On the following pages are descriptions of the four new books that will be used in Eliot’s ALL READ discussion groups beginning in February. Also included is a description of “Waking Up White” for those who did not get to participate in a discussion of that book last fall.

Read the descriptions and decide which one you’d most like to read and discuss, so you’ll be ready, on Sunday, January 17, to sign up for a group that best fits your interests and your schedule.
Between the World and Me
by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Winner of the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction. Named one of the 10 best books of the year by The New York Times Book Review • The Washington Post • People • Entertainment Weekly • Vogue • Los Angeles Times • Chicago Tribune • Newsday • Vulture • Library Journal • Publishers Weekly

Readers of his work in The Atlantic and elsewhere know Ta-Nehisi Coates for his thoughtful and influential writing on race in America. Written as a series of letters to his teenaged son, his new memoir, Between the World and Me, walks us through the course of his life, from the tough neighborhoods of Baltimore in his youth, to Howard University—which Coates dubs “The Mecca” for its revelatory community of black students and teachers—to the broader Meccas of New York and Paris. Coates describes his observations and the evolution of his thinking on race, from Malcolm X to his conclusion that race itself is a fabrication, elemental to the concept of American (white) exceptionalism. Ferguson, Trayvon Martin, and South Carolina are not bumps on the road of progress and harmony, but the results of a systemized, ubiquitous threat to “black bodies” in the form of slavery, police brutality, and mass incarceration. Coates is direct and, as usual, uncommonly insightful and original. There are no wasted words. This is a powerful and exceptional book.

“Powerful and passionate . . . profoundly moving . . . a searing meditation on what it means to be black in America today.” The New York Times

“Brilliant . . . [Ta-Nehisi Coates] is firing on all cylinders, and it is something to behold: a mature writer entirely consumed by a momentous subject and working at the extreme of his considerable powers at the very moment national events most conform to his vision.” The Washington Post

“I’ve been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly it is Ta-Nehisi Coates. The language of Between the World and Me, like Coates’s journey, is visceral, eloquent, and beautifully redemptive. And its examination of the hazards and hopes of black male life is as profound as it is revelatory. This is required reading.” Toni Morrison

“Ta-Nehisi Coates is the James Baldwin of our era, and this is his cri de coeur. A brilliant thinker at the top of his powers, he has distilled four hundred years of history and his own anguish and wisdom into a prayer for his beloved son and an invocation to the conscience of his country. Between the World and Me is an instant classic and a gift to us all.” Isabel Wilkerson, author of “The Warmth of Other Suns”

“A work of rare beauty and revelatory honesty, Between the World and Me is a love letter written in a moral emergency, one that Coates exposes with the precision of an autopsy and the force of an exorcism. . . . Coates is frequently lauded as one of America’s most important writers on the subject of race today, but this in fact undersells him: Coates is one of America’s most important writers on the subject of America today.” Slate
Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
by Bryan Stevenson

A powerful true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to fix our broken system of justice—from one of the most brilliant and influential lawyers of our time.

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn’t commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Just Mercy is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer’s coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

“A searing, moving and infuriating memoir . . . Bryan Stevenson may, indeed, be America’s Mandela. For decades he has fought judges, prosecutors and police on behalf of those who are impoverished, black or both. . . . Injustice is easy not to notice when it affects people different from ourselves; that helps explain the obliviousness of our own generation to inequity today. We need to wake up. And that is why we need a Mandela in this country.”

Nicholas Kristof, The New York Times

“Unfairness in the justice system is a major theme of our age. . . . This book brings new life to the story by placing it in two affecting contexts: [Bryan] Stevenson’s life work and the deep strain of racial injustice in American life. . . . The book extols not his nobility but that of the cause, and reads like a call to action for all that remains to be done. . . . The message of the book, hammered home by dramatic examples of one man’s refusal to sit quietly and countenance horror, is that evil can be overcome, a difference can be made. Just Mercy will make you upset and it will make you hopeful.”


“It will come as no surprise to those who have heard Stevenson speak or perused any of his briefs that Just Mercy is an easy read — a work of style, substance and clarity. Mixing commentary and reportage, he adroitly juxtaposes triumph and failure, neither of which is in short supply, against an unfolding backdrop of the saga of Walter McMillian, an innocent black Alabaman sentenced to death for the 1986 murder of an 18-year-old white woman.”

Rob Warden, Executive Director Emeritus of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law

There is an excellent UUA discussion guide for this book at www.uua.org/re/adults/read.
The New Jim Crow:
Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
by Michele Alexander

Once in a great while a book comes along that changes the way we see the world and helps to fuel a nationwide social movement. The New Jim Crow is such a book. Praised by Harvard Law professor Lani Guinier as "brave and bold," this book directly challenges the notion that the election of Barack Obama signals a new era of colorblindness. With dazzling candor, legal scholar Michelle Alexander argues that "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it." By targeting black men through the War on Drugs and decimating communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control—relegating millions to a permanent second-class status—even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness. In the words of Benjamin Todd Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP, this book is a "call to action."

