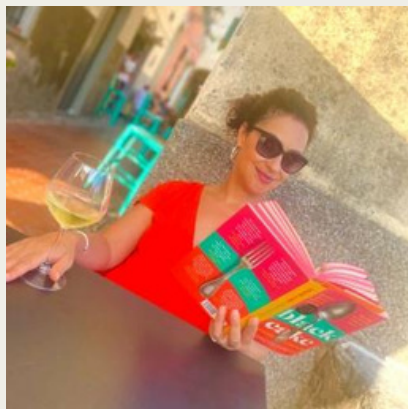


Co! That's A Bit Racey!

READING LISTS



FAVOURITE BOOKS BY AUTHORS OF COLOUR

BY CLAIRE BALE

AUTHOR OF THATSABITRACEY.COM

CONTENTS

Introduction 03

Why only authors of colour

List 1 04

Black Authors: My favourite books by writers of Afro-Caribbean heritage

List 2 05

Asian Authors: My top five books by authors of Asian heritage

List 3 06

LGBTQ+: Powerful stories with LGBTQ+ characters

List 4 07

Historical Fiction: Stories that have brought the past to life

List 5 08

Non-Fiction: Books that have helped me understand the world through facts and advice

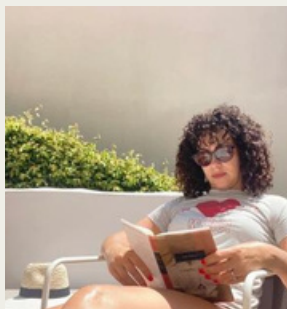
Conclusion 09

A final few words from me, and a thank you for supporting me

,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CLAIRE BALE



Hi, I'm Claire Bale. I'm a blogger, activist for racial justice, diversity and inclusion professional, and self-confessed bookworm.

I've been reading all my life. More recently, I've only been reading books by authors of colour. It was a decision I made in the summer of 2020, when I began to research the racial inequalities in the world today.

As a mixed-race woman living in Britain, it was a time of reflection about my own experiences and privileges, and it was the start of a life changing journey for me.

The knowledge I gained by actively seeking out stories that would have likely passed me by otherwise, enabled me to understand the world a lot better. It led me to begin my anti-racism blog, thatsabitracey.com, and accompanying Instagram page [@oo_thats_a_bit_racey](https://www.instagram.com/oo_thats_a_bit_racey). I made connections with other activists, found the courage to use my voice to educate others, and stepped into a career in Diversity and Inclusion. All thanks to that decision to only read books by authors of colour.

People always ask me for my favourite books, and I always find it a challenge to answer them. So here are some of my favourites, grouped into five categories: Black authors, Asian authors, LGBTQ+ stories, historical fiction and non-fiction. I hope you find my lists helpful, and I hope you find as much pleasure, knowledge and power as I did between the pages of the books listed here.

LIST ONE: BLACK AUTHORS

I'm of mixed race heritage. My maternal grandfather was from Nigeria and my grandmother was white British. Racism and anti-blackness have always been an important topic for me to understand, and this is where my book lists begin.

①

Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

An emotional roller coaster and an action-packed 300 pages, this begins with two sisters in Africa and follows their families' paths through nine generations. From slavery and slave trading, through to modern day America, it's Black American history in one novel.

②

The Sweetness of Water by Nathan Harris

The most beautiful, tender debut novel, set in America immediately after Emancipation. Two brothers, freedmen, begin to build new lives on a white family's farm. Life is not without its challenges and heartbreak for all concerned. Not a dry eye in the house with this one.

③

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett

This struck a chord with me, as someone who could "pass" as white to the untrained eye, depending on how I wear my hair that day. It's about two sisters whose lives take very different paths when one of them chooses to "pass" as white and leave her Afro-Caribbean heritage behind.

④

Black Cake by Charmaine Wilkerson

I'm a sucker for a multi-generational family saga full of secrets and this is one of my favourites. It begins on a Caribbean island and ends two generations later in America at the reading of a will. More interesting than the will is the confessional letter that sits alongside it.

