

Reading and Discussion Guide

We Are Meant to Rise

Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to the World

Carolyn Holbrook and David Mura, Editors

About the Book

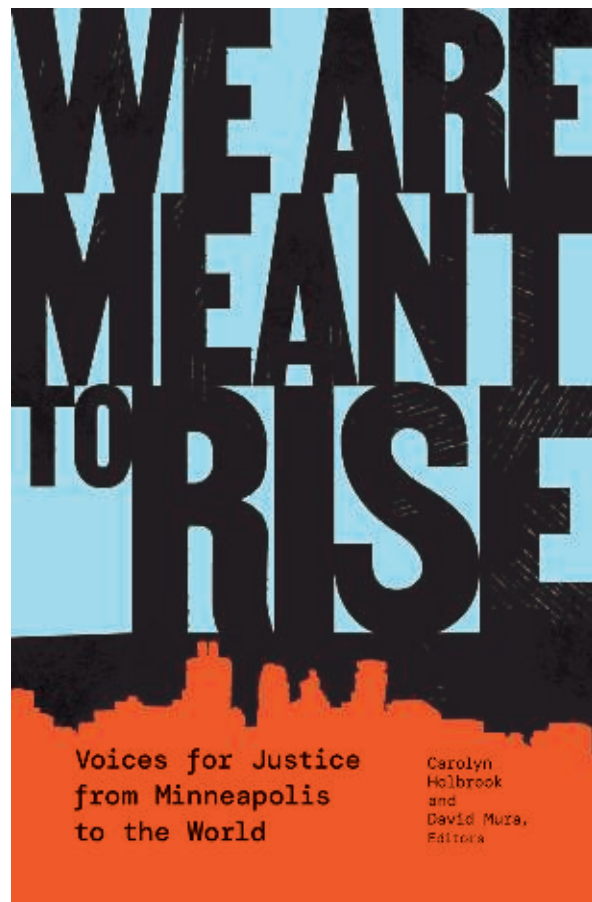
In this significant collection, Indigenous writers and writers of color bear witness to one of the most unsettling years in the history of the United States. Essays and poems vividly reflect and comment on the traumas we endured in 2020, beginning with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, deepened by the blatant murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers and the uprisings that immersed our city into the epicenter of passionate, worldwide demands for justice. In inspired and incisive writing these contributors speak unvarnished truths not only to the original and pernicious racism threaded through the American experience but also to the deeply personal, in essays about family, loss, food culture, economic security, and mental health. Their call and response is united here to rise and be heard.

We Are Meant to Rise lifts up the astonishing variety of BIPOC writers in Minnesota. From authors with international reputations to newly emerging voices, it features people from many cultures, including Indigenous Dakota and Anishinaabe, African American, Hmong, Somali, Afghani, Lebanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Puerto Rican, Colombian, Mexican, transracial adoptees, mixed race, and LGBTQ+ perspectives. Most of the contributors have participated in *More Than a Single Story*, a popular and insightful conversation series in Minneapolis that features Indigenous and people of color speaking on what most concerns their communities.

We Are Meant to Rise meets the events of the day, the year, the centuries before, again and again, with powerful testament to the intrinsic and unique value of the human voice.

Contributors

Suleiman Adan, Mary Moore Easter, Louise Erdrich, Anika Fajardo, Safy-Hallan Farah, Sherrie Fernandez-Williams, Pamela R. Fletcher Bush, Shannon Gibney, Kathryn Haddad, Tish Jones, Ezekiel Joubert III, Douglas Kearney, Ed Bok Lee, Ricardo Levins Morales, Arleta Little, Resmaa Menakem, Tess Montgomery, Ahmad Qais Munhazim, Melissa Olson, Alexis Pate, Bao Phi, Mona Susan Power, Marcie Rendon, Samantha Sencer-Mura, Said Shaiye, Erin Sharkey, Sun Yung Shin, Michael Torres, Diane Wilson, Kao Kalia Yang, and Kevin Yang.



"A powerful and passionate take on a fraught moment."

- Publishers Weekly

"This collection is diverse, enraging, heartbreaking, impassioned and this month's #RequiredReading."

- Ms. Magazine

Before Reading

1. What do you remember about the 2020 uprisings in Minneapolis and throughout the United States? Did you join your community in protest in 2020? What factors impacted your decision?
2. What changes have you witnessed in your community since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? What changes are still needed?

“Introduction: Call and Response” by David Mura

3. David Mura calls this anthology “A series of lenses on the American experience.” How would you describe your own lens on the American experience? Why is it important to read stories from Indigenous people and people of color bearing witness to the present state of the nation?
4. How can individual stories challenge and enrich us? What can we learn from strangers when we interact with them as fellow Americans?

