

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Sponsored by the Intersection Justice Committee

(below are excerpts from “The Spire” Newsletters)

2017

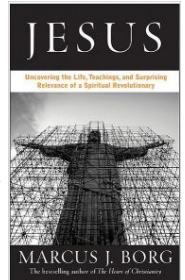
January 2017—

“Jesus: The Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary” by Marcus Borg

Our current book is “Jesus: The Life, Teachings and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary,” by Marcus Borg, and our next discussion will be Saturday, Jan. 28, at 10am.

This book has been chosen because it gets right at the heart of what it means for us to be Christians and to live out our faith. Who was Jesus and what was most essential about him, his life and what he had to teach us about the essence of God? What does this mean for us in terms of the meaning of following Christ and being followers of Christ? What strikes you as most significant in what you read in this book? Join us as we wrestle with these and other questions, including the kinds of justice opportunities that this might mean the IJC ought to be working to offer to the congregation going forward.

We are eagerly anticipating the discussion of this book, which is Borg's seminal work on Jesus, and we hope that many of you will join us! You can check your local bookstore for the book, find it on Amazon at <https://goo.gl/njrRqs> or talk to Kevin Nelson for assistance in procuring a copy.

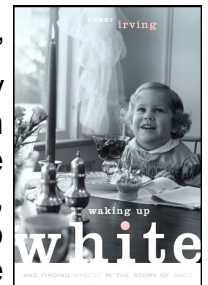


February 2017—

“Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race” by Deborah Irving

Our February book will be “Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race” by Deborah Irving. As we head into the celebration of black history during Black History Month, please join us as we wrestle with what it means to be white and to benefit from

a society structured to benefit white people at the expense of people of color. In the words of Bishop Gene Robinson, the retired Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire, “Irving's personal and moving tale takes us on an adventure to a world utterly new to her as she wakes up to the reality of how, without her knowledge or active pursuit, she lives in a society which is set up to reward her at the expense of people of color. I cannot imagine a more understandable and compelling invitation to learn about how racism lives on in our homes, communities, and nation.” Please join us Saturday, Feb. 25th at 10 AM as we wrestle with this topic and ask ourselves, “What does this mean for us now?” All invited.

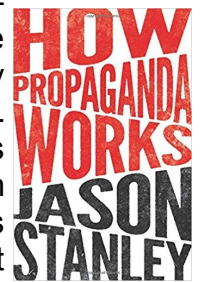


March 2017—

“How Propaganda Works” by Jason Stanley

The Intersectional Justice Committee (IJC) continues to invite members of the congregation to participate in book discussions in order to discuss and broaden our knowledge base on a range of justice matters. The March book is “How Propaganda Works” by Jason Stanley, and our next discussion will be Saturday, March 25th, at 10:00 AM.

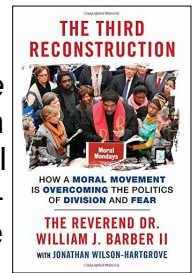
Please join us as we examine how to recognize propaganda, how propaganda operates subtly, how it undermines democracy--particularly the ideals of democratic deliberation and equality--how it has damaged democracies of the past, and what all of this means for us now. All are invited to join in this conversation. You can look for the book at your favorite library or bookstore, or talk to Kevin Nelson who can provide you with a copy for \$16. You can reach Kevin at kmichael07@yahoo.com. Also, for those interested in reading ahead, the April book will be *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II.



April 2017—

"The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear" by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II

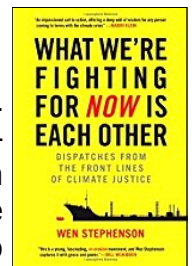
The April book is *The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear* by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, and our next discussion will be Saturday, April 29th, at 10:00 AM. Rev. Dr. Barber is the founder of the Moral Mondays Movement in NC and is one of Pastor Sara's personal heroes and most compelling preachers she has ever heard. In this book, he tells "the stirring story of how he helped start a movement to bridge America's racial divide." Over the summer of 2013, Rev. Dr. Barber led more than a hundred thousand people at rallies across NC to protest restrictions to voting access and an extreme makeover of state government. This is a movement that has spread around the country, including being emulated here in NY State. This book tells the story of this movement (plus, it's relatively short!). Please join us in this important discussion that can help to inform our own resistance efforts today.



