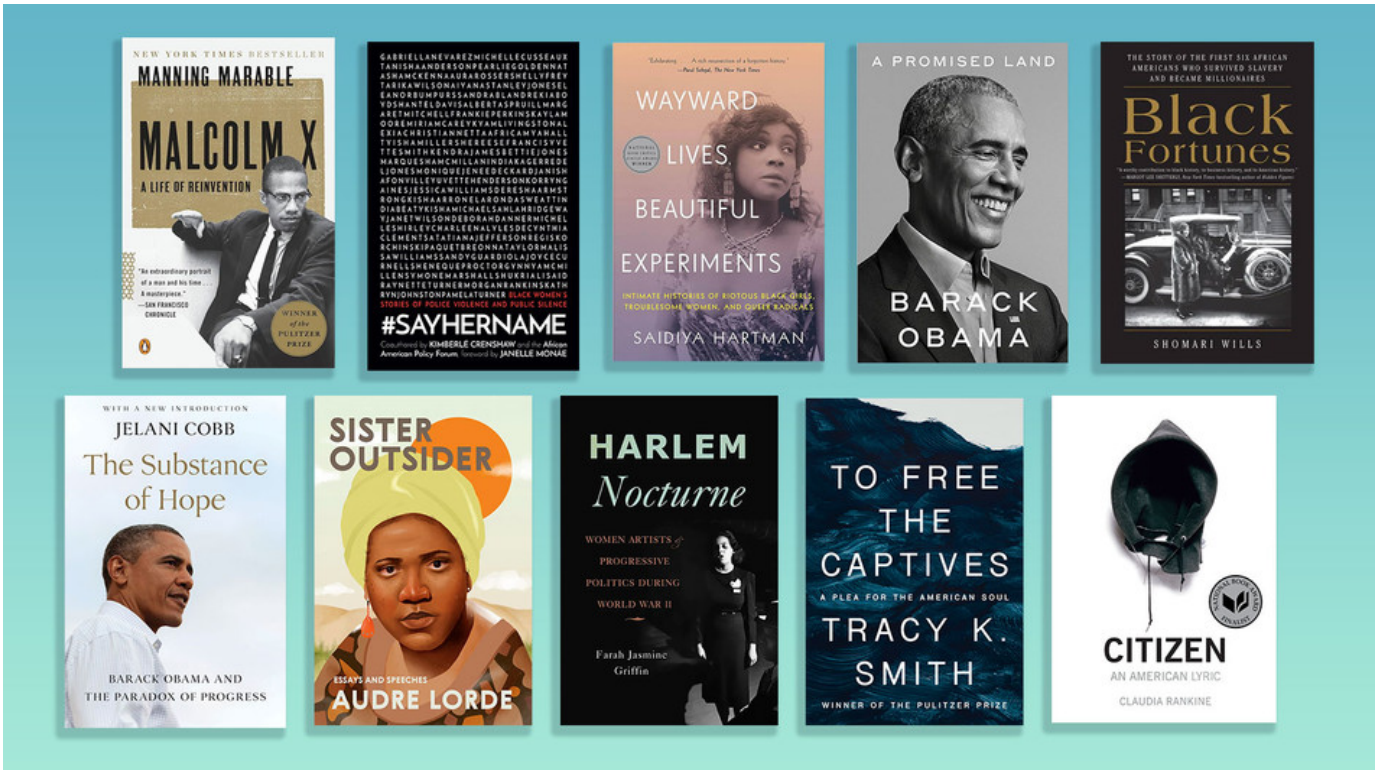
Books

10 Books to Read for Black History Month, All by Columbia Authors

By
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February is Black History Month, a time to celebrate the remarkable achievements of Black Americans and to celebrate and learn about the influence of Black heritage and culture. These ten books, all by Columbia faculty and alumni, are a good place to continue that education.

