

EDUCATION

How to Teach Kids About What's Happening in Ferguson

A crowdsourced syllabus about race, African American history, civil rights, and policing

By Marcia Chatelain



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When the unrest in Ferguson erupted, my husband made an observation that broke

my heart: “The kids were supposed to start school today.”

For me, the perfume of synthetic fibers and freshly sharpened pencils always signals the start of a new school year, and it makes me ecstatic. As a child, the ritual began with a trip to the uniform store. My older sister and I trekked onto Clark Street via a city bus. Each year, we found ourselves before the counters of what had to be the world’s largest purveyor of Catholic school uniforms. “St. Margaret Mary, please,” we would say. The elderly salesman would fetch my mostly polyester wardrobe for the upcoming school year—a plaid jumper, pleated skirts, Peter Pan-collared blouse, acrylic cardigans—carefully folded in individual plastic bags.

I loved the preparations for the first day of school so much that I became a college professor. I’ve spent most of my 34 Augusts anticipating a school year.

From the beginning of the situation in Ferguson, news reports alerted the public that Michael Brown was to start college soon. Before surveillance videos and photographs of protestors with their hands up were available, people saw a stoic Brown in a bright orange, probably acetate graduation gown. He will not have a first day ever again. And for the children of Ferguson, who have yet to have their first day, they may remember the smell of death, the odor of tear gas, the stench of an American tragedy.

In this kind of situation, people all say, what can I do? I have few talents in a crisis, but I do know I’m pretty good at teaching, and I knew Ferguson would be a challenge for teachers: When schools opened across the country, how were they going to talk about what happened? My idea was simple, but has resonated across the country: Reach out to the educators who use Twitter. Ask them to commit to talking about Ferguson on the first day of classes. Suggest a book, an article, a film, a song, a piece of artwork, or an assignment that speaks to some aspect of Ferguson. Use the hashtag: [#FergusonSyllabus](#).

From a children’s book about living with someone with PTSD to maps of St. Louis’s school-desegregation struggles to J. Cole’s “Be Free,” the Ferguson archive was tweeted, re-tweeted, mentioned, and favorited thousands of times. A small community has formed; the fabric of this group is woven across disciplines and

cultural climates. Some of us will talk about Ferguson forcefully, others gingerly, but from preschool classrooms to postdoctoral seminars, Ferguson is on the syllabus.

The following list was compiled by a community of teachers, academics, community leaders, and parents to teach about some aspect of the national crisis in Ferguson, Missouri. This is a snapshot of the recommendations that has been edited. The contributions continue on Twitter.

Teaching About Race and Ferguson

“The Danger of a Single Story”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TedTalk

“A Talk to Teachers,” in *The Price of the Ticket, Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985*

James Baldwin

“Constructing a Conversation on

Race”

Charles M. Blow, *New York Times*

“Ferguson Killing Inspires Young Black

Activists”

Frederica Boswell, NPR

“On Recognizing My White Privilege

as a Parent in the Face of Ferguson”

Elizabeth Broadbent, xoJane

“5 Ways to Teach Michael Brown and

Ferguson in the New School Year”

Christopher Emdin, blog

“#FergusonSyllabus”

Kathee Godfrey, blog

“Teaching About Ferguson”

Julian Hipkins, Teaching for Change

“#FergusonSyllabus: The #FergusonFiasco and Teaching African American Theology”

Andre E. Johnson, blog

“What Do We Teach When Kids Are Dying? #MichaelBrown”

Chris Lehman, blog

“What White Children Need to Know About Race”

Ali Michad and Eleonora Bartoli, nais.org

“Between the By-Road & the Main Road: Curated Bibliography on Whiteness, Silence & Teaching”

Mary Ann Reilly, blog

“Reading Ferguson: books on race, police, protest and U.S. history”

Hector Tobar, *Los Angeles Times*

“Educators Use Twitter To Teach About Ferguson, Build Syllabuses”

Erica Smith, "St. Louis on the Air," St. Louis Public Radio

Healing Days: A Guide For Kids Who Have Experienced Trauma

Susan Straus

“12 Things White People Can Do Now because Ferguson”

Janee Woods, *Quartz*

“#Ferguson”

zotero.org

African-American History/Civil Rights in the United States

“SNCC Women, Denim and the Politics of Dress”

Tansha Ford, *Journal of Southern History*

100 Years of Lynchings

Ralph Ginzburg

Bombingham

Anthony Grooms

African-American Identity in the Gilded Age

The Library of Congress

Stalking the Angel of Death: The Lynching Calendar

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Alex Haley

Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America

Melissa Harris-Perry

“Black Power”

Speech delivered by C.L.R. James, 1967

“How the Children of Birmingham Changed the Civil-Rights Movement”

Lottie L. Joiner, *The Daily Beast*

Black Liberation in the Midwest: The Struggle in St. Louis, Missouri, 1964-1970

Kenneth Jolly

“Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“On Ferguson, Missouri: History, Protest, and 'Respectability'”

Clarence Lang, Labor and Working Class History Association blog

March: Book One

John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, Nate Powell

“Learning from the 60s”

An address by Audre Lorde, 1982

At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power

Danielle L. McGuire

"We have to make them feel us': Open Letters and Black Mothers' Grief"

Emily Owens, African American Intellectual History blog

Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision Barbara Ransby

Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America

Beryl Satter

The Red Record

Ida B. Wells

The Miseducation of The Negro

Carter G. Woodson

Native Son

Richard Wright

Children's Books

Noughts & Crosses

Malorie Blackman

Smoky Night

Eve Bunting and David Diaz

What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?