Called "stunning" by Pulitzer Prize–winning historian David Levering Lewis, "invaluable" by the Daily Kos, "explosive" by Kirkus, and "profundly necessary" by the Miami Herald, this updated and revised paperback edition of The New Jim Crow, now with a foreword by Cornel West, is a must-read for all people of conscience.

“I can't remember a book that's brought more attention to a particular societal injustice in recent years. This is a credit to the intellectual courage of Michelle Alexander. Alexander is direct and frank about the influence of white supremacy in our history and in our society, and refuses to hem and haw in the name of an empty "moderation." I suspect it's that direct and frank approach that has attracted so many readers to her case. Should any sanity enter our sentencing laws over the next few years, some portion of the credit will likely belong to The New Jim Crow.”
The Atlantic

“The book marshals pages of statistics and legal citations to argue that the get-tough approach to crime that began in the Nixon administration and intensified with Ronald Reagan’s declaration of the war on drugs has devastated black America. Today, Professor Alexander writes, nearly one-third of black men are likely to spend time in prison at some point, only to find themselves falling into permanent second-class citizenship after they get out. That is a familiar argument made by many critics of the criminal justice system, but Professor Alexander’s book goes further, asserting that the crackdown was less a response to the actual explosion of violent crime than a deliberate effort to push back the gains of the civil rights movement. For many African-Americans, the book — which has spent six weeks on The New York Times paperback nonfiction best-seller list — gives eloquent and urgent expression to deep feelings that the criminal justice system is stacked against them.”
The New York Times

There is an excellent UUA discussion guide for this book at http://www.uua.org/re/adults/read/new-jim-crow.
Race, Place and Suburban Policing: Too Close for Comfort
by Andrea S. Boyles

While considerable attention has been given to encounters between black citizens and police in urban communities, there have been limited analyses of such encounters in suburban settings. Race, Place, and Suburban Policing tells the full story of social injustice, racialized policing, nationally-profiled shootings, and the ambiguousness of black life in a suburban context. Through compelling interviews, participant observation, and field notes from a marginalized black enclave located in a predominately white suburb, Andrea S. Boyles examines a fraught police-citizen interface, where blacks are segregated and yet forced to negotiate overlapping spaces with their more affluent white counterparts.

“Race, Place, and Suburban Policing is a timely and important book. Set in a suburb not far from Ferguson, MO, (Meacham Park!), it is a must-read for those who seek a deeper understanding of the social and historical forces that led to the killing of Michael Brown and the protests that took hold of Ferguson in the months following his death.”
Nikki Jones, author of “Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence”

“This book is a powerful and prescient investigation of police–African American community relations in suburban St. Louis. What makes Boyles’ work so compelling is her insistence that contemporary racialized policing be understood through a socio-historical lens. She balances a broad view, including the roots of American policing in slave codes and sundown towns, with the rich and careful analysis of the history of place to offer a groundbreaking contribution.”
Jody Miller, author of “Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and Gendered Violence” and “One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender”

Andrea S. Boyles is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Lindenwood University-Belleville. She has also taught inmates and correctional officers within the Missouri prison system.

NOTE: Boyles will be presenting a forum on her work on Saturday, February 27, from 9:00 to 11:00 am, in Eliot’s Adams Hall.
Waking Up White
and Finding Myself in the Story of Race
by Debby Irving

Racism taps into our deepest fears and longings. Understanding how it works is the key as we move toward racial justice and healing.

From Debby Irving........

"Waking Up White is the book I wish someone had handed me decades ago. My hope is that by sharing my sometimes cringe-worthy struggle to understand racism and racial tensions, I offer a fresh perspective on bias, stereotypes, manners, and tolerance. As I unpack my own long-held beliefs about colorblindness, being a good person, and wanting to help people of color, I reveal how each of these well-intentioned mindsets actually perpetuated my ill-conceived ideas about race. I also explain why and how I’ve changed the way I talk about racism, work in racially mixed groups, and understand the racial justice movement as a whole. Exercises at the end of each chapter prompt readers to explore their own racialized ideas. Waking Up White’s personal narrative is designed to work well as a rapid read, a book group book, or support reading for courses exploring racial and cultural issues."

"Debby Irving bravely describes her jolting and continuing journey from white oblivion to white awareness in an honest way that may inspire others to do such transformational work on themselves. She has courage in tracing many cultural and class assumptions that kept her for decades in a fog of racial denial and white dominance. This empathetic book can help white readers to dissipate the imprisoning white ignorance that we did not ask for but that has damaged our world and ourselves."

Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D., Associate Director, Wellesley Centers for Women

"Debby Irving is a self-proclaimed WASP from New England who discovered in her late 40’s that many of the benefits her father had received in housing and education from the G.I. Bill had been denied to millions of African-American veterans. In her book, Ms. Irving writes about ‘stepping out of a dream’ and realizing that the black people she knew lived in a more challenging world than she ever would face."

The New York Times

"Irving’s book is an immensely brave and important cultural memoir."

Portland Press Herald

“…one of the most important books on race in recent memory.”

Readers + Writers Journal