

Where to get books in a pandemic:

At the Midtown Scholar we've been fulfilling **online orders** with free or discounted shipping since March. This month, for June, we've added **phone orders** with **curbside pickup**, and we're holding an **outdoor Sidewalk Sale** every Saturday in June, 9am-3pm.

Our public author talks and community **events have gone virtual**, and will probably remain that way throughout the summer. Since March we've been hosting 2-4 authors every week for live-streaming book talks, conversations, and Q&A, on multiple platforms: Facebook Live, YouTube, and Crowdcast. Afterwards, the talks are recorded and saved for viewing on our YouTube channel, [YouTube.com\MidtownScholarBookstore](https://www.youtube.com/MidtownScholarBookstore) . We actually have a year's worth of archived video recordings there, including last fall's book festival keynote speakers, as well as several years of author-event audio podcasts on our website, if you want to listen to authors discussing their books!

Meanwhile, we're busy rearranging our store to suit socially-distanced book-browsing! We'll be reopening the store to the public, for book-shopping, on Thursday, July 9th.

Pandemic Reading

#1

Historical perspectives from UK historian Catharine Arnold, ***Pandemic 1918: Eyewitness Accounts from the Greatest Medical Holocaust in Modern History***

- We have a YouTube recording available of Arnold's virtual book talk earlier this year

#2

Physician and journalist Meredith Wadman's dramatic account of ***The Vaccine Race: Science, Politics, and the Human Costs of Defeating Disease***, including profiles of Pennsylvania scientists and important vaccine advances made in Philadelphia in the 1960's.

The Midtown Scholar's Top 10 Summer Reads

#Black Lives Matter

#10 First-hand HISTORY, in celebration of Juneteenth this week:

The Underground Railroad Records: Narrating the Hardships, Hairbreadth Escapes, and Death Struggles of Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, by William Still, introduction by Ta-Nehisi Coates

- As a conductor for the Underground Railroad, William Still helped as many as 800 people escape enslavement. Based in Philadelphia, he was a clerk and corresponding secretary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in the 1840s and 1850s. He first published this collection of anecdotes, firsthand accounts, and letters from those escaping slavery and those assisting, in 1872. That first edition was over 800 pages! This 2019 Modern Library edition has been heavily edited, to about 1/3rd of that, and gives primary emphasis to the experiences of women and families.
- Related reading: *The Portable Frederick Douglass*, edited by John Stauffer and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and the Pulitzer-Prize winning biography *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, by David W. Blight.

#9 Because SHORT STORIES make great summer reading:

Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories from the Harlem Renaissance, an entirely new edition of short stories by Zora Neale Hurston - freshly transcribed and edited by Genevieve West. It includes five recently rediscovered stories, printed in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of nation's most widely circulated Black newspapers in the 1920s and '30s.

- With a foreword by Tayari Jones, author of *An American Marriage*
- Related reading: Zora Neale Hurston's *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*, edited by Deborah G. Plant.

#8 In lieu of a summer road trip, read a HISTORY of highway-travel and race:

Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights, by Gretchen Sorin, explores how the automobile fundamentally changed African-American life, including the role of the "Green Book" in aiding travel and mobility. In the 1930s, a black postal carrier from Harlem named Victor Green published a book that was part travel guide and part survival guide. The Green Book helped African-Americans navigate safe passage across America well into the 1960s.

- If you'd like more excellent histories of the middle of the 20th-century, consider these:
- Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*
- Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom*
- Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America*

#7 BIOGRAPHY fans - here are two-for-one!

One of the most compelling speakers we've featured in our Virtual Event Series this spring has been Peniel E. Joseph, author of *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.*

Most Americans think of these two great leaders in contrast, representing militant self-defense versus nonviolence, black power versus civil rights, the sword versus the shield. Joseph upends this view to create two nuanced portraits: King was more revolutionary, and Malcolm more pragmatic, than we usually think.

#6 A gripping novel about the Civil Rights era – and winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize: *The Nickel Boys*, by Colson Whitehead, who already won the Pulitzer and National Book Award for his transporting, lyrical novel *The Underground Railroad*.

- *The Nickel Boys* has its paperback release in July, and we are hoping to host Colson Whitehead next month for a virtual book talk, livestreaming on the Midtown Scholar's new Crowdcast platform.
- The Pulitzer committee called the novel "a spare and devastating exploration of abuse at a reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida that is ultimately a powerful tale of human perseverance, dignity and redemption." Whitehead is only the 4th writer ever to have won the prize for a novel, twice!
- Set in the 1960s and based on a real school, the novel follows Elwood Curtis, a studious African-American from Tallahassee, who is caught up in the criminal justice system after riding in a stolen vehicle to attend university classes. Declared delinquent, he is sent to Nickel Academy, a juvenile reform school in Eleanor, Florida. Elwood tries to follow Dr. King's assertion, "Throw us in jail and we will still love you." He becomes friends with another boy, Jack Turner, who thinks that's impossibly naïve. When Turner overhears an administrator's plans to have Elwood killed, and the two attempt an escape that goes horribly wrong.