“About More Than a Single Story” by Carolyn Holbrook

5. What are some of the perceptions about Black women writers that Carolyn Holbrook is working to shift? Why did she start *More Than a Single Story*?
6. What are some of the potential consequences of defining a person by a single story? Why does Holbrook assert that the multitude of stories in the United States is our greatest strength?

“Pandemic Love” by Ed Bok Lee

7. What are some of the smells, sights, and textures that Ed Bok Lee shares in his lyric essay? How did Lee’s identity as a father shape his reflections following George Floyd’s death?
8. What are some of the natural and human cycles that Lee writes about? What are some of the different forms of love that he describes?

“Juice” by Alexis Pate

9. What is the stone of racism that Alexis Pate writes about in his essay? Who squeezes juice from this stone? How can we continue to squeeze this stone?
10. What happens to this figurative stone when people collaborate and build coalitions? What are some “icons of the stone” that have been pulled down or changed? Have you worked to squeeze juice from the stone? Why or why not?

“George Floyd Was Killed in My Neighborhood” by Safy-Hallan Farah

11. What are some of the joyous and painful memories that Safy-Hallan Farah associates with Minneapolis? How was she treated as a Black immigrant girl growing up in this region?
12. What are some of the ways that Farah witnessed white people reacting to social uprisings? Have you witnessed performative or negative reactions from white people in your community? If yes, how?

“Queer Death in Exile” by Ahmad Qais Munhazim

13. What were some of the reflections that Ahmad Qais Munhazim had about people in prison during the Covid-19 lockdown? What reflections did they have about their future life as a young person growing up in Afghanistan?
14. Who was Sarah Hegazi and how did her life inspire Munhazim’s essay? What did Munhazim share about their relationship with grief? How does their experience connect to your own experience of grief and loss?

“With Birthday Girl Blindfolded, Star Piñata Considers His Regrets and Offers a Last Request” by Michael Torres

15. Why is this poem written from the perspective of a piñata? Who is the piñata and who is the birthday girl?
16. What are the piñata’s favorite words? What do you believe these words represent? What is the piñata’s last request?

“Battlegrounds and Building Grounds” by Kao Kalia Yang

17. What were some of the challenges that Kao Kalia Yang and her sister faced while growing up with working parents in St. Paul? Why did the two sisters always avoid calling the police?
18. How does Yang describe her relationship with her sister Dawb? How was their relationship shaped by violence and poverty?

“Summer 1964” by Pamela R. Fletcher Bush

19. What did Pamela R. Fletcher Bush experience when she moved to a new neighborhood? What did she witness at the Watts Festival?
20. How were Bush’s childhood experiences and relationships shaped by her race? How did her friend BK betray her? How have your relationships been shaped by your identity?

“The Courage of Holding Together, the Courage to Fall Apart” by Mona Susan Power

21. What memories does Mona Susan Power share about her grandparents? How was Power influenced by her mother’s activism? What did her mother teach her about her ancestors? What have you learned about your own ancestors?
22. What is historical trauma and what are some of its impacts? Why does Power assert that “we are the generation that heals old wounds”?

“Long Live the Fatherless Children” by Anika Fajardo

23. Why did Anika Fajardo visit the Colombian consulate with her father? What was the importance of getting a cédula? How would you describe your own family tree and the places that you come from?
24. What did Fajardo experience growing up without a father in her life? How did this shape her life and the goals that she set for herself?

“Land Acknowledgment Statement of a Native Virginian” Mary Moore Easter

25. What was Mary Moore Easter taught about the land she grew up on? What did she learn about this land later in her life? How was Easter’s experience with the land shaped by her individual identity?
26. What do you know about the Indigenous history of the land that you are on? What are some of the benefits and the limitations of land acknowledgements?

“Financial Trauma” by Tess Montgomery

27. How did financial trauma impact Tess Montgomery’s life? How is financial trauma carried through generations, especially by women of color? Why is financial trauma rarely mentioned when talking about historical trauma?
28. How did Montgomery break generational patterns of loss, scarcity, and poverty? What argument does Montgomery make for reparations in the form of services like healthcare, education, and housing? How do you think reparations should be paid to Black and Indigenous people in the United States?

“Cross Pollination” by Kathryn Haddad

29. Why was Kathryn Haddad given a packet of seeds from a man at church? What did she do with these seeds?
30. Why does Haddad describe herself as a “result of cross pollination”? How did she connect with her ancestors by growing a koosa plant?

