

THE EDUCATION OF KEVIN POWELL: A BOY'S JOURNEY INTO MANHOOD

READER'S GUIDE: HIGH SCHOOL

Created by

Piper Anderson

piper@create-forward.com

Kevin Powell

kevin@kevinpowell.net

Tayllor Johnson

tayllorjohnson@gmail.com

Message from the Author:

Peace everyone! Thank you for taking the time to read my book, and this Reader's Guide we created especially for you. My autobiography is the most important thing I have ever written in my life. I wrote it because I think it is mad important that we all tell our stories in some form, especially if we have survived and overcome much. For me writing, art, being creative, is not only about telling my truths, but also about healing and being self-empowered. In fact, writing is as important to me as breathing, and reading and writing have helped and saved my life so many times. It is my sincere hope my book will do the same for you in some way.

HOW TO USE THIS READER'S GUIDE

This Reader's Guide is a resource for educators and youth workers who want to engage high school students in an exploration of *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*. This guide includes twenty activities that anyone can facilitate in their classroom, library, after school program, or home. The activities aim to encourage critical thinking, personal connections, and generate rich discussion on the themes of identity, race, personal development, activism, and leadership.

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SECTION 1: WHO IS KEVIN POWELL?

A series of character development activities to analyze who young Kevin Powell is and the environment that shapes him.

SECTION 2: STANDING FOR JUSTICE

In this section, students will explore some of the key historical moments that Kevin participated in and debate whether Hip-Hop can be feminist. Students will explore and engage in conversations on civil and human rights leadership, then and now.

SECTION 3: FEMINISM AND MANHOOD

The activities in this section focus on Kevin's evolving beliefs about manhood and women. Students will identify important moments of personal growth in Kevin's life and explore the role of feminism in his evolution, while decoding messages about gender roles, violence against women and girls.

SECTION 4: RACE, ACTIVISM, & HIP-HOP

This final section focuses on Kevin's participation in moments of social change in this section, students will explore and analyze some of the key historical moments that Kevin participated in.

We hope that you will use the activities in this guide, share your feedback on the content, and the work your students produce. We look forward to hearing from you.

All content Readers Guides for *The Education of Kevin Powell* were designed by Piper Anderson, Create Forward LLC. www.create-forward.com

SECTION 1: WHO IS KEVIN POWELL?

Photo Day

“One day my mother told me we were going to get my picture taken....”

In the first chapter, Kevin Powell describes the day he took the book cover photo. Analyze the picture on cover of the book with students:

- What do you notice about the boy in the picture?
- What do you notice about how he is sitting in the photo?
- What does his facial expression tell you?
- Do you think he wants to be there? Why or why not?
- Where do you think this photo was taken?
- Do you think he knew the person taking the photo?

Next, read the first chapter of the book where he describes the photo day.

Discussion Questions:

1. Returning to the photo, what other words would you use to describe the child in the picture?
2. Why do you think he had so much trouble moving his arm from behind his back?

3. Why do you think the earlier experience of getting burned made him so fearful when getting his photo taken?
4. What is one thing you would have said to little Kevin to help him feel less afraid in that moment?

#ThrowbackThursday:

In preparation for this activity request that students bring in a personal photo of themselves that they have posted online when they were much younger for #ThrowbackThursday. This is a writing activity. As students write, ask them to consider the following:

- Begin by describing the day the photo was taken: where were you? What kind of day was it?
- Who took the photo?
- How did you feel when the photo was taken?
- Did you want to have your photo taken? Why or why not?
- Who else was there?
- What did you say or do before the photo was taken?
- Were you told how to pose or did you decide?
- What other details can you tell us about this moment?

Like My Neighborhood:

“...that Jersey City, where I was born and where I would spend the first eighteen years of my life, began to disrobe itself, fascinating me, annoying me, and tempting me simultaneously.”

Kevin describes the sites and sounds of the Jersey City where he spent the first 18 years of his life:

“Like the rapture of playing on the black-and-gray gravel of Audobon Park: climbing the monkey bars, coasting hands-free down the sliding board, or kicking my feet toward the clouds as my mother pushed me on the swings.”