May/June 2017—

"What We Are Fighting For Now Is Each Other: Dispatches From the Front Lines of Climate Justice" by Wen Stephenson

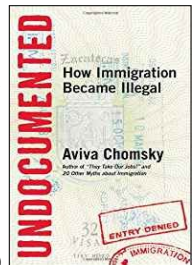
Everyone is welcome to our next conversation held on Saturday, June 10th at 10:00 am. We'll discuss the book entitled, "What We Are Fighting For Now Is Each Other: Dispatches From the Front Lines of Climate Justice" by Wen Stephenson. Stephenson takes an urgent, on-the-ground look at some of the "new American radicals" who have laid everything on the line to build a stronger climate justice movement in opposition to political and economic policies that are leading us to catastrophic climate change.



July 2017—

"Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal" by Aviva Chomsky

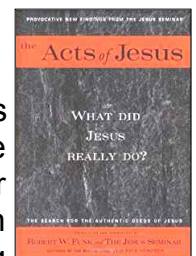
The June/July book is *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* by Aviva Chomsky, and our next discussion will be Saturday, July 29th, at 10 AM. All are invited to join in this conversation. In this illuminating work, immigrant rights activist Aviva Chomsky shows how "illegality" and "undocumentedness" are concepts that were created to exclude and exploit. With a focus on US policy, she probes how people, especially Mexican and Central Americans, have been assigned this status—and to what ends. Blending history with human drama, Chomsky explores what it means to be undocumented in a legal, social, economic, and historical context. The result is a powerful testament of the complex, contradictory, and ever-shifting nature of status in America. Immigrants of all sorts are experiencing substantial discrimination in the United States, and a movement is underway and has been pressing the Schenectady City Council since February to declare Schenectady a "sanctuary city" and adopt a series of immigrant-friendly policies. As such, understanding the history of "undocumentedness" is especially important and can be a key tool to inform the conversations taking place in our community.



September 2017—

"The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?" by The Jesus Seminar

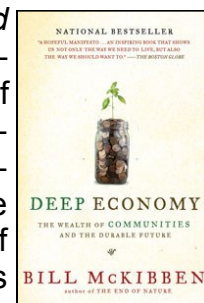
On July 23rd, the scripture readings were from John 6:1-21—the stories about Jesus feeding the five thousand and Jesus walking on water across the Sea of Galilee. Have you ever read such stories and wondered, "Did these stories really happen?" If so, our September book discussion is for you! For our next book study, and in honor of John Dominic Crossan's visit in September, the Intersectional Justice Committee is inviting the congregation to read, *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* which we will discuss on Saturday, September 16th, at 10 AM. Crossan's visit will be the following weekend. Crossan is a New Testament scholar, historian of early Christianity, former Catholic priest, and a member of the



Jesus Seminar. The Jesus Seminar was a group of 150 critical biblical scholars and laymen who have been foremost in the field of historical Jesus research. Their special contributions have been related to uncovering the authentic words and deeds of Jesus. Marcus Borg, a previous lecturer at FUMC, was also a member. Their seminal and most popular work was *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* And the companion to that is *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* By Robert W. Funk and The Jesus Seminar. Funk was the convener of the Jesus Seminar until his death in 2005. *The Acts of Jesus*, despite being a long book, is organized in a particularly accessible way that makes it easy to read and participate in the discussion. The parts that are critical to read are the introduction and the concluding chapter, “What Do We Really Know About Jesus?” In between are translations of half a dozen gospels and specific chapters on the birth/infancy stories and the empty tomb/appearances/ascension. You are encouraged to read as much of the in between material as you find interesting and engaging. Kevin M. Nelson (kmichael07@yahoo.com) can provide you with a gently used copy of *The Acts of Jesus* for \$16 or you can get your own through a library or other source. The following discussion near the end of October is going to be about the previously scheduled *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* by Bill McKibben.

