100
The List of One Hundred Books for Fisk University
The Fisk 100 Revisited

Technological advances have kidnapped many of our young people and transported them through the screens of cell phones and tablets into the cyber world of Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, and Hulu. Though surrounded with “information”, many students are missing the opportunity to improve vocabulary, expand imagination, develop analytical thinking, dispel loneliness, and grow their knowledge base by reading a “good” book. The Fisk 100 offers a place to start.

This represents the third edition of Fisk 100, the former two appearing in 1980 and 1991. In each instance, the compilation of the reading list has been a corporate undertaking, involving faculty students, and administrators. About one fourth of the titles listed in the 1991 edition have been retained here. Additionally, each committee has included at least one member from the previous group of compilers to provide a consistency in philosophy and vision. Each revision has been mindful of Fisk’s status as a liberal arts institution that provides students with a broad experience. It sees the liberal education as encompassing both the theoretical and the experiential. Fisk has long understood that the world is far broader and richer than what is often considered in required or assigned reading lists. It remains cognizant that its students are a part of a shrinking world community thrown together by new global forces and rapid social and technological changes. Thus, the following list of texts includes items from a historical perspective as well as ethnically and geographically inclusive as representations of the human story.

A well-founded liberal education for undergraduates can never be packaged in one hundred books that students should read. And this is precisely the purpose that the selection panels all had in common: that the Fisk student should develop insatiable skills and interest in reading, and set a pattern here for lifelong growth and exploration through books. Let books take the Fisk student where he or she needs to go!

The list of books presented here has been created specifically for the Fisk University community. While it is not an exhaustive list, it reflects the broad educational experience envisioned for the student. It includes titles that are perennially important and ones that represent the inclusivity of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of literary titles. The texts address issues such as identity, family, politics, freedom, responsibility, and women’s rights. These books illustrate the ways in which issues permeate periods, ethnic groups, and geographical areas. Thus, they ask readers to consider ways in which these issues and themes transcend race, gender, and periods. A reading of these texts allows the reader to capture the nature of the human condition and to understand that cultural specificity (i.e. African American, Native American) is complex and in many ways
universal. Thus, the reading experience encourages readers to critically examine the new and to be open to the global expansion which is a part of present and future experiences.

The final Fisk 100 Committee consisted of Dr. Lean’tin L. Bracks, director of the Honors Program and professor in English; Dr. Katharine Burnett, junior faculty member in English; Lynwood Berry, assistant director of Alumni Affairs; LaFonda Davis, library assistant in Access Services; Cheryl Hamberg, associate librarian for Technical Services; Patricia McCarroll, coordinator of the Core Curriculum and lecturer, Department of Life and Physical Sciences; Dr. Sheila Peters, director of the QEP and professor in psychology, Dr. Jessie Carney Smith, dean of the library; and students Taylor Prescott, history major, and Brianna Lawrence, sociology major. The committee acknowledges with appreciation Rondrekus Wilkes, business/art major, for designing the cover. The committee also appreciates the titles suggested by faculty, students, President H. James Williams and other administrators, Fisk alumni and friends. And for making it all possible, the committee gratefully acknowledges the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for providing funds to the Franklin library through the HBCU Library Alliance and its program “Expanding Library Support for Faculty Research in HBCUs.”

May you, our readers and intended audience, be guided by the voice of the late Dr. L. M. Collins, Fisk legend, who was engaged in preparing the previous Fisk 100s and believed fully in these words: “Read On!”

Jessie Carney Smith
Dean of the Library

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   The classic story of a powerful Ibo villager whose life illustrates the tragic nobility of Nigerian society on the eve of colonialism.

   An autobiographical statement by a poet/singer/actress/playwright/television personality describing a disadvantaged girlhood in Arkansas and St. Louis and her painful emergence in California as an independent woman and thinker.

   A collection of essays by the prominent civil rights-era author that address topics ranging from autobiography to portraits of prominent civil rights leaders.

   Baldwin’s novel is an exploration of sexuality and sexual identity through the experiences of an American man living in Paris during the mid-twentieth century and his relationship with an Italian bartender, Giovanni.

   A collection of poems by Imami Amiri Baraka (also known as LeRoi Jones), a preeminent African American poet, writer, and activist throughout the twentieth century.