Students will generate a list of the places, sights, sounds, smells, people, and colors that make up their neighborhood. What are the memories that you want to hold on to? In what ways has your neighborhood changed?

Next, write a description of your neighborhood including the details that you listed. Notice the kind of detailed imagery that Kevin includes in his description. Try to create imagery just as clear as you write about your neighborhood.

Poverty and Gentrification:

Poverty is a repeated theme in Kevin’s autobiography. It in fact dominates much of his life.

Group Discussion:

- What does the word poverty mean to you?
- What does the word gentrification mean to you?

- How did being poor affect Kevin and his mother, mentally, physically, both?
- How else do you think poverty affects those who are poor?
- Why do you think people use words like “ghetto” to describe people, including people not from the ghetto?
- How was Kevin’s life similar to other poor people in his community, and how was it different?
- What did Kevin do to overcome his poverty?
- How did Kevin’s experiences being poor prepare him for life, or did it?

A Dialogue on Child Abuse

“My mother beat me for a long as I can remember. She used her hands, one of my belts, or “a switch”—a strong flexible type of wood yanked from bushes in our ‘hood. Of all the weapons at my mother’s disposal, the switches caused the most damage—inflamed welts would rise on my arms and legs where my mother struck me.

In Chapter 10, *My mother* (part 2) Kevin writes about the beatings he experienced at the hands of his mother. In this exercise, will explore the impact that child abuse can have on a young person.

Group Discussion:

- Why do you think his mother beat him?
- Did her beatings make him behave the way she hoped he would?
- What effect did this violence have on Kevin later in life?
- How do you think the beatings affected the way he treated others?
- Is it acceptable for parents to beat their children now? Why or why not?

At the end of Chapter 10, Kevin writes about how he both hated his mother for beating him but also loved her very much. If young Kevin could have told his mother how he felt, what do you think he would have said to her.

With a partner write a dialogue between Kevin and his mother talking about the abuse. What might he say to her about the ways that her beatings affected him later in life? Decide who will be Kevin and who will be Ma. Using one piece of paper and one pen begin writing your dialogue with Kevin starting the conversation. Once his first line is written pass the pen to your partner to write his mother’s line. Continue writing in this way until dialogue is completed and then read back together. Once you’ve read it you can make edits and additions to the script.

If there’s time each pair should share their dialogue with the full group. What are some of the ideas that came up in these different dialogues? How did it feel to write from a character’s perspective that may not be your own? What did you discover about the character or about yourself?

Social Identity Collage

Our identities shape who we are and how we interact with the world. We have many identities some of them personal choice and others are categories defined by the culture we live in.

In preparation for this activity provide definitions of the following:

- **Personal identities:** Individual traits that make up who you are including your birth order, favorite hobbies, foods, and style of dress.
- **Social Identities:** primarily group identities, aspects of ourselves where we belong to a particular group. Social identities are shaped by common history, shared experiences, legal and historical decisions, and day to day interactions.

The identities that we think most about are the ones that are most salient for us. Which social identities does Kevin write about? What some of the experiences that inform the way he thinks about those identities?

First, map your own social identities. Identify the ones that are most important to you. Why are those identities most important to you? What experiences have informed the way you think about those identities?

Finally, create a collage that reflects the social identities that you identified as most salient for you. Try to find words, images, and quotes that reflect how you feel about those identities.

In small groups share and discuss collages:

- Why did you choose the images that you chose?
- What does your collage say about the identities that matter most to you?

SECTION 2: THE SOCIAL JUSTICE IMAGINATION

Can Hip Hop Be Feminist?

“Hip-Hop culture educated us about ourselves, about our collective history, and gave us a new way to view the world that was different from the one that we had learned about in school. And it was all to a dope beat.”

In section two of his memoir, Kevin Powell talks about the ways that both Hip Hop and Feminism have both informed his development. In this exercise, students will explore the relationship between Hip Hop and feminism through a team debate.

First, develop some shared understandings of what Hip Hop and Feminism are. Brainstorm some associations using a mind map. Create a mind map for each term:

1. What comes to mind when you think about Hip Hop? How does Kevin Powell describe Hip Hop?
2. What comes to mind when you think about Feminism? How does Kevin Powell describe Feminism?