#5 A compelling summer read for families (older teens and adults):

Jacqueline Woodson's short, remarkable new novel *Red at the Bone* relates a family's history over successive generations. You may know Woodson as a National Book and Newberry award-winning author of more than 20 books for Young Adults. Multigenerational readers, from teens to parents and grandparents, will all find *Red at the Bone* resonant and moving.

- Shifting smoothly between 5 points of view!
- Two families from different social classes are joined together by an unexpected pregnancy and the child it produces.
- NPR critic Heller McAlpin writes that *Red at the Bone* fuses poetry and drama "to encompass issues of class, education, ambition, racial prejudice, sexual desire and orientation, identity, mother-daughter relationships, parenthood and loss — yet never feels like a checklist of Important Issues."
- Published last fall, yet resonant with today's headlines: The grandmother in the story was two years old and living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the 1921 race riots there.
- (p.80-81) "History tries to call it a riot, but it was a massacre." ... "Listen. Those Tulsa white folks burned my grandmama's beauty shop to the ground! They burned up the

school my mama would have gone to and her daddy's restaurant. They nearly burned my own mama, who carried a heart-shape scar on the side of her face till the day they laid her in the ground. (...) "The old folks used to say that from the ashes comes the new bird. There wasn't much they had left after the fires, but my mama's people packed up with they had and went up to Chicago..."

- For more like this: Woodson's *Another Brooklyn*, about young women growing up in 1970's Brooklyn

#4 A family memoir by a gifted Pennsylvania story-teller:

Philadelphia writer Lorene Cary's new memoir *lady sitting: My Year with Nana at the End of Her Century* is a journey through five generations of an African-American family.

- For a cross-cultural memoir of a Liberian woman's immigration to Texas in the 1990's, read novelist Wayetu Moore's new memoir, *The Dragons The Giant The Women* about
- For an emotionally gripping memoir about unequal justice in America and a Black man's wrongful, 30-year imprisonment on death row, read Anthony Ray Hinton's *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life, Freedom, and Justice*

#3 In lieu of watching your favorite sports, read an athlete's memoir this summer, like this Steelers' story, just published this week:

The bookstore is hosting a free live-streaming author talk Monday, June 15th, especially for sports fans, to celebrate Pittsburgh Steelers star running back James Conner's new book, *Fear is a Choice*.

- From fighting for his life to pursuing a career in the NFL, ACC Player of the Year and star Pittsburgh Steelers running back James Conner has lived a story offering wisdom and advice for anyone who has faced adversity. During his first two years at Pitt, running back James Conner became one of the Panthers' biggest stars, breaking records and winning the adoration of fans. Then, in his junior year, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. His mantra became, "Fear is a choice. I choose not to fear cancer." In his memoir, he shares his experiences during his battle with cancer and beyond, exploring the spiritual truths and personal principles that got him through his darkest days.
- A recording of tonight's talk will be available on the bookstore's youtube and facebook pages afterwards.

#2 A riveting, lyrical novel "about love, fury, and the black American experience":

Tochi Onyebuchi's *Riot Baby* is my top recommendation for fiction for all ages. It is much more than a dystopian science fiction novel, although the author is known for his award-winning young adult speculative fiction. It may also be the most modernist novel on the list, just 176 pages, with sparse, evocative prose.

- The author is an American civil rights lawyer of Nigerian descent and has won well-deserved praise from Amal El-Mohtar in the *New York Times*: "I experienced Tochi Onyebuchi's **RIOT BABY** as one tightly held breath. Moving from South Central Los Angeles to Harlem to Rikers Island to a speculative near-future in short bursts of fierce feeling, 'Riot Baby,' Onyebuchi's first novel for adults, is as much the story of Ella and

her brother, Kevin, as it is the story of black pain in America, of the extent and lineage of police brutality, racism and injustice in this country, written in prose as searing and precise as hot diamonds.

“Ella has a ‘Thing,’ a power that manifests variably as telepathy, precognition, telekinesis, but isn’t ever described in those terms; she experiences it as overwhelming grief and anger, as explosion and aftermath, and struggles with controlling and deploying it over the course of the book. Kevin, born in 1992 during the Los Angeles riots, grows up in Harlem in the shadow of Ella’s furious, repressed power — but when Ella vanishes after watching reports of the murder of Sean Bell on television, she takes her limited protection of him with her. Kevin’s adolescence consists of being harassed by the police and consistently steered away from education and prospects, before getting arrested on an attempted armed robbery charge and imprisoned on Rikers.