A Promised Land

By Barack Obama ’83CC

It would be impossible to mark Black History Month without a deep dive into the legacy of America’s first Black president, whose election was a major milestone for many African-Americans. Barack Obama’s third book is a meditation on his first years in office and on many of the traumas and triumphs he experienced.

Black Fortunes

By Shomari Wills ’13JRN

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the shadow of slavery still hanging over the country, a small group of African-Americans managed to do something remarkable — become millionaires. Journalist Shomari Wills profiles six of them, including Robert Reed Church, a former slave who became the largest landowner in Tennessee, and Annie Turnbo Malone, a self-taught chemist who used her scientific knowledge to create a hair-care empire. It's an inspiring story of ingenuity and perseverance, but also of commitment to the common good: nearly all of Wills’s subjects donated a significant portion of their fortunes to civil-rights causes.

Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention

By Manning Marable

Manning Marable, a self-described “public historian and radical intellectual” and a professor of African-American studies, history, and public affairs at Columbia, had a lifelong fascination with Malcolm X, calling him “the most remarkable figure produced by 20th-century Black America.” Marable’s 2011 biography of Malcolm X was the result of years of scholarship and became a fitting capstone to a remarkable career. Marable died just after it was published and was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2012.

To Free the Captives

By Tracy K. Smith ’97SOA

Despite the burden of seemingly insurmountable generational trauma, Tracy K. Smith graduated from Harvard and Columbia and went on to become the twenty-second poet laureate of the United States. In this gorgeously rendered hybrid of memoir and family history, Smith seeks to understand and celebrate the “titanic” strength it took for her family to succeed in a world intent on seeing them fail.

#SayHerName

By Kimberlé Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum

When we think about police violence, we generally picture its male victims, since those are the ones that have gotten widespread media attention. But as Columbia law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw makes clear in her new book, Black women and girls have also been harmed and killed by the police, and their stories deserve to be heard. Crenshaw, who coined the terms “critical race theory” and “intersectionality,” is a leading authority on civil rights and Black feminist legal theory, making her a fitting guide for this important topic.

Citizen

By Claudia Rankine ’93SOA

Poet Claudia Rankine won the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Citizen*, a powerful exploration of the racial aggressions that she and other Black Americans face every day. Interweaving text — a book-length poem and several “lyric essays” — with images of paintings, drawings, and sculptures, as well as screen grabs from digital media, she uses the book to document the individual and collective impact of racism in contemporary society.

Sister Outsider

By Audre Lorde ’60LS

Audre Lorde was a poet, librarian, professor, and feminist icon who spent her life working against racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. *Sister Outsider*, a collection of Lorde’s speeches and essays, has become a mainstay of Black, women’s, and queer studies. Lyrical and powerful, it’s an essential introduction to Lorde’s writing and a call to arms.

Harlem Nocturne

By Farah Jasmine Griffin

Harlem is famous for its cultural Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s. But Columbia literature professor Farah Jasmine Griffin argues that the war years that followed, when the neighborhood became a center of progressivism, were equally exciting. In *Harlem Nocturne*, she profiles three women artists — choreographer and dancer Pearl Primus, composer and pianist Mary Lou Williams, and novelist Ann Petry — who were a key part of this important cultural and political moment.

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments

By Saidiya Hartman

In her 2019 book, the winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism, Columbia literature professor Saidiya Hartman blends history and fiction to reimagine the lives of Black women in New York and Philadelphia at the beginning of the twentieth century. “The wild idea that animates this book is that young black women were radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways to live and never failed to consider how the world might be otherwise,” writes Hartman.

The Substance of Hope

By Jelani Cobb

Columbia Journalism School dean Jelani Cobb, a prominent scholar of race, politics, and American history, first published this book, about the monumental significance of Barack Obama's ascent to the Oval Office, in 2010. Cobb traces the factors that led to Obama's rise and his hopes for the country that elected him. A decade-plus later, the country looks a little different than Cobb imagined, and in the latest edition , released in 2020 with a new introduction, he reflects on the way Obama's historic presidency continues to shape America.

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