The Debate:

Can Hip Hop be feminist? Split into two debate teams. One team will take the position that Hip Hop can be feminist? The other will take the position that Hip Hop cannot be feminist. Each team will generate a list of 3 arguments for their position. As teams develop their arguments, consider what the other team's counter arguments might be?

Once teams have developed their arguments, set-up the debate in three rounds providing each team with two minutes to make their argument.

To close, reflect on the arguments from each team. What were some of the compelling evidence in support or against Hip Hop feminism?

One of the writers that Kevin Powell names in his memoir, is Joan Morgan who coined the term Hip Hop Feminism in her 1999 book, *When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*.

A Talk with Malcolm

"And I was rescued just as Malcolm himself became rescued. The self-education he gave himself through reading books was a revelation to me, as his insatiable thirst for knowledge became my insatiable thirst, too."

In Chapter 18, "Rutgers University" Kevin writes how *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* would change his life and set him on a course toward becoming an activist. In this exercise students will write an imaginary dialogue between Kevin Powell and Malcolm X discussing the state of Black leadership.

"Farrakhan and Jackson were like father figures who had disappointed me greatly, as my own biological father had done. I resented them both for doing things in the name of Black folks and the Black community that seemed to suit their needs and agendas."

In the above quote from Chapter 25, Powell offers his assessment of prominent Black leaders, Louis Farrakhan and Jesse Jackson. Use this quote as a prompt to begin writing your dialogue between Kevin Powell and Malcolm X.

What would Kevin want Malcolm to know about Black leadership if he wrote to him fifty years after his death?

Hip Hop Activism + Black Lives Matter

In chapter 22, Hip-Hop, Poetry, and New York City. Kevin writes about Hip Hop activism in the 1980s and early 90s.

Group Discussion:

- What is Hip-Hop activism?
- Who were some of the leaders of the hip-hop movement that during the 1980s?
- What was the role of music, fashion, and language in this movement?

- Why was hip-hop such an effective tool for organizing young people?
- Is hip-hop still an effective tool for bringing young together?
- Since the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012, Black Lives Matter has become the organizing force behind youth activism. What role does culture play in Black Lives Matter? Do you see any similarities between the way music and culture was used during Kevin's hip-hop activism era of the 1980-90s and the Black Lives Matter today? Consider the ways that police brutality is addressed then and now?
- Is hip-hop used as a tool for activism within Black Lives Matter?
- How have artists like Kendrick Lamar, Macklemore, Usher, and Beyoncé contributed to the Black Lives Matter movement?

Social Justice Project

"I began college wanting to get a degree and a good job so that I did not have to be poor any longer, just as my mother instructed. But I had found something much greater. All the rebelliousness in my bones—dating back to my childhood—was being channeled into being an agent for change."

In college, Powell discovered his passion for social justice and became an activist. What are some of the social justice issues that are important to Kevin? What are the issues that are important to you?

In small groups, identify a social justice issue that is important to the members of your group. Research to learn more about the issue: who is affected? What are some of the proposed solutions that currently exist?

There are many ways to contribute to social change. Your activism project should take on one of the following:

- Public Awareness: educating the public about the issue
- Advocacy: Talk with political leaders and asking them to support policies that create change.

Write a proposal for how your group would address your chosen issue that could lead to social justice. Include the following your proposal:

Project Title

The Problem

Who is affected?

Your strategy for justice

How will your solution lead to justice?

Each group can record a short 60-second video pitching their idea to Kevin Powell. Videos can be emailed to kevin@kevinpowell.net The most creative ideas for social justice will be posted to the Kevin Powell's BK Nation website.

SECTION 3: FEMINISM AND MANHOOD

Three Moments in the Search for Manhood

In this activity, students will analyze three key moments where Kevin is seeking a definition of Manhood.