“Breath: A Meditation in Uprising” by Erin Sharkey

31. How does Erin Sharkey describe her relationship with her breath? How did she balance the fear of Covid-19, her asthma, and her desire to join others in protest?
32. How has Sharkey’s asthma impacted her relationships? How did she describe her heartbreak and her healing?

“Dear Editor” by Douglas Kearney

33. Why did Douglas Kearney write this essay? Why does he describe this moment in time as a “changing same”? What is the “control-comfort ecosystem” that he writes about? Why does he resist the production of new work during times of crisis?
34. Why does Kearney call for more accountability from white people? Do you think white people have a responsibility to do more in the fight for a more equitable society? Why or why not?

“What Does It All Mean” by Tish Jones

35. What are some of the ways that Tish Jones uses the word “may” in this poem? How does she write about survival, possibility, and permission?
36. Read this poem quietly to yourself and then read it again out loud. How do you experience this poem when reading it in these different ways?

“The Trauma Virus” by Resmaa Menakem

37. What is the trauma virus that Resmaa Menakem writes about in this essay? How is the trauma virus passed to others? How did Menakem build up his immunity to this virus?
38. What are the symptoms of white-body supremacy? What is Menakem’s call to action for accountability and healing?

“How Will They Take Us Away / How Will We Stand” by Bao Phi

39. What are some examples of how Asian communities have stood in solidarity with Black and Indigenous movements? Why does Bao Phi’s mother not like it when he protests in the street? What does he mean when he writes, “Sometimes I think being Vietnamese in America is to be an argument”?
40. What did Phi witness in the wake of George Floyd’s murder? How did he witness the police refusing to defend communities of working-class and nonwhite people?

“Healers Are Protectors / Protectors Are Healers” by Marcie Rendon

41. Who are some of the protectors and healers that Marcie Rendon describes in her essay? How did the Anishinabe clan structure assure the protection, health, and well-being of their people? Who are the healers and the protectors in your community? Are they recognized in this role? Why or why not?
42. How are trauma and resilience passed down through generations, particularly in indigenous families? How do indigenous people utilize clan teachings during times of quarantine and social unrest?

“The Pachuco Himself Considers the Audacity of Language” by Michael Torres

43. What does pachuco mean? Who is the speaker in this poem? What is the relationship between the wind and the trees that Torres describes in this poem?
44. How does Torres describe his relationship with his daughter? What moments does he celebrate and what worries does he have?

“Covid-19 and Asian Americans” by David Mura

45. Why does media often focus on tensions between Asian American and African American communities? How did the Trump administration stoke violence against Asian American people? Did you witness racial tensions in your community?
46. Why does Mura assert that being Asian American means being “permanently foreign”? What happened when Mura was interviewed by a reporter on the Covid-19 pandemic?

“Little Brown Briefcase” by Suleiman Adan

47. When did Suleiman Adan first realize that his family was poor? Do you remember when you first became aware of your economic class? If yes, what was your experience like? If no, what factors do you think contributed to not having that experience?
48. Who qualifies for the American Dream? What lessons did Adan receive from his mother? What messages about money did you receive or not receive from people in your life?

“We Are All Summoned” by Diane Wilson

49. What messages does Wilson have for mothers everywhere? Why did mothers in Argentina march? How did they refuse to accept the disappearance of their children? Why is it important to join mothers in the present-day movement for justice?
50. How does Wilson describe the relationship between racism and nature? What are some of the ways that communing with nature can bring people together?

“A Tangent to a Story about the Smith & Wesson .38, or, Attempts to Be Fully Assimilated into the White American Project Have Failed Miserably, in the Form of a Self-Questionnaire” by Sun Yung Shin

51. What did Sun Yung Shin share about her identity in this piece? Why do you think she chose the self-questionnaire format to tell her story?
52. What is the significance of the Smith & Wesson handgun in this piece? How do stories about this handgun connect to Shin’s personal story of assimilation in the United States?

“Today in Minneapolis” by Samantha Sencer-Mura

53. What were some of the feelings about Minneapolis that Samantha Sencer-Mura shared in this essay? Why is the narrative in the news often different from what is happening on the ground?
54. How did social uprisings reveal deep inequality in Minneapolis? Do you agree with Sencer-Mura that destruction is a natural consequence of injustice? Why or why not?

“Let Me Tell You a Story” by Melissa Olson

55. What actions did Melissa Olson take to protect MIGIZI’s radio archives? Why was it so important to protect these tapes?

56. Why is it important that tapes like these be available to the public? Have you ever visited or explored a cultural archive, online or in person?