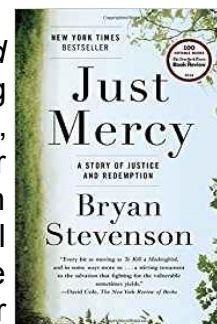
October 2017—

“Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future” by Bill McKibben, The October book study will be on *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* by Bill McKibben, who is a nationally-renowned climate justice activist and a United Methodist clergy member in New England who was a co-founder of 350.org. In this book, McKibben lays out a vision for how to be a society and a community together that stands as a stark contrast to the bankrupt vision of us as consumers that is provided by Capitalism. To learn more about this alternative vision and the solutions it points us toward in terms of community, local production and alleviation of some of the harmful effects of climate change, please join us in reading McKibben’s book! The discussion will take place on Saturday, October 28th at 10 AM at the church.



November/December 2017—

“Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption” by Bryan Stevenson. The November/December book study will be on *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson. It is a *NY Times* Bestseller and award winning book, including being named one of the “Best Book of the Year” by the *NY Times*, winner of the Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction, winner of the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction, winner of a Books for a Better Life Award and numerous others. 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. The discussion will take place on Saturday, December 9th at 10 AM at the church.



2018

January 2018—

"Crazy Love" by Leslie Morgan Steiner

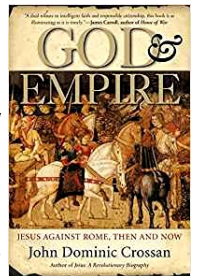
The January book study will be on *Crazy Love* by Leslie Morgan Steiner. UMW and the Intersectional Justice Committee have teamed up to pick this book on abusive love out of Steiner's own life. At 22, Leslie Morgan Steiner seemed to have it all: a Harvard diploma, a glamorous job at *Seventeen* magazine, a downtown New York City apartment. Plus a handsome, funny, street-smart boyfriend who adored her. But behind her façade of success, this golden girl hid a dark secret. She'd made a mistake shared by millions: she fell in love with the wrong person. Gripping and utterly compelling, *Crazy Love* takes you inside the violent, devastating world of abusive love. Conor said he'd been abused since he was a young boy, and love and rage danced intimately together in his psyche. Why didn't Leslie leave? She stayed because she loved him. Find out for yourself if she had fallen truly in love – or into a psychological trap. *Crazy Love* will draw you in -- and never let go. The discussion on this book will take place Saturday, January 27th at 10 AM at the church.



February/March 2018—

"God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now" by John Dominic Crossan

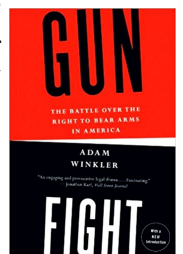
The February/March book study will be on the book entitled *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* by renowned biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan, who was the Carl lecture series lecturer here at First UMC this past fall. From the divine punishment and promise found in Genesis through the revolutionary messages of Jesus and Paul, John Dominic Crossan reveals what the Bible has to say about land and economy, violence and retribution, justice and peace, and, ultimately, redemption. In contrast to the oppressive Roman military occupation of the first century, he examines the meaning of the non-violent Kingdom of God prophesized by Jesus and the equality advocated by Paul to the early Christian churches. The first-century Pax Romana, Crossan points out, was in fact a "peace" won through violent military action. Jesus preached a different kind of peace—a peace that surpasses all understanding—and a kingdom not of Caesar but of God. The Romans executed Jesus because he preached this Kingdom of God, a kingdom based on peace and justice, over the empire of Rome, which ruled by violence and force. For Jesus and Paul, Crossan explains, peace cannot be won the Roman way, through military victory, but only through justice and fair and equal treatment of all people. The discussion will take place Saturday, March 24th at 10 AM at church.



April/May 2018—

"Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America" by Adam Winkler.

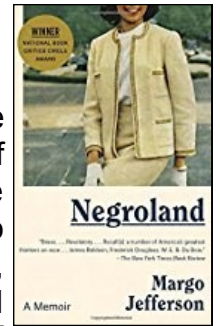
The April book study will be on *Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America* by Adam Winkler. *Gunfight* is a timely work examining America's four-centuries-long political battle over gun control and the right to bear arms. In this definitive and provocative history, Adam Winkler attempts to reveal how guns—rather than abortion, race, or religion—are at the heart of America's cultural divide. Using the landmark 2008 case *District of Columbia v. Heller*—which invalidated a law banning handguns in the nation's capital—as a springboard, Winkler brilliantly weaves together the dramatic stories of gun-rights advocates and gun-control lobbyists, providing often unexpected insights into the venomous debate that now cleaves our nation. 20 illustrations are included. In the aftermath of the mass shootings at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, FL, the Las Vegas massacre, the Orlando massacre and countless other mass shootings, it is critical that we be more fully educated on this subject in order to more effectually engage in conversation and advocacy for effective changes to gun regulations. The discussion will be held on Sunday, May 20th, after Worship.