Three Moments of Manhood:

1. This feeling of emptiness, of hurt, of pain, of father-come and father-gone, of father lost, would torture me through my teens and into adulthood. I struggled and tripped over myself trying to understand what it was to be male, a boy, and a man. Chapter 9, *Father*
2. In Malcolm, I had discovered the perfect Black man. I rejected almost everything associated with Dr. King, stopped paying attention to anything said about him, except for the fight to make his birthday a national holiday. Because of the way Dr. King had been presented to me during my years in school, I felt that he was soft, corny, a sucker, a butt kisser of White people. Malcolm was strength, coolness, power, unapologetic anger, an imposing and uncompromising figure. Chapter 18, *Rutgers University*
3. In time I would come to question and challenge images of women, and girls in every form of American pop culture, including my beloved hip-hop. Feminists bell hooks and Gloria Steinem helped me through the process, and I participated in numerous workshops, conferences, and even one-on-one sessions, all focused around the need to redefine manhood toward peace, love, and a different and healthier way to handle conflict and anger. Chapter 23, *My Girlfriend and the Bathroom Door*

Breaking into small groups, each group will receive one of Kevin's manhood moments and discuss. They should have copies of the book on hand to re-read the chapter if necessary.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did this experience impact Kevin?
2. What message about manhood is Kevin receiving in this moment?
3. What impact will this have on his future?
4. What is Kevin's definition of manhood in this moment?

Each group will share their manhood moment and report back on what they discussed.

Full Group Discussion:

1. How does Kevin Powell's definition of manhood change over time?
2. Do you agree with his definition of manhood?
3. How does his definition of manhood compare to your own?

Violence Against Women

“Here I was raised by women, shaped by women my entire life, yet completely ignorant of women and girls. It was inevitable, given my journey and mis-education, that I would come to hurt women.”

Define Terms:

Patriarchy

Misogyny

Sexism

Gender based violence

Feminism

Define each of the terms and present back to the larger group. Offer an example from Kevin’s story that illustrates these terms. What are some other ways that this shows up in society? Provide examples.

Kevin talks about being an ally to women and educating other men about violence. What are some of the ways that he has become an ally to women?

What can other men do to help end gender violence? Generate a list of things men can do.

Work in small groups select one of the things on the list and design a poster, scene, or a group poem that is about ending violence and offers on of the actions that men can take to contribute to ending gender violence.

Final Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean to be an ally to women?
- What does manhood mean to you?
- Who created your definition of manhood?
- How does pop culture, music, and social media shape your definition of manhood?
- What examples do you see in pop culture, music and music videos, TV, movies, video games, and social media that spread definitions of manhood that are negative, violent, or disrespectful to girls and women?
- How did Kevin throughout his life display a typical definition of manhood? How did he challenge it later in his life? Why?
- If you could create a new definition of manhood how would you define it?

Aunt Cathy

“Somewhere in the creases of my grandmother’s death and Anthony’s departure and the many years of working and walking and cooking and scrubbing and having nothing to show for any of it, Aunt Cathy began to crack.”

Kevin writes about his Aunt Cathy and the impact that poverty eventually had on her mental health. The quote above is from chapter 21, *Aunt Cathy. And a new life*.

While Kevin writes about his Aunt Cathy throughout the book we never actually get to hear from her directly. In this exercise, students will place themselves in Aunt Cathy's shoes and write a monologue from her perspective. Before writing brainstorm a list of all the things we've learned about Aunt Cathy.

First, decide whom she is speaking to. Is it Kevin or someone else in her life?
What does she want them to know about her life, what she's been through?
What's her dream or hope for the future? Perhaps it's a secret that she's sharing for the first time with this person.

Final Reflection:

- How does poverty impact a person's mental health overtime?
- Is poverty a form of violence?
- Why do you think her sisters committed her to a mental institution?
- What do you think Kevin would have done to help her?

Letter of Self-Forgiveness

"I have been damaged, I've been broken, I've been 'buked,' I've been scorned, I've been unready for manhood, unready for my humanity. I've made so many mistakes in my life, hurt so many people, and hurt myself on far too many occasions. Out of that pain and trauma, I've found the will to live in a way that I did not think possible. Today and for the rest of my life, I believe in peace, I believe in love, I believe in therapy, I believe in healing. I believe in self-care, I believe in myself. And I humbly ask and pray that those I've disrespected or wounded in some way in my past life to forgive me, please.

In the second section of his memoir, Kevin Powell writes honestly about the many mistakes that he made in his relationships personally and professionally. In Chapter 30, the final chapter of the book he asks for their forgiveness.

