

The Diversity Book Club

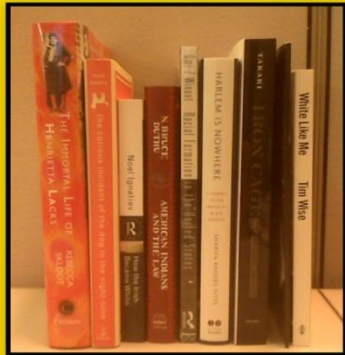
Gina Betcher, Research Officer, OVPR and Colleagues

Reading Who We Were to Discover Who We Can Become

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot

This book is a joy to read on many levels. It tells the story of Henrietta Lacks' friends and family members and their reactions to learning of the contribution Henrietta's cells have made to medical science. It is a sensitive depiction of the culture of a poor black community in the American South of the 1950s and 1960s, and it sheds light on what medical research subjects are told about the studies they participate in and how they are likely to interpret (or misinterpret) the information they are given. Rebecca Skloot tells a moving story and, at the same time provides accurate scientific information that both adds to the narrative and makes the science of cell culture both fascinating and accessible to a general audience.

The advance PR makes one think the book will be about how scientists take advantage of naïve patients/research subjects, but the book itself deals fairly with both scientists and research subjects, doctors and patients. I came away feeling that an injustice had occurred, but unable to assign a perpetrator.



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon

I chose this book because developmental disorders, mental illness and the inclusion of people of varying levels of ability should be part of the conversation when we discuss fostering diversity.

How The Irish Became White by Noel Ignatiev

I love this book. The text illustrates the fluidity of solidarity between racial and ethnic groups, and the social and political pressures that immigrant groups face as they seek economic and political advancement. One major theme in the book is that the racial category "white" is not a self-evident one and that social divisions among citizens, and humanity generally, are not natural or "fixed," but result from, and can be dissolved by, human action and choice.

Harlem is Nowhere by Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

Harlem is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America drew me in particularly because of a presentation and a resulting essay I hammered out in graduate school on painters of the Harlem Renaissance. I wondered immediately about what I did not know at the time and what I could not know for never having been to Harlem.

In her March 2011 Harper's book review, the writer Zadie Smith identifies Rhodes-Pitts equal parts a dreamer for a place, for a black place, as she is a deconstructionist of its history (67). Rhodes-Pitts presents Harlem's past promises from poets, writers and painters, looking to the doors on Lexington Avenue to forge a new entrance.

Iron Cages by Ronald Takaki

Takaki's work suggests that American concerns at the founding about how a democratic republic could ensure its economic and political survival fueled the creation of a new vision of democratic sovereignty which emphasized independent, self-governing citizens and shaped attitudes towards which individuals were morally fit for citizenship. The reason I enjoy this work is because it underscores how racial and ethnic identities are socially constructed and that the frameworks that are often used to evaluate individuals classified/viewed as members of those groups are historically contingent.

The Everyone Counts Faculty and Professional Learning Community on Race provided me with the opportunity to explore personal and professional values shaped by the American race experience. This platform allowed me to welcome OVPR staff to a book about race and white privilege.

The goals of my project were to allow myself and my colleagues to:

- become enriched readers
- enable discussions on race and about white privilege
- recognize diverse histories and what this means; and,
- contribute meaningful texts to a diversity library inside the Office of Diversity and Inclusion

The library will result in future invitations to read selected texts as a community.