

The
**TRAYVON
GENERATION**



Elizabeth Alexander

Author of
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This is a nonfiction book that asks you to read in a different way—there are many featured poems, and visual art is woven through and integral to the book. Which of the visual artworks did you find most compelling, and why? How did they affect your reading experience?
2. Dr. Alexander analyzes a number of monuments and memorials—many that honor white supremacists, including Stone Mountain and numerous Confederate monuments. Think about what statues, monuments, or memorials exist in your area. Or think about the names of streets, schools, or cities in your area. Who is honored? Who isn't honored? What kinds of lessons are these public symbols teaching you? Whose memories are you asked to remember?
3. The chapter “a tale of two textbooks” delves into how American history is taught, including the intense efforts to suppress Black history in textbooks and classroom lessons and the value of Black studies as a discipline. Think back to how you were taught about American history—how were colonialism, slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement covered? What wasn't covered? Were there times you were uncomfortable with what was being taught? Were there moments of “delayed comprehension,” as Adrienne Su put it, where you later realized what you had been taught was false or not the whole story? What do you keep with you from that education? What have you unlearned in the years since?
4. What and how we remember—and are taught about—the past and history is a key focus in the book. What are the different forms of remembering discussed throughout the book? Consider more everyday forms, such as songs and rituals, as well. How do these different forms affect your experience of learning and memory?
5. How has the digital age (the advent of social media, smart phones, etc.) impacted how we—and those who have grown up in the digital age in particular—witness and comprehend race-based violence?
6. Dr. Alexander describes the pride and fear that are integral to her life as a mother. Find some examples in the text that show what motherhood means to Dr. Alexander. What elements of Black motherhood are specific to the Black experience? Which elements feel intrinsic and universal to motherhood itself?

7. In the chapter “we dress our ideas in clothes to make the abstract visible,” Dr. Alexander writes about a visit to the Louisiana State Penitentiary (also known as Angola, for its location) and the crisis of mass incarceration in the United States. She writes, “If we forget them, we will not understand who, in total, we are.” How do you understand “who we are” in this context? How do the artists and artwork discussed in this chapter also influence your understanding of “who we are”?

8. What is a “free Black man” in Dr. Alexander’s use of the term? What does it mean to you, and are there any men who come to mind when you hear that phrase?

9. Dr. Alexander focuses on several poems throughout the book. Choose one and read it out loud. Are there a few lines or images that strike you? What about the poem resonates with the book?

10. Dr. Alexander poses the question, “Do I really believe that cultural expression can somehow shape a world where our children are safer?” (p. 64) at the end of the first section. How do the next two parts of the book answer this question? Did your answer to this question shift at all as you read?

11. In the last chapter, Dr. Alexander declares a few wishes for today’s young people: “I wish for these young people freedom of movement, of thought, of imagination...I wish also for our young people rest from the unending labor that is race work, and from the spectral anxiety that is part of what it is to be Black.” What do you wish for this generation, or yourself and your peers if you are a part of this generation? What about for the generation to follow? And what about for our elders?

A LETTER FROM ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

Dear Reader,

I began writing this book in June 2020, in the heat of a summer of protest and collective grief and action. I wrote it to reflect on my joys and my fears as a lifelong educator and mother of two young men who have come of age watching other young Black people being routinely endangered with anti-Black hatred. I have come to refer to our children's generation as the Trayvon Generation because their worldviews have been shaped profoundly by Trayvon's story. My role as a mother has been equally impacted.

The book goes much further than the original essay and is a historical meditation on the persistence of race as an unresolved issue at the center of American experience. The power of art, poetry, and culture to illuminate our historical and personal understanding is a central theme, and the book includes beautifully reproduced works of art by some of most brilliant artists.

I hope it will spark meditation, conversation, and action, and I hope you find insight and power in *The Trayvon Generation*.