Margaret Burroughs

I am Rosa Parks

Brad Meltzer

Ruth & the Green Book

Calvin Ramsey

Tar Beach

Faith Ringgold

As Fast As Words Could Fly

Pamela Tuck

The Skin You Live in

Michael Tyler

The Other Side

Jacqueline Woodson

Shining Star

Paula Yoo

Community Organizing, Leadership, Activism

“Fighting Police Abuse: A Community Action Manual”

American Civil Liberties Union

“When the Boss Feels Inadequate: Power, Incompetence, and Aggression”

Nathanael J. Fast and Serena Chen, *Psychological Science*

“From Eric Holder: A Message to the People of Ferguson”

Eric Holder, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*

“The Mindless Menace of Violence”

Robert F. Kennedy

“The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”

Audre Lorde

Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project

Bob Moses and Charlie Cobb

Thinking in an Emergency

Elaine Scarry

Educational Issues

“U.S. Schools: Desegregation court cases and school demographic data”

Brown University

“Race and the Ferguson-Florissant School District”

Shaun R. Harper and Charlee Davis, III, University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

See Unending Struggle: The Long Road to an Equal Education in St. Louis, Gerald W. Heaney and Susan Uchitelle

“Self-Segregation: Why It's So Hard for Whites to Understand Ferguson”

Robert P. Jones, *The Atlantic*

“Reflections on Ferguson — What does education mean in a world like this?”

Daniel Katz, blog

“Michael Brown’s High School Is An Example Of The Major Inequalities In Education”

Rebecca Klein, *Huffington Post*

Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools

Jonathan Kozol

Stepping over the Color Line: African-American Students in White Suburban Schools

Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crane

Film

“Banished: How Whites Drove Blacks Out of Town in America” (2006)

“Chicago 10” (2007)

“Do the Right Thing” (1989)

“Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1985” (1990)

“Little Rock Central High School: 50 Years Later” (2007)

“The Pruitt Igoe Myth” (2011)

“Freedom Summer” (2014)

Media Studies and Journalism

“In Ferguson, Photographs as Powerful Agents, Smartphone cameras are the 'weapon of choice' for many protestors”

Maurice Berger, *New York Times*

“Unethical journalism can make Ferguson more dangerous”

Malcolm Harris, *Al-Jazeera America*

“I will not be returning to Ferguson”

Ryan L. Shuessler Blog

White Victims, Black Villains: Gender, Race, and Crime News

Carol A. Stabile

“Embarrassed to Photograph Ferguson”

VDC Photo Blog

Music

“Be Free”

J. Cole

“Black Rage”

Lauren Hill

“Mississippi Goddam”

Nina Simone

Other Educational Hashtags on Twitter

#sschat

#TTTI

#HipHopEd

#KidLitforJustice

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown

Personal Reflections

"Dear White Mom"

Keesha Beckford, blog

"Men Without a Country: Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, My Father and Me"

Arthur Chu, *The Daily Beast*

Black Body: Rereading James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village"

Teju Cole, *New Yorker*

"Blue on black violence and original crime: a view from Oakland, California" Brad

Erickson, anthropelia.com

"The Coming Race War Won't Be About Race"

Kareem Abdul Jabbar, *Time*

"How Does it Feel to be a Problem?"

Relando Thompkins, blog

Different Rules Apply

Matt Zoller Seitz, rogerebert.com

Poetry

“Riot”

Gwendolyn Brooks

“If There Be Sorrow”

Mari Evans

“I, Too, Sing America”

Langston Hughes

“If We Must Die”

Claude McKay

“The Still Voice of Harlem”

Conrad Kent Rivers

“Not an elegy for Mike Brown”

Danez Smith

“See the Heart”

Jean Toomer

“Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful”

Alice Walker

Policing

The Rise of The Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces

Radley Balko

“Database: How many grenade launchers did Michigan police departments receive?”

Detroit Free Press staff

“In Ferguson, cops hand out three warrants per household every year”

Kevin Drum, *Mother Jones*

"The Ferguson Shooting and the Science of Race and Guns"

Erika Eichelberger, *Mother Jones*

"The Surprising History and Science of Tear Gas"

Brian Clark Howard, *National Geographic*

Black in Blue: African-American Police Officers and Racism

James Loewen

"To What End?"

Michael Maderino Blog

Police Brutality: An Anthology

Jill Nelson

"The Etiquette of Police Brutality: An Autopsy"

Rion Amilcar Scott, *AsItOuttoBe.com*

Race and Violence in in America

The Properties of Violence: Claims to Ownership in Representations of Lynching

Sandy Alexandre

The Fire Next Time

James Baldwin

"Exploring Unintentional Racism: The Case of Tim Hanks"

Robert W. Grossman and Thomas E. Ford, *Science Cases*

The History of White People

Nell Irwin Painter

"Black Riot"

Raven Rakia, *The New Inquiry*

"Heart of Whiteness"

Tobias Wolff, *The New Yorker*

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