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Monroe Township Library

February 2025 (Black History Month)

The First Ladies- by Bennedict, Marie

FIC BENEDICT

The daughter of formerly enslaved parents, Mary McLeod Bethune refuses to back down as white supremacists attempt to thwart her work. She marches on as an activist and an educator, and as her reputation grows she becomes a celebrity, revered by titans of business and recognized by U.S. Presidents. Eleanor Roosevelt herself is awestruck and eager to make her acquaintance. Initially drawn together because of their shared belief in women's rights and the power of education, Mary and Eleanor become fast friends confiding their secrets, hopes and dreams, and holding each other's hands through tragedy and triumph. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt is elected president, the two women begin to collaborate more closely, particularly as Eleanor moves toward her own agenda separate from FDR, a consequence of the devastating discovery of her husband's secret love affair. Eleanor becomes a controversial First Lady for her outspokenness, particularly on civil rights. And when she receives threats because of her strong ties to Mary, it only fuels the women's desire to fight together for justice and equality. This is the story of two different, yet equally formidable, passionate, and committed women, and the way in which their singular friendship helped form the foundation for the modern civil rights movement.

The Vanishing Half – Bennett, Brit

FIC BENNETT

The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Ten years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly

passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters storylines intersect?

Four hundred souls : a community history of African America, 1619-2019

—by Kendi and Blain

973.0496 FOU

A chronological account of four hundred years of African-American history is written in five-year segments as documented by ninety multidisciplinary historians, artists and writers.

Can't we be friends : a novel of Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe - by Bryce Denny

FIC BRYCE

One woman was recognized as the premiere singer of her era with perfect pitch and tireless ambition. One woman was the most glamorous star in Hollywood, a sex symbol who took the world by storm. And their friendship was fast and firm... 1952: Ella Fitzgerald is a renowned jazz singer whose only roadblock to longevity is society's attitude toward women and race. Marilyn Monroe's star is rising despite ongoing battles with movie studio bigwigs and boyfriends. When she needs help with her singing, she wants only the best-and the best is the brilliant Ella Fitzgerald. But Ella isn't a singing teacher and declines-then the two women meet, and to everyone's surprise but their own, they become fast friends. On the surface, what could they have in common? Yet each was underestimated by the men in their lives-husbands, managers, hangers-on. And both were determined to gain. Each fought for professional independence and personal agency in a time when women were expected to surrender control to those same men. This novel reveals and celebrates their surprising bond over a decade and serves as a poignant reminder of how true friendship can cross differences to bolster and sustain us through haunting heartbreak and wild success.

Horse – by Brooks, Geraldine

FIC BROOKS

A discarded painting in a junk pile, a skeleton in an attic, and the greatest racehorse in American history: from these strands, a Pulitzer Prize winner braids a sweeping story of spirit, obsession, and injustice across American history

Kentucky, 1850. An enslaved groom named Jarret and a bay foal forge a bond of understanding that will carry the horse to record-setting victories across the South.

When the nation erupts in civil war, an itinerant young artist who has made his name on paintings of the racehorse takes up arms for the Union. On a perilous night, he reunites with the stallion and his groom, very far from the glamor of any racetrack.

Kindred – by Butler, Octavia

FIC BUTLER

The visionary time-travel classic whose Black female hero is pulled through time to face the horrors of American slavery and explores the impacts of racism, sexism, and white supremacy then and now.

“I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm.”

Dana’s torment begins when she suddenly vanishes on her 26th birthday from California, 1976, and is dragged through time to antebellum Maryland to rescue a boy named Rufus, heir to a slaveowner’s plantation. She soon realizes the purpose of her summons to the past: protect Rufus to ensure his assault of her Black ancestor so that she may one day be born. As she endures the traumas of slavery and the soul-crushing normalization of savagery, Dana fights to keep her autonomy and return to the present. Blazing the trail for neo-slavery narratives like Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *The Water Dancer*, Butler takes one of speculative fiction’s oldest tropes and infuses it with lasting depth and power. Dana not only experiences the cruelties of slavery on her skin but also grimly learns to accept it as a condition of her own existence in the present. “Where stories about American slavery are often gratuitous, reducing its horror to explicit violence and brutality, *Kindred* is controlled and precise”.