June 2018—

"Negroland: A Memoir" by Margo Jefferson.

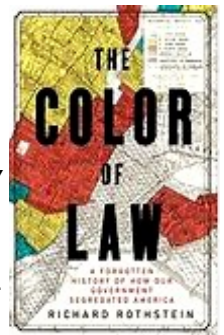
The June book study will be on *Negroland: A Memoir* by Margo Jefferson. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award (2016), A *New York Times* Notable Book, and one of the Best Books of the Year (2016) according to the Washington Post, LA Times, Time and others. Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic Margo Jefferson was born in 1947 into upper-crust black Chicago. Her father was head of pediatrics at Provident Hospital, while her mother was a socialite. In these pages, Jefferson takes us into this insular and discerning society: "I call it Negroland," she writes, "because I still find 'Negro' a word of wonders, glorious and terrible." Negroland's pedigree dates back generations, having originated with antebellum free blacks who made their fortunes among the plantations of the South. It evolved into a world of exclusive sororities, fraternities, networks, and clubs—a world in which skin color and hair texture were relentlessly evaluated alongside scholarly and professional achievements, where the Talented Tenth positioned themselves as a third race between whites and "the masses of Negroes," and where the motto was "Achievement. Invulnerability. Comportment." At once incendiary and icy, mischievous and provocative, celebratory and elegiac, *Negroland* is a landmark work on privilege, discrimination, and the fallacy of post-racial America. The discussion will be on Saturday, June 16th, at 10 AM at the church.



September/October 2018—

"The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America" by Richard Rothstein

The September/October book study will be on *The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein. This "powerful and disturbing history" exposes how American governments deliberately imposed racial segregation on metropolitan areas nationwide (*New York Times Book Review*.) All welcome. The discussion will be held Sunday, October 14, after Worship.

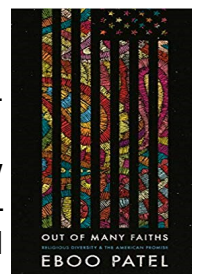


2019

January/February 2019—

"Our of Many Faiths" by Eboo Patel

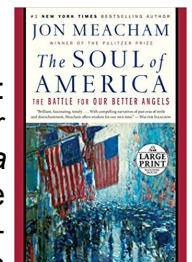
Sponsored by the Intersectional Justice Committee, our latest recommended book is entitled, "Out of Many Faiths: Religious Diversity and the American Promise" by Eboo Patel. It's a book that explores religious diversity and the American promise. Robert Wuthnow writes that it is "A passionate response to the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, racist white nationalism that so deeply afflicts our nation." Everyone is welcome to pick up this book and read it, and join us to discuss this timely defense in support of religious diversity in our nation at a time when there is so much division between one another. The discussion on this book will be held on Saturday, February 9th, at 10:00 AM in the Gathering Room.



March/April 2019—

"The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels" by Jon Meacham

On Saturday, April 6th, at 10:00 AM, a book discussion will be held on "The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels" by Jon Meacham. Named one of the best books of the year by NPR in 2018. Our current climate of partisan fury is not new, and in *The Soul of America* Meacham shows us how what Abraham Lincoln called the "better angels of our nature" have repeatedly won the day. Painting surprising portraits of Lincoln and other presidents, and illuminating the courage of such influential citizen activists as Martin Luther King, Jr., Meacham brings vividly to life turning points in American history. While the American story has not always—or even often—been heroic, we have been sustained by a belief in progress even in the gloomiest of times. In this inspiring book, Meacham reassures us, "The good news is that we have come through such darkness before"—as, time and again, Lincoln's better angels have found a way to prevail. (416 pages) Everyone

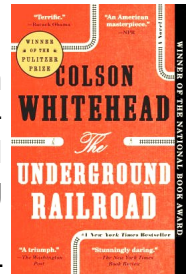


is welcome to pickup a copy of the book and join the discussion on April 6th.