   Thoughtfully written survey of African American art that serves as a landmark achievement in the historical literature of American art.

   This history presents an alternative view of Abraham Lincoln’s role in abolition and nineteenth-century civil rights, arguing that despite the prevailing historical view, Lincoln, in fact, was a reluctant proponent of emancipation.

   Part history and part biography, this book details the pivotal role Van Vechten—a prominent figure in Fisk University history—played in black culture and arts at the beginning of the twentieth century.

   A religious text, the Bible also provides a historical, literary, and genealogical perspective that has been foundational to much of western theology and culture.

   Twelve critical essays on the flowering of black literature, art, and thought that centered in Harlem in the 1920s, with a memoir by Bontemps, the longtime Fisk University librarian, who was a key figure in the intellectual life of the period.
   Written by two Fisk faculty members, this book examines the history of the Harlem Renaissance through a study of the women who were crucial to the movement.

   Collected works of the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, ranging the entirety of her career.

   Using the backdrop of the massacre of Native Americans at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota in 1890, the author recounts both emotional and factual accounts of the varied relationships between Native Americans, the government, and settlers.

   Brown’s poetry often features the lives and experiences of African Americans in the South and incorporates the influence of African American history, blues and jazz. This collection spans the entirety of Brown’s career.

   In his sociological text, Bullard argues that in the U.S.’s history of waste management, lower class black and white communities often bear the brunt of the resulting damages and environmental problems.

   A novel that vividly depicts the slave experience through a time-travel plot, in which a modern woman travels to a moment during the antebellum period in the U.S. South. Draws from the slave narrative and science fiction traditions.

   Spanish romance satirizing chivalry, materialism, and absurdities generally.

   An important contributor to the later Harlem Renaissance and the black power movements, Clarke’s history traces the impact of Africans and their culture on major global historical developments.

   A detailed history of the university’s first one hundred years of leaders in the context of U.S. civil rights history and local Nashville history.

   Originally published in 1990, this text encompass the intellectual discussion of black female writers and thinkers regarding feminist traditions and concepts.

   A coming of age story that details the rise of a young boy from poverty to wealth.

A novel on the theme of suffering for one’s crime, and through suffering, the attainment of regeneration.

   Recounts Douglass’s rise from slave to one of the most eminent Americans of the nineteenth century, becoming the voice of freedom and the first black to enunciate the slogan “Freedom Now!.” A distinguished orator for emancipation, he was a pioneer spokesman for civil rights.

   An American classic celebrating the nature of the human spirit as well as the souls of black men and women in the United States as they recognize their cultural heritage and honor and protect it while contributing to American culture.

   The most complete look at the life, work, and achievements of Aaron Douglas, the founding chair of Fisk University’s Department of Art and one of the most celebrated modernists of his generation.

   A stubborn affirmation in fiction of the worth and dignity of the individual in the face of forces which conspire to render him invisible.

   One of the earliest and most popular American slave narratives, Equiano’s text traces his life from his birth and childhood in Africa, to his capture and sale to American slave traders, to his life as a slave and eventually a free man in Britain.

   An examination of the condition of colonized peoples who are victims of Western exploitation.

   A seminal work of American literature, Faulkner’s novel features the Bundrens, a poor white family in Mississippi, and tells their story through the various perspectives of the family members and their reactions to their mother’s death.

   A Fisk alum, Franklin has written this classic history of African Americans; it is an objective and sage chronicle of the human spirit.

   A study of the rise of the black middle class in the United States, describing economic and social status, education, power, and political orientation; a competent sociological study of black society.

Using primary documents as her main source material, Giddings outlines the history of black women in the United States and their triumphs over institutionalized racism and sexism.

   A biography of Charles S. Johnson, Fisk’s first black president and a prominent intellectual and leader during the early portion of the twentieth century.

   Drawing from topics explored in many of her earlier collections, the book presents a mix of poetry, essays, and memoir.

   A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and Fisk alum, Giovanni’s career has spanned from her early participation in the Black Arts Movement in the 60s up through the twenty-first century. She is considered one of the most important and influential modern poets. This collection encompasses the majority of her career.