A most beautiful thing : the true story of America's first all-black high school rowing team – by Cooper, Arshay

797.12 COO

"Now a documentary narrated by Common, produced by Grant Hill, Dwyane Wade, and 9th Wonder, from filmmaker Mary Mazzio The moving true story of a group of young men growing up on Chicago's West side who form the first all-black high school rowing team in the nation, and in doing so not only transform a sport, but their lives. Growing up on Chicago's Westside in the 90's, Arshay Cooper knows the harder side of life. The street corners are full of gangs, the hallways of his apartment complex are haunted by junkies he calls "zombies" with strung out arms, clutching at him as he passes by. His mother is a recovering addict, and his three siblings all sleep in a one room apartment, a small infantry against the war zone on the street below. Arshay keeps to himself, preferring to write poetry about the girl he has a crush on, and spends his school days in the home-ec kitchen dreaming of becoming a chef. And then one day as he's walking out of school he notices a boat in the school lunchroom, and a poster that reads "Join the Crew Team". Having no idea what the sport of crew is, Arshay decides to take a chance. This decision to join is one that will forever change his life, and those of his fellow teammates. As Arshay and his teammates begin to come together to learn how to row--many never having been in water before--the sport takes them from the mean streets of Chicago, to the hallowed halls of the Ivy League. But Arshay and his teammates face adversity at every turn, from racism, gang violence, and a sport that has never seen anyone like them before. *A Most Beautiful Thing* is the inspiring true

story about the most unlikely band of brothers that form a family, and forever change a sport and their lives for the better".

Finding Me -by Davis, Viola

B DAVIS

In my book, you will meet a little girl named Viola who ran from her past until she made a life-changing decision to stop running forever.

This is my story, from a crumbling apartment in Central Falls, Rhode Island, to the stage in New York City, and beyond. This is the path I took to finding my purpose but also my voice in a world that didn't always see me.

As I wrote Finding Me, my eyes were open to the truth of how our stories are often not given close examination. We are forced to reinvent them to fit into a crazy, competitive, judgmental world. So I wrote this for anyone running through life untethered, desperate and clawing their way through murky memories, trying to get to some form of self-love. For anyone who needs reminding that a life worth living can only be born from radical honesty and the courage to shed facades and be . . . you.

Finding Me is a deep reflection, a promise, and a love letter of sorts to self. My hope is that my story will inspire you to light up your own life with creative expression and rediscover who you were before the world put a label on you.

Washington Black -by Edugyan, Esi

FIC EDUGYAN

From the blistering cane fields of the Caribbean to the frozen Far North, from the earliest aquariums of London to the eerie deserts of Morocco, a boy rises from the ashes of slavery in the 1830s to become a free man of the world.

James -by Everett, Percival

FIC EVERETT

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck Finn has faked his own death to escape his violent father, recently returned to town. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and too-often-unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond.

While many narrative set pieces of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn remain in place (floods and storms, stumbling across both unexpected death and unexpected treasure in the myriad stopping points along the river's banks, encountering the scam artists posing as the Duke and Dauphin...), Jim's agency, intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light.

Life and Other Love Songs -by Gray, Anissa

FIC GRAY

It's a warm, bright October afternoon, and Ozro Armstead walks out into the brilliant sunshine on his thirty-seventh birthday. At home, his wife Deborah and daughter Trinity prepare a surprise celebration; down the street, his brother waves as Oz heads back to

his office after having lunch together.

But he won't make it to the party or even to his briefcase back at his desk. He's about to disappear.

In the days, months, and years to follow, Deborah and Trinity look backward and forward as they piece together the life of the man they love, but whom they come to realize they might never have truly known.

In a gripping narrative that moves from the Great Migration to 1970s Detroit and 1990s New York, we follow the hopes, triumphs, losses, and secrets that build up and tear apart an American family.

Homegoing -by Gyasi, Yaa

FIC GYASI

Ghana, eighteenth century: two half sisters are born into different villages, each unaware of the other. One will marry an Englishman and lead a life of comfort in the palatial rooms of the Cape Coast Castle. The other will be captured in a raid on her village, imprisoned in the very same castle, and sold into slavery.

One of Oprah's Best Books of the Year, *Homegoing* follows the parallel paths of these sisters and their descendants through eight generations: from the Gold Coast to the plantations of Mississippi, from the American Civil War to Jazz Age Harlem. Yaa Gyasi's extraordinary novel illuminates slavery's troubled legacy both for those who were taken and those who stayed—and shows how the memory of captivity has been inscribed on the soul of our nation.

