



Books & Writers



Race Relations: A second look through some old books

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

It appears that the age-old subject of race has become, in perhaps new and angrier ways, one of the latest (albeit oldest) focus of writers and pundits.

An undercurrent of racial tension is undeniably shaking the foundation of a nation that once flourished in freedom and faith.

There is a reason for the increase in racial rhetoric.

A recent CBS News/New York Times poll found that both blacks and whites are feeling worse about race relations now than they did six years ago. Unfortunate, but sadly obvious.

While this column's focus is on books and writers—I would encourage each of us to look closely at the issue of race, both in past and current literature.

In these times, when race either dominates discussion or suppresses it, it would be constructive to re-examine some important books that bring different perspectives on this subject.

Enlightenment comes through learning—and if we all become better educated about

our nation's historic struggle with race relations the more likely we are to understand it.

Who remembers reading *Black Like Me*, a 1961 book written by John Howard Griffin? Griffin, a white man from Dallas, Texas, had his skin darkened by doctors and then documented his experienced as a black man as he traveled through the deep south (a book which later caused him to move to Mexico after he and his family received threats on their lives).

More recently, Juan Williams, a FOX News Contributor and former commentator for National Public Radio, has written several books on American society, including the brilliant (and controversial) book *Enough*. Published nearly ten years ago, the book is more relevant now than ever.

Williams, a U.S. journalist who was born in Panama, called on blacks to take on a greater role in determining their own destiny. He takes current black leaders to task by saying they are missing the opportunity to lead when they spend too much time complaining about the past and not enough time building

for on the future.

Of course, you can't talk about race relations without reading the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Nobel Peace Prize winner wrote nearly 20 books in his lifetime, but his book *Strength to Love* is one that we can all look to in 2015.

In it, King begins by quoting from the Bible (Matthew 10:16) "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves," and makes the argument that only through toughness of mind and kindness of heart can we make strides toward racial harmony. King's grounding in non-violence is a theme that seems to have been forgotten by a generation of Americans, both black and white.

Another great non-fiction work on the subject is Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (a Pulitzer Prize winner). Branch, an Atlanta native who now lives in Baltimore, is best known for his trilogy about King and the civil rights movement (*Parting the Waters* was the first in that series).

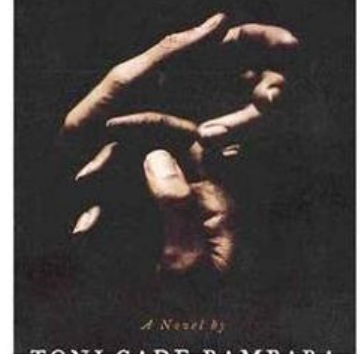
The Georgia Center for the Book, part of a federally funded program which exists in each of the 50 states, recommends at least two books that deal with race in its "Books All Georgians Should Read" list. *Those Bones Are Not My Child*, authored by the late Toni Cade Bambara, a New York native and Georgia Hall of Fame writer, is a novel about the missing and murdered children cases that beset Atlanta in the early 1980's.

Another book on the list is *Welcome to Braggsville*, by T. Geronimo Johnson, a story about four UC Berkeley students who stage a dramatic protest during a Civil War reenactment, a book the Washington Post calls "a shockingly funny story."

Bambara and Johnson are writers who have something to say about race relations—some of it irreverent and some of it insightful. But all of it is original.

Literary themes on race relations have been with us since our nation was founded—but all

Those Bones Are
Not My Child



Those Bones Are Not My Child, by Toni Cade Bambara, is listed as one of the "Books All Georgians Should Read." The novel is set in Atlanta in the early 1980s.

of these books offer differing treatments on the subject.

There is no shortcut to better racial understanding—especially given today's headlines.

Perhaps revisiting this literature can rationally and intellectually address many of our preconceptions about race. While the complex issue of race is often one of the heart—we must look to our minds to find a way toward reconciliation.

[David R. Altman has been nominated for Georgia Author of the Year by the Georgia Writer's Association for his first book of poetry, *Death in the Foyer*. He lives part time in Jasper, and can be reached at altmandavidr@gmail.com and www.davidraltman.com.]

Movie Under the Stars Sept. 12 features "Home"

North Georgia Community Action's Pickens County Community Service Center will be hosting their second annual fundraising event, "Movie under the stars" on September 12th where they will be showing the DreamWorks picture "Home".

The movie will start when it gets dark, roughly around 8:45, but guests will more than welcome to come early. There will be a small concession stand, which they are still accepting

donations for, that will have drinks, snacks, and a snow cone machine.

The admission will be a donation of one can of non-perishable, un-expired can or box of food per person, but no one will be turned away. Donations can be made at the Pickens County office at 250 West Church Street in Jasper. We hope to have a big turnout this year and don't forget to bring chairs or blankets to sit on!

Jasper Merchants meeting Sept. 10

Jasper Merchants Association holds its monthly membership meeting the 2nd Thursday of every month (except Dec. & Jan.) starting at 6 p.m. inside J-Town Grill located at 61 N. Main Street in Downtown Jasper. Food is available during the meetings. This meeting is open to the public and we cover topics ranging from local events the JMA host to ideas on bringing customers into your location. For more information at the JMA visit us at www.jasperjma.com or visit us on Facebook. JMA Hotline (706) 426-1968