“Onyebuchi’s voice work is magnificent, sharp and whipping, and he shifts from macro to micro with confident flexibility. Ella’s sections are written in the third person, and through her Thing-ridden eyes we see decades of cruelty toward black people; meanwhile, Kevin’s first-person narration roots us in the immediacy and hopelessness of his contemporary experience. Though it’s ostensibly centered on Ella’s and Kevin’s coming-of-age, ‘Riot Baby’ isn’t a bildungsroman so much as a reversal of one: an elegiac portrait of how white supremacy strips the future from black children, violence by violence, across generations and individual lives.”

- If you like science-fiction/fantasy, try 3-time Hugo Award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling author N.K. Jemisin, who has crafted her most incredible novel yet - *The City We Became: A Novel (The Great Cities Trilogy Book 1)* - a story of culture, identity, magic, and myths in contemporary New York City.

#1 On the power of protest and the history of #BlackLivesMatter:

This summer more than ever, DeRay McKesson’s 2018 essays *On the Other Side of Freedom: The Case for Hope* are essential reading. The author is an internationally recognized civil rights activist and host of the podcast “Pod Save the People.” He was 29 years old in August 2014 during the uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri. His book draws from his own experiences to offer a new way to understand the nature of oppression and calls on all of us to dismantle the legacies of racism. He’s now become a leading national advocate for the use-of-force police reforms known as “8 Can’t Wait.”

- You may have heard DeRay McKesson at the bookstore this winter interviewing the former White House Communications Director Dan Pfeiffer, host of “Pod Save America.” A video recording of their conversation is archived at www.YouTube.com/midtownscholarbookstore
- For another view of how women especially can reclaim power in the streets, read Tatyana Fazlalizadeh’s *Stop Telling Women to Smile: Stories of Street Harassment and How We’re Taking Back Our Power*

Plus 5 special topics

#5 In honor of Pride month:

Darnell L. Moore's *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black & Free in America*.

When Darnell Moore was fourteen, three boys from his neighborhood tried to set him on fire. They cornered him while he was walking home from school, harassed him because they thought he was gay, and poured a jug of gasoline on him. He escaped, but just barely. Three decades later, he is an award-winning writer, a leading Black Lives Matter activist, and an advocate for justice and liberation. In his memoir, he shares the journey taken by that scared, bullied teenager who not only survived, but found his calling.

#4 POETRY for children and teens:

Say Her Name: Poems to Empower, written and compiled by Zetta Elliot and illustrated by Loveis Wise

Inspired by #SayHerName, these poems pay tribute to victims of police brutality as well as the activists championing the Black Lives Matter cause.

Two of my favorites are "We Can't Breathe" and "A Big Blue Sky Poem"

#3 A Novel in Free Verse for Middle-Schoolers:

Jason Reynolds, *Long Way Down*, 2017 Newberry Award winner.

15-year-old Will Holloman is ready to exact vengeance on the person who murdered his older brother, Shawn. Over the course of a minute, as Will rides the elevator down from his 8th floor apartment, at each floor a new person, who is dead, gets on and tells a story about their lives.

#2 A beautiful, history-themed Picture Book framed as "a love letter to America."

Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson, *The Undefeated*:

"This is for the unafraid. The audacious ones, who carried the red, white, and *Weary Blues* on the battlefield to save an imperfect Union. The righteous marching ones who sang *we shall not be moved* because black lives matter. (...) This is for the unlimited, unstoppable ones. The dreamers and doers who swim across *The Big Sea* of our imagination and show us *the majestic shores of the promised land*: The Wilma Rudolphs The Muhammad Alis The Althea Gibsons The Jesse Ownses The Jordans and The LeBrons The Serenas and The Sheryls The Reece Whitleys and the undiscovered."

- Related reading: Vashti Harrison, *Little Legends: Exceptional Men in Black History*

#1 A rhyming BOARD BOOK for the youngest set, and those who read to them:

Ibram X. Kendi, *Antiracist Baby*, with quirky, adorable illustrations by Ashley Lukashevsky.

"Antiracist Baby is bred, *not* born. Antiracist Baby is raised to make society transform. Babies are taught to be racist or antiracist - there's no neutrality. Take these nine steps to make equity a reality. 1 Open your eyes to all skin colors. (...) 2 Use your words to talk about race. No one will see racism if we only stay silent. If we don't name racism, it won't stop being so violent. (...) 9 Believe we shall overcome (...)"