The Sweetness of Water -by Harris, Nathan

FIC HARRIS

In the waning days of the Civil War, brothers Prentiss and Landry, freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, seek refuge on the homestead of George Walker and his wife, Isabelle. The Walkers, wracked by the loss of their only son to the war, hire the brothers to work their farm, hoping through an unexpected friendship to stanch their grief. Prentiss and Landry, meanwhile, plan to save money for the journey north and a chance to reunite with their mother, who was sold away when they were boys. Parallel to their story runs a forbidden romance between two Confederate soldiers. The young men, recently returned from the war to the town of Old Ox, hold their trysts in the woods. But when their secret is discovered, the resulting chaos, including a murder, unleashes convulsive repercussions on the entire community. In the aftermath of so much turmoil, it is Isabelle who emerges as an unlikely leader, proffering a healing vision for the land and for the newly free citizens of Old Ox.

The house of Eve: a novel -by Johnson, Sadeqa

FIC JOHNSON

Fifteen-year-old Ruby Pearsall is on track to becoming the first in her family to attend college, in spite of having a mother more interested in keeping a man than raising a daughter. But a taboo love affair threatens to pull her back down into the poverty and

desperation that has been passed on to her like a birthright...Eleanor Quarles arrives in Washington, DC, with ambition and secrets. When she meets the handsome William Pride at Howard University, they fall madly in love. But William hails from one of DC's elite wealthy Black families, and his parents don't let just anyone into their fold. Eleanor hopes that a baby will make her finally feel at home in William's family and grant her the life she's been searching for.

**The other Madisons the lost history of a president's black family -by
Kearse, Bettye** **973.5109 KEA**

A descendant of a slave named Coreen, and-according to oral tradition-her owner, President James Madison, finally shares her family's story.

Calling Me Home -by Kibler, Julie **FIC KIB**

Eighty-nine-year-old Isabelle McAllister has a big favor to ask her hairdresser, Dorrie. She wants the black single mother to drop everything and drive her from Texas to a funeral in Ohio - tomorrow. Dorrie, fleeing problems of her own and curious about Isabelle's past, agrees, not knowing it will be a journey that changes both their lives. Isabelle confesses that, as a teen in 1930s Kentucky, she fell in love with Robert Prewitt, a would-be doctor and the black son of her family's housekeeper - in a town where blacks weren't allowed after dark. The tale of their forbidden relationship and its tragic consequences just might help Dorrie find her own way.

The secret life of bees -by Kidd, Sue Monk **FIC KIDD**

Fourteen-year-old Lily Owens lost her beloved mother when she was only four--under tragic circumstances clouded by time and secrecy. She later found a fiercely protective "stand-in," her abusive father's outspoken housekeeper, Rosaleen. Ignoring differences in age and color--and the fact that racial hatred seethed during the summer of 1964 in rural South Carolina--these two unlikely companions set off on a seemingly aimless pilgrimage that ends at the home of a trio of eccentric bee-keeping black sisters. Lily tells her remarkable tale of longing and love in an idiom and accent heard far south of the Mason-Dixon Line, but the lessons learned during her odyssey into the world of bees and their "secret life" are universal and everlasting.

Flipping boxcars : a novel -by Kyles, Cedric **FIC KYLES**

Cedric The Entertainer's debut novel Flipping Boxcars is a valentine to close-knit black families and tightly woven communities during the Depression and World War II. The story is also an homage to Cedric's grandfather, who in this tale emerges as Babe. He is a charismatic and widely loved man. He is also a gambler, whose gift of gab often gets him out of tricky situations, which is often. Babe is also a dreamer, something he shares in common with his patient and loving wife. They both yearn for financial stability and need to hold on to their land as insurance for future generations. However, when Babe

and a few comrades enlist in a scheme that improbably falls apart, Babe places his family on the verge of losing everything. What's a family man to do? Babe decides to go for one more big scheme involving railroad boxcars. In breakneck speed, Cedric the Entertainer pulls readers in and never lets them go until the last page. Will Babe succeed? Will Rosie continue to support her husband? Are the Feds on to Babe's scheme? Flipping Boxcars is a page-turner anchored by rich, multi-dimensional characters, and oozing with Cedric The Entertainer's inimitable charm.