Group Discussion:

- Do you think it's possible to be fully forgiven for the mistakes we've made in the past? Why or why not?
- What does it take to experience forgiveness from another?
- What does it take to forgive yourself for the harm you've caused in the past?
- Have you ever done something that you asked forgiveness for? Were you able to forgive yourself?

Write a letter to yourself about forgiveness. What do you want to forgive yourself for? What do you want to let go of? (anger, guilt, shame, disappointment, etc.) What are you committed to doing now that you've forgiven yourself for the past mistake? What positive emotions, actions do you now want to put out into the world now that you've released the past?

SECTION 4: RACE, ACTIVISM, HIP-HOP

An Education on Race

Throughout his memoir Kevin talks about his experiences with race and racism. We're going to look at three moments from Kevin's journey where he learned about race and racism and decode the messages within those moments. There is a message behind every experience that teaches us something about the world and ourselves. What are the messages behind these three moments in Kevin's journey?

DECODING MESSAGES ABOUT RACE

<p>"Kevin, if a White person says you cute, then it must be true. They don't just be saying that to anyone." Ch 2.</p>	<p>Message:</p>
<p>Whites seemed to own and control everything; Blacks seemed to have nothing and were dependent on Whites, or the government, or both to merely survive. And in most stories I heard about Black experiences with White people, Whites were extremely cruel. In the safety of our own company: "Them crackers ain't nothin', man. Always tellin' a nigga what to do." Ch 15.</p>	<p>Message:</p>
<p>Soon, two White police officers climbed onto the bus through the now-open back door, wrenched Richie and me apart, and removed us from the bus. For some reason my arms were pressed behind my back and I was placed in handcuffs, but Richie, a light-complexioned Puerto Rican, was not. Richie and I we walked to a police car. Once officer gently put Richie into the front seat while the other-a red headed</p>	<p>Message:</p>

man with a shaggy red moustache— rammed me into the backseat. Ch.16	
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Discussion Questions:

- How does Kevin’s understanding of race change over the course of his life?
- Do you think his earlier experiences with White people impacted the way he defines racism later in life?
- When Kevin is on the reality show, *The Real World* he has several conversations with his cast mates about race. Writing about that experience he says, “*Somewhere in all the beefs with my White cast mates, I proclaimed that “Black people cannot be racist” because “racism equals race plus power.”*” Ch 24.
 - What does he mean by “racism equals race plus power”?
- Who has the power in each of Kevin’s lessons on race?
- What are other examples where you see racial power play out in Kevin’s story?

Write about a moment when you learned an important lesson about race? What was the underlying message? How did it make you feel about yourself? About others?

Reporting the News: East Coast v. West Coast

What role did media play in escalating the conflict between Biggie and Tupac, East versus West Coast? Have there been other battles between different groups of hip-hop artists since then?

Break into teams. Each team is a group of reporters writing about some aspect of the east coast and west coast battle. Do your research to see how writers were reporting on it in the past. Your job is to report the “who/what/when/where/ why” of the story. But keep in mind that what you write could have an impact on how fans and artist react. Could your writing help to deescalate the conflict or make it worst? Are you writing before the deaths of Biggie and Tupac or are you writing after one of their deaths? Choose a moment and write about it in the style of a journalist reporting major news in the entertainment industry.

For further exploration of Hip Hop Journalism please see, *And It Don’t Stop: The Best American Hip Hop Journalism* by Raquel Cepeda includes articles written by Kevin Powell and many other journalists that he writes about.

In the Hot Seat: 10 Questions for Kevin Powell

In Chapter 19, *Kicked Out of College* Kevin is suspended from Rutgers University. After reading this chapter students will generate a list of ten questions for Kevin Powell about what led to his suspension from Rutgers. What questions would you want to ask him? What would you want him to be thinking about as he reflects on the decisions that led to his suspension? Think about questions that will help him to reflect on his choices.

Reality TV: Then and Now

In Chapter 24, MTV's *The Real World* Kevin writes about being on the first reality television shows, *The Real World*. The creators of *The Real World* went on to create other reality series including *Road Rules*, *Making the Band*, *The Simple Life*.

How does "The Real World", compare to other reality television shows?