⑤

The Bread The Devil Knead by Lisa Allen-Agostini

Set in beautiful, buzzing Trinidad, this book uncovers the secrets of its central female character. Hiding bruises from her partner, she finds ways to maintain her independence, but life catches up with her in this exciting and unique novel. Trigger warning - domestic violence.



LIST TWO: ASIAN AUTHORS

Anti-racism is about supporting all minority ethnic groups, and I've enjoyed learning more about Asian people's experiences and histories through my reading. I've only just scratched the surface of understanding Asia's rich and varied culture so far. These are some of my favourite books that have helped me learn more.

①

Yellow Face by R F Kuang

On the surface, a weird and wonderful thriller about a writer who steals her dead friend's manuscript to write a bestseller. On closer inspection, a subtle and sophisticated satire of being woke in a world that doesn't have a clue.

②

Best of Friends by Kamila Shamsie

Following the lives of two best friends from Karachi in the 1980s to contemporary London, this is a great read. It taught me more about women in Pakistan as the country came out of dictatorship, and held a mirror up to the complexity and beauty of female friendships.

③

Before The Coffee Gets Cold by Toshikazu Kawaguchi

A series of three sweet, short books. They each tell the stories of intriguing characters who visit a magical Japanese cafe that helps them travel back in time, under certain, strict conditions. Each character has a fascinating reason to want to turn back the clock, and each book is beautifully bitter sweet.

④

Hana Khan Carries On by Uzma Jalaluddin

Set in a family-run Halal restaurant in Canada, this is a rom-com with a more serious side than most. Hate crimes in the neighbourhood, societal expectations and career limiting assumptions, mean that Hana Khan is a character you find yourself rooting for. You don't often read about heroines who wear a hijab in mainstream fiction. It makes you think.

⑤

Love Marriage by Monica Ali

A long book packed with humour, social commentary, romance and secrets. If you liked Ali's Brick Lane, you'll love this even more. Proof that no one really has it all, even a successful doctor with a handsome fiancée and a supposedly open-minded mixed-race family.



LIST THREE: LGBTQ+ STORIES

Sadly, there are many minoritised groups who experience injustice in the world, including LGBTQ+ communities. It's important to prioritise groups who aren't usually in the mainstream if you want to understand the world in a meaningful way, so here are some of my recommendations featuring LGBTQ+ stories and characters.

①

Here Again Now by Okechukwu Nzelu

OMG this book is just too beautiful. If you appreciate well crafted prose, this is the one for you, and the story is so lovely too. A detailed but gentle look into the complexities of being gay, Black and male in the London Afro Caribbean community, with a love story so deep and non-clichéd it makes you cry.

②

Giovanni's Room by James Baldwin

Written by gay Black author James Baldwin in the 1950s, our star-crossed lovers are white in this short and powerful story. Baldwin said he couldn't face the trauma of writing about being both gay and Black at the same time. It's stunningly heartbreaking, with a tonne of atmosphere from those fascinating 1950s bars and boarding houses.

③

All My Mother's Lovers by Ilana Masad

A young gay woman works out her mother's many secrets after her death. Nothing was what it seemed to be in her picture perfect life, and our flawed heroine learns more about herself, as well as her mother, as she meets the lovers she had over the years - none of whom were her father.

④

Mr Loverman by Bernadine Evaristo

I really enjoyed this book because I fell in love with all the characters, especially our dapper septogenarian hero, Barry. Also his long suffering wife Carmel, and his long time lover Morris. Set in East London, with references to the Caribbean Islands our cast called home, it's a great read. It works well on audiobook too.

⑤

The Confessions of Frannie Langton by Sara Collins

Recently made into a TV series for ITVX and Amazon Prime, this is quite an involved read, akin to *Alias Grace*. It covers all the tough topics - slavery, murder, crime and punishment.



LIST FOUR: HISTORICAL FICTION

I believe that in order to understand the present, you must first understand the past. Historical fiction is my favourite genre, but it can be one of the hardest to read too. It's impossible to avoid the horrors of slavery if you're reading about Afro-Caribbean communities of just a few generations ago. It really helps make sense of the world though, and here are some of my favourites.