All we were promised -by Lattimore, Ashton **FIC LATTIMORE**

The paths of three young Black women in pre-Civil War Philadelphia unexpectedly-and dangerously-collide in this dramatic debut novel inspired by the explosive history of a city at war with itself. Philadelphia, 1837. When nineteen-year-old Charlotte escaped from the deteriorating White Oaks plantation four years ago, she'd expected freedom to look completely different from her former life as an enslaved housemaid. Instead, she's locked away playing servant to her white-passing father, hiding their past and identities to protect themselves from slavecatchers who would destroy their new lives. Charlotte longs to break away, but outside the walls of their townhouse, the City of Brotherly Love is up in arms. Pennsylvania is a free state, yet abolitionists are struggling to establish a permanent home for the anti-slavery movement, as southern sympathizers incite violence against free Black people and white vigilantes stalk the streets. Undeterred, Charlotte sneaks out and forges an unlikely friendship with Nell, a member of one of Philadelphia's wealthiest Black families. Nell is under so much pressure from her parents to settle down and marry Alex, a close family friend, that the two pretend to get engaged, just to take the heat off. Meanwhile Nell and Charlotte grow close over their mutual commitment to abolition, so when Evie, Charlotte's enslaved friend from White Oaks, shows up in the city, they conspire to help her flee North. Charlotte and her father's freedom is threatened as she and Nell navigate the abolitionist world's racial and class politics and ever-present dangers, struggling to forge a plan to free Evie from slavery before it's too late. Inspired by the untold history of Pennsylvania Hall, one of Philadelphia's landmarks lost to violence, All We Were Promised is the story of three young Black women-the rebel, the socialite, and the fugitive-fighting for each other in an American city straining to live up to its loftiest ideals.

The Twelve Tribes of Hattie -by Mathis, Ayana **FIC MATHIS**

A debut of extraordinary distinction: through the trials of one unforgettable family, Ayana Mathis tells the story of the children of the Great Migration, a story of love and bitterness and the promise of a new America.

In 1923, 15-year-old Hattie Shepherd flees Georgia and settles in Philadelphia, hoping for a chance at a better life. Instead, she marries a man who will bring her nothing but disappointment and watches helplessly as her firstborn twins succumb to an illness a few pennies could have prevented. Hattie gives birth to nine more children, whom she

raises with grit and mettle and not an ounce of the tenderness they crave. She vows to prepare them for the calamitous difficulty they are sure to face in their later lives, to meet a world that will not love them.

Captured here in 12 luminous narrative threads, their lives tell the story of a mother's monumental courage and the journey of a nation. Beautiful and devastating, Ayana Mathis's *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* is glorious, harrowing, unexpectedly uplifting, and blazing with life.

Behold the Dreamers -by Mbue, Imbolo

FIC MBUE

Jende Jonga, a Cameroonian immigrant living in Harlem has come to the United States to provide a better life for himself, and his family. In the fall of 2007, Jende can hardly believe his luck when he lands a job as a chauffeur for a senior executive at Lehman Brothers. When the financial world is rocked by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, Jende is desperate to keep his job and is soon forced to make an impossible choice.

The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store -by McBride, James

FIC MCBRIDE

In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new development, the last thing they expected to find was a skeleton at the bottom of a well. Who the skeleton was and how it got there were two of the long-held secrets kept by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side and shared ambitions and sorrows. Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Moshe integrated his theater and where Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. When the state came looking for a deaf boy to institutionalize him, it was Chona and Nate Timblin, the Black janitor at Moshe's theater and the unofficial leader of the Black community on Chicken Hill, who worked together to keep the boy safe.

Take My Hand -by Perkins-Valdez, Dolen FIC PERKINS-VALDEZ

Inspired by true events that rocked the nation, a searing and compassionate new novel about a Black nurse in post-segregation Alabama who blows the whistle on a terrible injustice done to her patients, from the New York Times bestselling author of *Wench* Montgomery, Alabama, 1973. Fresh out of nursing school, Civil Townsend intends to make a difference, especially in her African American community. At the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic, she hopes to help women shape their destinies, to make their own choices for their lives and bodies.

But when her first week on the job takes her along a dusty country road to a worn-down one-room cabin, Civil is shocked to learn that her new patients, Erica and India, are children—just eleven and thirteen years old. Neither of the Williams sisters has even kissed a boy, but they are poor and Black, and for those handling the family's welfare benefits, that's reason enough to have the girls on birth control. As Civil grapples with

her role, she takes India, Erica, and their family into her heart. Until one day she arrives at their door to learn the unthinkable has happened, and nothing will ever be the same for any of them.