   A best-selling work of social psychology that details the ways in which trends emerge, take hold, and shape the development of cultural practices.

   Drama about the eternal struggle of the devil for the human soul, in this case that of Faust, who wins heaven’s grace having lived fully life’s experiences and having learned the meaning of service to others.

   Winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in History and the National Book Award for Nonfiction, Gordon-Reed’s book narrates the history of the Hemings family over the course of four generations through their connections to their master and the father of Sally Hemings’s children, Thomas Jefferson.

   A nonfiction book that recounts the experiences of Griffin (who was white) while posing as a black man for six weeks during the Jim Crow era South.

   A fictional saga of a black American family, beginning in 1767 when seventeen-year-old Kunta Kinte is kidnapped in his native Gambia and sold into slavery in Spotsylvania County, Virginia; a symbolic story of 25,000,000 Americans of African descent.

   Drama about the aspirations of a black ghetto family; the hazards and racial hurdles blocking pursuit of its dreams.
    A popular science book that addresses a wide range of subject matter (from physics to
    cosmology), and includes an accessible discussion of higher mathematics.

    A Fisk professor and the first African American to serve as U.S. Poet Laureate,
    Hayden’s career spanned most of the twentieth century, and his poetry draws from
    both African American and British poetic traditions.

    Winner of the National Book Award, this poetry collection explores personal themes
    through the incorporation of black cultural icons and intricate poetic forms.

45. Higginbotham Jr., A. Leon. **In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal
    A history that begins in the colonial period and moves up through the twentieth
    century to trace the oppressive practices of the American legal system toward black
    Americans.

    Greek epic poems (c. 1100-900 B.C.E.). The first details the siege of Troy, while the
    second documents the travels of Odysseus. Both are formative to the canon of western
    literature.

    A work of radical feminist theory in which hooks examines American cultural
    patterns through an understanding of the ways in which gender, race and class
    influence cultural and social development.

    The autobiography of one of the most influential American authors, Hughes confronts
    American civil rights and race relations and details his life growing up in Missouri, as
    a participant in the Harlem Renaissance movement, and his later life in Paris.

    This collection draws from Hughes’s work during the Harlem Renaissance and up
    through the middle of the twentieth century.

    A novel of a black woman’s belief in self, made dramatic by her pride and
    determination, told in the country voices of her friends, kinsmen, and acquaintances.

    A classic dystopian novel warning against the dangers of a police state and the
    oppression of individual freedoms.

    This journalist details the rise of “breakthrough politicians,” or black American
    course of American politics during the twenty-first century.

The first slave narrative written by a female ex-slave that chronicles the brutalization of slave women. It documents Jacobs’s life under slavery and her eventual escape. A pinnacle text that is often seen as a counterpart to the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass. It is a key text of early black American history and literature.

   Novel of the moral cowardice of a black protagonist in search of his own identity, the “symbol of man’s universal failure to fulfill his highest destiny.”

   Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2004, the novel features a plantation in the antebellum South that is owned and run by a former slave.

   A collection of King’s speeches, writings and interviews.

   A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a young girl growing up in rural Alabama. The novel presents an incisive critique of racism and the Jim Crow era South.


   A deeply personal memoir that offers Lewis’s experiences as an activist during the Civil Rights Movement. He balances his intimate and touching recollections with the intense national drama of that period.

   Works chronicling John Lewis’s life during the civil rights era including his participation in the Selma march, using the format of the graphic novel. These works are a part of a trilogy.

   The spiritual evolution of Malcolm X from hipster to Black Muslim leader and advocate of tolerance.

   An autobiography (or what Lorde calls a “biomythography”) that traces Lorde’s life from childhood up through her work as a radical black feminist and gay rights activist.
   The autobiography of the black South African civil rights leader, first black president of the country, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

   A biography of Ernest Just, a pioneering biologist and black American, who regularly confronted the racism that characterized scientific fields throughout the twentieth century.

   Winner of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in history, Marable’s biography offers other perspectives and viewpoints on the life of Malcolm X, including his parents’ work as political activists.

   An anthology of the most important work from the civil rights era, including work by James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and Richard Wright.

   A pictorial history of Fisk University assembled by Mitchell, an alumnus and faculty member in history.