May/June 2019—

“The Underground Railroad: A Novel” by Colson Whitehead

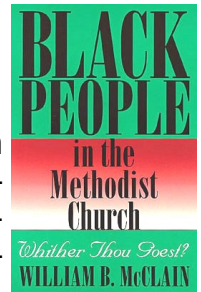
On Sunday, June 2nd, after Worship and the potluck luncheon celebrating Christian Education Sunday, we'll held a book discussion on “The Underground Railroad: A Novel” by Colson Whitehead. Colson is a Pulitzer Prize winner and a National Book Award winner as well as being recommended by Oprah's Book Club. It chronicles a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South. As Whitehead re-creates the terrors for black people in the pre-Civil War era, he seamlessly weaves the saga of the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day. “The Underground Railroad” is at once a kinetic adventure of one woman's ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share. All welcome. Plan to pick up a copy of this book and attend the book discussion on June 2nd!



July 2019—

“Black People in the Methodist Church” by William B. McClain

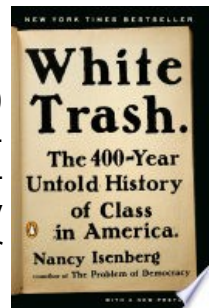
The next book discussion will be on “Black People in the Methodist Church” by William B. McClain, which has been recommended by Virgia Phoenix. According to the description, Dr. McClain “has written a fascinating and insightful account of one segment of Methodism's complex history. The early circuit riders, abolitionists, John Wesley himself...all are here. [A] unique account of the struggles within United Methodism, the disastrous 'uniting' conference of 1939, and the setbacks that forced a segregated faction to rise from its ashes.” The discussion will be on Sunday, July 21st, after the 10 AM service. This book has somewhat limited availability, but you can order a used copy on Amazon (generally for a low cost), see if one of the local bookstores can procure a copy, or possibly borrow a copy.



October 2019—

“White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America” by Nancy Isenberg.

All are invited to participate by picking up a copy of the book and gathering at 10:00 am on Saturday, Oct. 19th to discuss it! Isenberg upends assumptions about America's supposedly class-free society—where liberty and hard work were meant to ensure real social mobility. Poor whites were central to the rise of the Republican Party in the early 19th century. Marginalized as a class, white trash have always been at or near the center of major political debates over the character of the American identity.

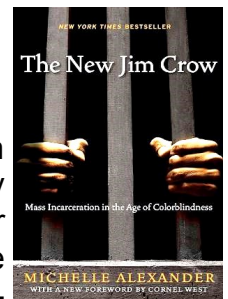


2020

January 2020—

“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” by Michelle Alexander.

Our next book discussion will be held on Saturday, January 11th, at 10:00 am on “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” authored by Michelle Alexander. Online description:...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 “profoundly 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.



February/March 2020—

“Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny” by Kate Manne

Sponsored by our Intersectional Justice Committee, the next recommended book is entitled, “Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny” by Kate Manne. All are welcome to pick up a copy of the book, read it and join the discussion March 14th at 10am in the Gathering Room.

Online description: Misogyny is a hot topic, yet it's often misunderstood. This book is an exploration of misogyny in public life and politics by the moral philosopher and writer Kate Manne. It argues that misogyny should not be understood primarily in terms of the hatred or hostility some men feel toward all or most women. Rather, it's primarily about controlling, policing, punishing, and exiling the "bad" women who challenge male dominance. And it's compatible with rewarding "the good ones," and singling out other women to serve as warnings to those who are out of order.

Manne examines events that set the stage for the 2016 US presidential election. Not only was the misogyny leveled against Hillary Clinton predictable in both quantity and quality, Manne argues it was predictable that many people would be prepared to forgive and forget regarding Donald Trump's history of sexual assault and harassment. For this, Manne argues, is misogyny's oft-overlooked and equally pernicious underbelly: exonerating or showing "himpathy" for the comparatively privileged men who dominate, threaten, and silence women.