Decades later, with her daughter grown and a long career in her wake, Dr. Civil Townsend is ready to retire, to find her peace, and to leave the past behind. But there are people and stories that refuse to be forgotten. That must not be forgotten.

Because history repeats what we don't remember.

Inspired by true events and brimming with hope, *Take My Hand* is a stirring exploration of accountability and redemption.

The queen of Sugar Hill a novel of Hattie McDaniel -by Tate, RaShonda **FIC TATE**

This fictional portrait of Hattie McDaniel, who won an Academy Award for her role as Mammy in the film *Gone with the Wind*, portrays her life after the limelight when she faced difficult daily struggles.

The gilded years -by Tanabe, Karin **FIC TANABE**

Since childhood, Anita Hemmings has longed to attend the country's most exclusive school for women, Vassar College. Now, a bright, beautiful senior in the class of 1897, she is hiding a secret that would have banned her from admission: Anita is the only African-American student ever to attend Vassar. With her olive complexion and dark hair, this daughter of a janitor and descendant of slaves has successfully passed as white, but now finds herself rooming with Louise "Lottie" Taylor, the scion of one of New York's most prominent families. Though Anita has kept herself at a distance from her classmates, Lottie's sphere of influence is inescapable, her energy irresistible, and the two become fast friends. Pulled into her elite world, Anita learns what it's like to be treated as a wealthy, educated white woman-the person everyone believes her to be-and even finds herself in a heady romance with a moneyed Harvard student. It's only when Lottie becomes infatuated with Anita's brother, Frederick, whose skin is almost as light as his sister's, that the situation becomes particularly perilous. And as Anita's college graduation looms, those closest to her will be the ones to dangerously threaten her secret. Set against the vibrant backdrop of the Gilded Age, an era when old money traditions collided with modern ideas, Tanabe has written an unputdownable and emotionally compelling story of hope, sacrifice, and betrayal-and a gripping account of how one woman dared to risk everything for the chance at a better life.

Let Us Descend -by Ward, Jesmyn **FIC WARD**

Let Us Descend describes a journey from the rice fields of the Carolinas to the slave markets of New Orleans and into the fearsome heart of a Louisiana sugar plantation. A journey that is as beautifully rendered as it is heart wrenching, the novel is "[t]he literary equivalent of an open wound from which poetry pours" (NPR).

Annis, sold south by the white enslaver who fathered her, is the reader's guide. As she struggles through the miles-long march, Annis turns inward, seeking comfort from memories of her mother and stories of her African warrior grandmother. Throughout, she opens herself to a world beyond this world, one teeming with spirits: of earth and water, of myth and history; spirits who nurture and give, and those who manipulate and take. While Annis leads readers through the descent, hers is ultimately a story of rebirth and reclamation.

Black Cake -by Wilkerson, Charmaine

FIC WILKERSON

In present-day California, Eleanor Bennett's death leaves behind a puzzling inheritance for her two children, Byron and Benny: a black cake, made from a family recipe with a long history, and a voice recording. In her message, Eleanor shares a tumultuous story about a headstrong young swimmer who escapes her island home under suspicion of murder. The heartbreaking tale Eleanor unfolds, the secrets she still holds back, and the mystery of a long-lost child challenge everything the siblings thought they knew about their lineage and themselves.

Can Byron and Benny reclaim their once-close relationship, piece together Eleanor's true history, and fulfill her final request to "share the black cake when the time is right"? Will their mother's revelations bring them back together or leave them feeling more lost than ever?

Charmaine Wilkerson's debut novel is a story of how the inheritance of betrayals, secrets, memories, and even names can shape relationships and history. Deeply evocative and beautifully written, *Black Cake* is an extraordinary journey through the life of a family changed forever by the choices of its matriarch.

No better time : a novel of the spirited women of the Six Triple Eight Central Postal Directory Battalion -by Williams, Sheila

FIC WILLIAMS

In early 1945, Dorothy and 800 African American WACs arrive at their post in England where they are tasked with processing mail sent to GIs from their loved ones back home, an estimated 17 million pieces, and with their outlooks changed forever, return to the U.S. as the catalysts for change in America.