Yours,

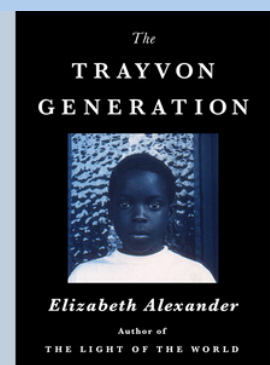
Elizabeth Alexander



Photo: © Djeneba Aduayom

**"ESSENTIAL READING
FOR EVERY GENERATION."**

—*COSMOPOLITAN*



MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Featured Works

Carrie Mae Weems

Blue Black Boy (detail), 1997

Jennifer Packer

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn
(*Breonna! Breonna!*), 2020

Lorna Simpson

Thin Bands (detail), 2019

Glenn Ligon

Untitled (I Am a Man), 1988

Kara Walker

The Jubilant Martyrs of
Obsolescence and Ruin, 2015

Mary Sibande

The Reign, 2010

Robert Pruitt

Up, Up, in the Upper Room, 2012

Amy Sherald

What's precious inside of him
does not care to be known by
the mind in ways that diminish
its presence (All American), 2017

Frank Stewart

St. Louis Cemetery II, 1980

Dawoud Bey

Martina and Rhonda, 1993

Kerry James Marshall

Souvenir II, 1997

Charles White

Banner for Willie J., 1976

Elizabeth Catlett

The Torture of Mothers, 1970

Chandra McCormick

Daddy'O, The Oldest Inmate in Angola
State Penitentiary, 2004

Deborah Luster

Eddie M. "Fat" Coco Jr., Transylvania,
Louisiana, March 8, 2002

jackie sumell

Herman's Wallace's Conference
Room, 2008

Jordan Casteel

Galen 2, 2014

Renée Cox

Chillin' with Liberty, 1998

Robert Pruitt

Untitled (Male Celestial Body), 2016

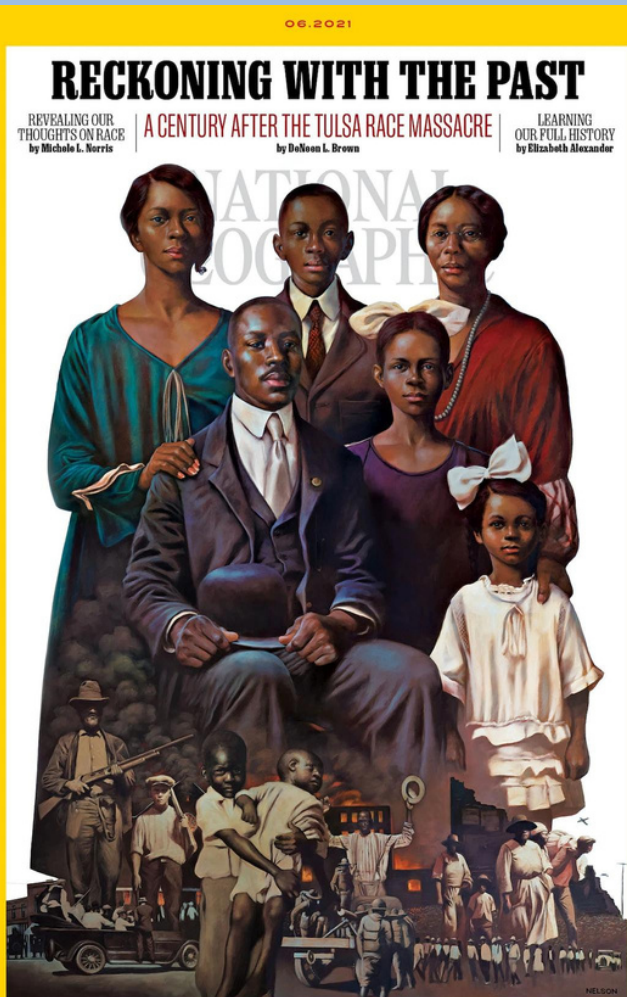
Betye Saar

Black Girl's Window, 1969

MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

"We owe him better."

In Oprah Daily, Elizabeth Alexander and Oprah Winfrey reflect on the legacy of Trayvon Martin in the decade since his murder. Dr. Alexander reflects on the effects of Martin's death has had on young people and is joined by the voices of some of those young people, Black men who are around the age Martin would be today—27.