①

Attic Child by Lola Jaye

Set in the early 1900s, this story follows the path of a young African boy stolen from his homeland to be "trained" as a gentleman in England. Disturbing, upsetting and based in truth, it's an important read. If anyone refuses to think critically of colonialism, this is a good book to offer them.

②

The Long Song by Andrea Levy

Another challenging read, I had a love hate relationship with this one. Set on a slave plantation, our narrator was a house slave who recalls her life there in her old age. The language is hard to face (the n-word litters every page) and the book doesn't hold back from telling us the reality of how people were treated.

③

The Colour Purple by Alice Walker

Also a Steven Spielberg film, and now a Broadway musical too, this is one of those books you just have to read. I first read it at university and it's haunted me ever since. Set in 1910 through to 1940, we witness life's traumas for Celie, a young African American girl. We follow her as she survives abuse, violence and heartbreak. An amazing book, but not for the faint hearted.

④

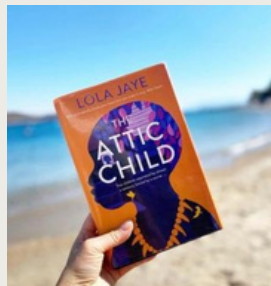
Of Women and Salt by Gabriela Garcia

We head to 1860s cigar factories in Cuba for this one, and end in the modern day refugee detention centres of America. Many narratives intersect, all from the points of view of women who have survived in different periods of time and different parts of the world.

⑤

Beloved by Toni Morrison

Another must read for anyone who's interested in female authors, Black authors, Afro-Caribbean or American history. A well deserved winner of the Pulitzer Prize, this is one of the most famous fictional accounts of life as an enslaved woman there is.



LIST FIVE: NON-FICTION

I love a good story, but I owe a lot of my knowledge about racial justice to the non-fiction books I've read recently. I've learnt to read them differently to a novel - to dip in and out and to be selective in which chapters to prioritise depending on what I'm looking for. I try to always have a non-fiction book on the go alongside my much loved fiction.

①

Me and White Supremacy by Laya F Saad

Written as a workbook, this is a commitment that's worth investing time in. It's a memorable book for me, because it gave me the language to describe the experiences that many of us have as ethnic minorities. Aimed at white people but relevant to all, this is an important book if you're serious about antiracism.

②

Black and British by David Olusoga

I read the kids' version, and there's an adult one too. A chance to unlearn the history you were taught at school and to understand that Black people have been part of British history for far longer than we've been led to believe.

③

Don't Touch My Hair by Emma Dabiri

Who knew there was so much history and heritage in Afro hair? This is quite an academic read, and a fascinating account of the history of Afro hair. It also takes a good hard look at the prejudice that still operates around Afro hair today, from non-consensual touching to discriminatory employment and education policies.

④

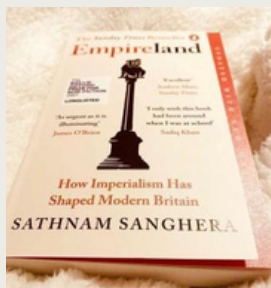
Empireland by Sathnam Sanghera

A brilliantly described explanation of the British Empire from the point of view of those who were colonised. Written by British journalist, Sanghera, who dives into his own heritage at the same time as researching the realities of the Empire, he does a great job of making the subject easy to understand.

⑤

Taking Up Space by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi

An empowering guide for Black women and girls to help them own the spaces they're in unapologetically. Not as easy as it sounds.



CONCLUSION

BOOKS HAVE THE POWER TO DRIVE CHANGE.

Choosing to read books by solely authors of colour has been the most empowering decision I've ever made. It's given me a huge amount of knowledge, understanding and motivation. I'm also honoured that it's enabled me to help others too, through the conversations I have, the education I offer and the representation I'm able to provide in the spaces I now occupy.

Every time someone picks up a book as a result of following my Instagram page, reading the blog or hearing me talk on local media, I feel a sense of accomplishment that I'm making a difference.

Thank you for engaging with my reading lists, and for being interested in the world around us. Thank you for taking steps to understand the stories of people of colour. It's vital in our journey towards racial justice.



thatsabitracey.com



[@oo_thats_a_bit_racey](https://www.instagram.com/oo_thats_a_bit_racey)