How has the reality television genre changed since Kevin Powell was on *The Real World*?

Do you think people on reality shows can have the kind of conversations about race that Kevin provoked on *The Real World*? Why or why not?

What kinds of issues do reality shows deal with now?

What kinds of images of Black people, women, and youth do we see on reality shows now?

What kinds of images would you like to see on reality TV shows now?

If you were to create a new version of *The Real World* today who would you want to see on the show? Work in a small group to come up with a pitch for a new "Real World". Who would you want to be on the show? Why did you select those people? What do you think will happen if they live in same house? What kinds of conversations do you think they're having? Where would the show be set? Why? What kind of house would they live in?

Write A Review of *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*

Political Sports writer, Dave Zirin wrote a review of Kevin Powell's memoir, *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*.

Print and distribute copies of the review for students to read in class or independently. After reading Zirin's review discuss his take on Powell's memoir.

<http://www.thenation.com/article/kevin-powells-memoir-will-crush-you/>

Zirin calls Powell's book, "a first hand account about surviving racism and poverty almost intact." Do you agree with Zirin's assessment of Powell's memoir? If you could describe Powell's memoir in one sentence how would you describe it?

Now that you've read Dave Zirin's review, write your own review of *The Education of Kevin Powell*. As you write your review consider the following:

- Zirin admits that Powell's book made him cry. What was your emotional response to reading Powell's memoir?
- How did the book affect you? What chapters, stories were most meaningful to you and why?
- Where did you disagree with Kevin Powell? What did you want to know more about?
- What value does this text hold for your generation? What lessons can you relate to?

The Soundtrack of Our Lives

Visit <http://www.kevinpowell.net/audio.php> and check out the two-volume soundtrack that is a compliment to his memoir, *The Education of Kevin Powell*. These songs are the soundtrack to Kevin Powell's story.

Look at the list of tracks. How many do recognize? Are there any songs here that you love? That would be apart of a soundtrack to your story?

If you could create a soundtrack to your story what songs would you include? Create a 10-song soundtrack to your life. Write a sentence or two about why you chose that sound.

Letter to the Author

"For me it said something about one's humanity if you recognized the existence of another human being with a greeting."

Write a letter to Kevin Powell and describe how you felt about his book, *The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood*.

Describe a moment that was especially important to you and explain why. Also include any questions you still have about his story.

You can share your letters to Kevin by sending them to kevin@kevinpowell.net

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

READ:

What is Manhood Without a Father? (an excerpt) via Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kevin-powell/what-is-manhood-without-a-father_b_8252068.html

Read an Exclusive Excerpt from Kevin Powell's Memoir 'The Education of Kevin Powell' via Complex

<http://www.complex.com/music/2015/10/kevin-powell-memoir-excerpt>

WATCH:

"I Don't Camouflage" -Kevin Powell Interview: Hip Hop, Peer Pressure and My Mother

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=43G8XBJme9U>

Bell Hooks and Kevin Powell: Black Masculinity, Threat or Threatened (TheNewSchool)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FoXNzyK70Bk>

Exclusive: Tupac Shakur Interview from Rikers Island in 1995 via Complex
<http://www.complex.com/music/2015/10/kevin-powell-memoir-excerpt>

LISTEN:

The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood- The Mix CD
Volume 1

<http://tinyurl.com/hljmcrv>

The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood- The Mix CD
Volume 2

<http://tinyurl.com/zlemrc3>

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.- Kevin Powell Mix CD

<http://tinyurl.com/hoya2eh>

More Books by Kevin Powell:

The Education of Kevin Powell: A Boy's Journey into Manhood (2015)

Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan, and The Ghost of Dr. King (2012)

Open Letters to America (2009)

The Black Male Handbook: A Blueprint for Life (2008)

No Sleep Till Brooklyn: New and Selected Poems (2008)

Someday We'll All Be Free (2006)

Who's Gonna Take the Weight: Manhood, Race, and Power in America (2003)

Who Shot Ya? Three Decades of HipHop Photography (2002)

Step into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature (2000)

Keepin' It Real: Post-MTV Reflections On Race, Sex, and Politics (1997)

Recognize (1995)

In The Tradition: An Anthology of Young Black Writers (1993)