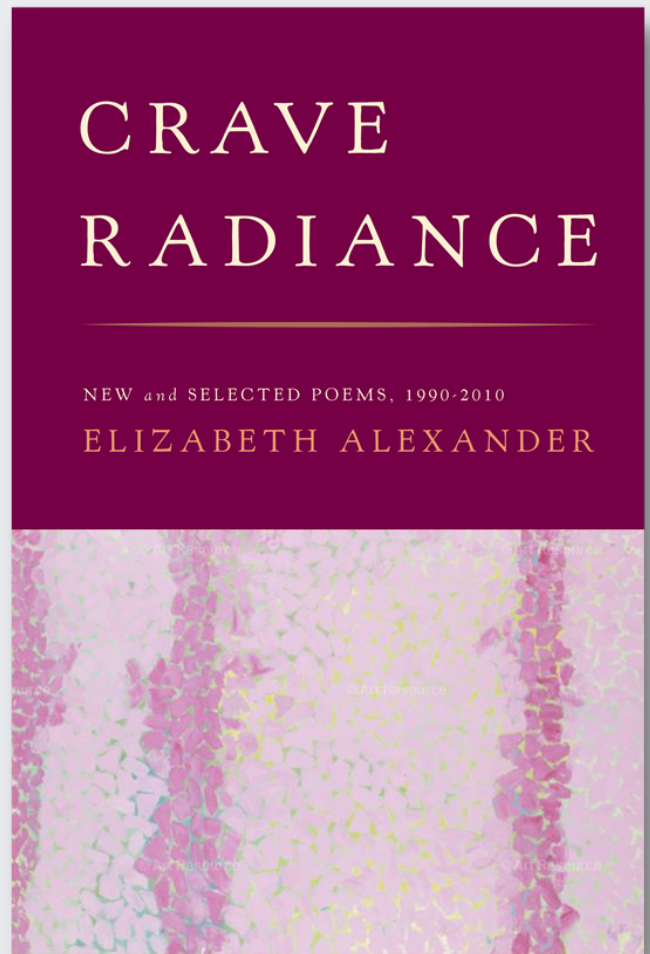
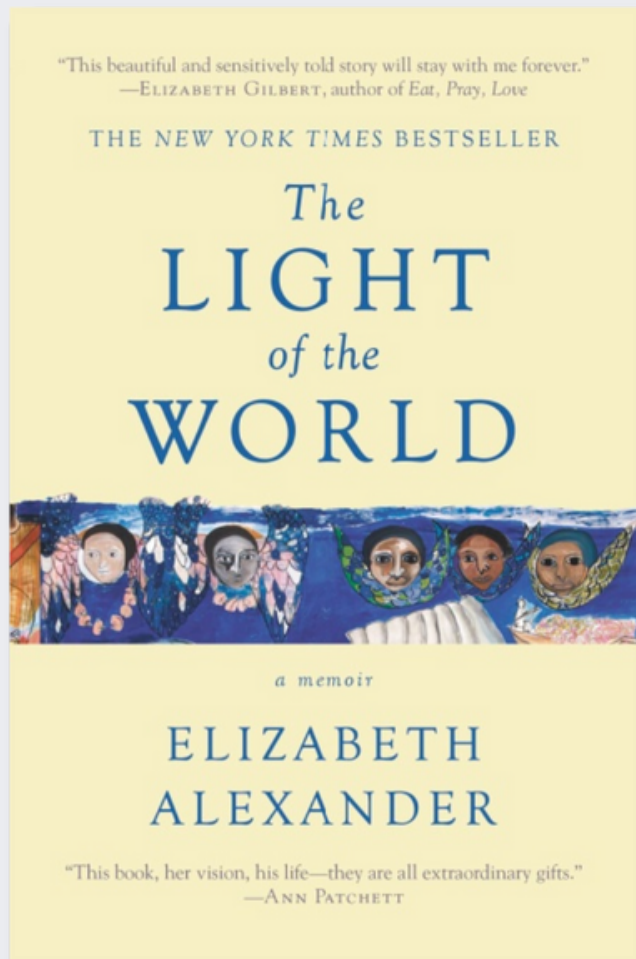


WATCH 'RISE AGAIN: TULSA AND THE RED SUMMER' ON NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Read "This how we envision Black freedom," Elizabeth Alexander's ground-setting essay for National Geographic's special "Race in America" issue, released on the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder.

Cover: *Tulsa*, © Kadir Nelson, 2021

MORE BY ELIZABETH ALEXANDER



"It is both raw and exquisitely crafted, mercilessly direct and sometimes lavishly metaphorical... THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD is, quite simply, a miracle."
—*Boston Sunday Globe*

"Alexander is an unusual thing, a sensualist of history, a romanticist of race. She weaves biography, history, experience, pop culture and dream. Her poems make the public and private dance together."
—*Chicago Tribune*

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