   A Pulitzer Prize-winning historical novel that delves into the lingering effects of slavery through the story of Sethe, a former slave, and her relationship with her children (both dead and living).

   Morrison’s first novel captures indelibly the reality and pain of growing up among images which deny one’s self-worth. Masterful in its storytelling and insight.

   The thirteenth century-empire of Mali and its emperor, Sundiata, come vividly alive in this 750 plus year-old masterpiece of African literature.

   The memoir of the first black President of the United States that reflects on his experience growing up as the son of a black Kenyan father and white American mother.

   Pierson’s history reveals the experience of the black bondsman in colonial New England and highlights the ways in which black Yankees of early America created and sustained an independent culture and community.

Penned by the Greek philosopher between 400 and 300 B.C.E., the canonical work of philosophy reflects on a variety of subjects, including logic, ethics, religion, and mathematics.

   A comprehensive book of psychiatry that highlights the specific issues faced by parents of black American children.

   Written by a Fisk faculty member, this history traces the evolution of the Jewish population in Ethiopia and places them at the center of the cultural life of the nation.

   An overview of the university’s history from its origins up to the end of the twentieth century.

   Sertima’s history claims that original Mesoamerican culture found its roots in Africa, as opposed to traditional narratives of the development of North and South American peoples.

   Drama of the trusting, jealous Moor of Venice, “one who loved not wisely, but too well.”

   A Tony Award-winning theater piece made up of a series of poetic monologues with accompanying music and dance that detail the experiences of seven black women dressed in the colors of the rainbow.

   This novel by a prominent Native American author draws from postmodern and folk traditions to craft an intricate tale of a WWII veteran’s return to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation and his recovery from the trauma of war.

   A rich tale of medical arrogance, racism, poverty, and modern science about Henrietta Lacks, a 31-year-old black woman whose productive cell line—known as HeLa—aided in medical discoveries.

   The first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize, Spiegelman’s narrative details his father’s experience during the Holocaust through the present-day relationship between father and son.

A classic American description of the conditions of California migrant workers and their struggle to create a better world.

   Incredibly popular and influential after its publication in the nineteenth century, Stowe’s abolitionist novel depicts the realities of the American slave system.

   An American classic: looking into nature, a man finds his soul, a philosophy of simplification, individualism, and freedom.

   A theological treatise that explores how the gospel can be used as a guide toward resistance for the disenfranchised.

   The foundational text of the Black Power Movement, Ture’s manifesto lays out the agenda of the movement: namely, to encourage black unity and independence from the dominant American social order.

   A prominent astrophysicist and public intellectual, Tyson’s book details his experiences growing up in New York and aspiring toward a career in astrophysics.

   As the first Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by an African American woman, this epistolary novel is written from the perspective of Celie, a poor uneducated black woman living in the rural South. The novel explores issues of domestic abuse, women’s rights, and sexual identity through Celie’s life from the age of 14 up through adulthood.

   Based on her definition of womanist theory, Walker explores the artistic, creative, and natural aspect of black women’s lives, as well as her experiences with the Civil Rights Movement, memories of her childhood, and her relationships with her family.

   The inspiring story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers who set out to raise funds for their university and changed the genre of American music.

   Winner of the 2011 National Book Award, the novel tells the story of a black family in Florida and their interpersonal dynamics in the midst of a hurricane.

   An autobiography by Booker T. Washington that chronicles over fifty years of his life.
   A collection of twenty-five essays that examine the neuroses related to white supremacy.

   A reinterpretation of the history of the African race that details the numerous factors that have actively dismantled and damaged African society throughout the course of history.

   Drawing on biblical works, this classic text helps to establish the field of African American womanist theology.

   A selection of the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright’s three most prominent plays: *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, *Fences*, and *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*.

   An influential theoretical text that argues that the American educational system, rather than educating black Americans, serves as a form of cultural indoctrination and conditioning. Through this work Woodson urges black Americans to think and “do for themselves” independent of the American establishment.

   The classic naturalist novel about a young black man of the ghetto of Chicago’s South Side—Bigger Thomas—the most memorable character in fiction by Negro authors, a tragic victim of his environment and his resulting criminality.