“Here Before” by Sherrie Fernandez-Williams

57. How does Sherrie Fernandez-Williams describe her relationship with pain? What were some of her experiences in healing spaces? Have you had similar experiences in healing spaces?

58. How did working with a genealogist help Fernandez-Williams make new connections with deceased family members? What did she learn about her ancestors’ cultural belief systems and stories?

“Truth, Reconciliation, and Four More Meditations on Human Freedom” by Arleta Little

59. What are the different ways that Arleta Little meditates on freedom in her poem? How does she bear witness to the current moment?

60. What do you think it means to “meet each other, be present for possibilities”? How are existing structures failing to meet our needs? What do you believe is possible in the “imagination of we the people”?

“Didion Dreams” by Said Shaiye

61. Why did Said Shaiye travel to California? What was he seeking and what was he avoiding? Have you ever moved to a new place? What was your experience like adjusting to a new environment?

62. What was Shaiye’s experience with addiction? How did his addiction lead to feelings of guilt and shame? What led him to seek psychiatric treatment, and what were the limitations of these services?

“A Time for Healing” by Carolyn Holbrook

63. Why does Carolyn Holbrook believe that we are in a time of healing? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Have you witnessed or experienced healing since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?

64. Why did Holbrook become a writer? How has she turned to art for healing? What are some of the things that you turn to for healing during difficult times?

“Speaking into Existence” by Kevin Yang

65. What did reading work by Asian American writers in school mean to Kevin Yang? How did writing help him explore his many identities? What are some of your multiple identities?

66. What did Yang experience while sharing a classroom with other Hmong students? Why did he begin to feel shame about his identity? How was his experience exacerbated by media? How did writing help him heal?

“The Weight” by Ezekiel Joubert III

67. What types of isolation did Ezekiel Joubert III face while living in Los Angeles? How was this isolation intensified by the pandemic lockdown and mass uprisings around the country? Why was it important for Joubert to travel home to be with his family?

68. How did Joubert commune with his ancestors? What mourning traditions did his family observe? Do you have any rituals for mourning and healing within your community?

“Four Genies” by Ricardo Levins Morales

69. What are some of Ricardo Levins Morales’ reflections on the phrase, “we’re all in this together”? How does capital impact people and communities differently during local and national crises? What are some of the factors that lead to drastically different experiences of sheltering in place?

70. What are the four genres that Morales describes? Why does Morales assert that artists must “make the invisible visible and the visible feel manageable”? What is your own role during this moment in time?

“All the Stars Aflame” by Shannon Gibney

71. How did Shannon Gibney connect to a lineage of Black writers during the social uprisings in 2020? How are Baldwin’s words still relevant to what is happening in the country today?

72. What are “all the stars aflame” in Baldwin’s work? How did Gibney reflect on the violence and destruction resulting from resistance to the police state in the United States?

“Humility, Sincerity, Banana Oil” by Louise Erdrich

73. What was Louise Erdrich’s grandfather’s role as the chairman of his tribe’s advisory committee? How did he advocate for his tribe and protect them against the Turtle Mountain termination bill of 1954? What challenges did he face while doing this work?

74. What did Erdrich learn from her grandfather’s letters? What does it mean that her grandfather threw banana oil at his opponent? How did he also utilize humility and sincerity in his fight for justice?

After Reading

75. What stories in this anthology resonated most with you? Do you have any new insights about the events that happened in Minneapolis in 2020?

76. Will you respond to any of the calls to action in this text? How will you share your own stories about what you witnessed and experienced in 2020?

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About the Editors

Carolyn Holbrook is the founder and director of More Than a Single Story. She is author of the essay collection *Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify* (Minnesota, 2020), winner of a Minnesota Book Award, and coauthor of Dr. Josie R. Johnson’s memoir *Hope in the Struggle* (Minnesota, 2019). She teaches creative writing at Hamline University, the Loft Literary Center, and other community venues.

David Mura’s most recent book is *A Stranger’s Journey: Race, Identity, and Narrative Craft in Writing*. He is author of two memoirs, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, which won the Oakland PEN Josephine Miles Book Award and was a *New York Times* Notable Book, and *Where the Body Meets Memory*.

About this Guide’s Author

Rachael Zafer is a writer, educator, and social change consultant. Rachael provides creative and technical consulting to nonprofits and institutions across the country and has led hundreds of classes and workshops in prisons and jails in Michigan, Illinois, New York, and Colorado. Rachael is the author of discussion guides for nearly two dozen books, including *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, and *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. You can view all of her discussion guides at www.rachaelzafer.com.