



Dear Ethel Waddell Githii Scholar:

Welcome to Spelman College, and to the E. W. Githii Honors Program. In choosing Spelman and Githii Honors, you are now members of this very particular community of scholars, artists, thinkers, questioners, readers, writers and change-agents.

What does it mean to be a scholar? Many people believe that scholars live inside of a tower of ideas and dusty books; that they are remote and without laughter. That they are “boring” and “not fun people to be around.” I look forward each year to the pleasure of meeting young student-scholars who know better, who know that words and meanings evolve. In Latin, scholar derives from *scholāris*, the word for school. A scholar was “of the school” or “one who is being schooled.” In our own times a scholar is cosmopolitan. She has to live and learn in anticipation of a very *connected* and complicated life. She must concern herself with the complex questions and conversations that shape and challenge a diverse global community. She must read, and read everything. She must never shortchange her intellectual pursuits.

March 7, 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of what has come to be called “Bloody Sunday,” the day that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others who were concerned with civil justice led civil rights activists in a walk from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery. They were stopped, with violence, at the Pettus Bridge. Each year, Githii Honors challenges our students to be volunteer readers—to alter your understanding of reading as an “academic” requirement, and to regard reading as a legitimate preparation for engaging in meaningful discourse with your sister scholars, your faculty, your family members and community, and the wider world that awaits you.

Enclosed in this mailing is information on our Summer Reading Program, and how to connect your conversation with your Spelman sisters and faculty via our online web page, “In the Castle of My Mind.” See you there!

Sincerely,

Opal J. Moore  
Director, E.W. Githii Honors Program

## Githii Summer Reading List and Notes

Our theme this year is, “**Re-Seeing Justice Movements (For Everyday Use).**” The Githii Honors Summer Reading program features three works that will tackle the world from three different directions:

The first book on our summer reading list is *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America* by Lani Guinier. Guinier is the Bennett Boskey Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and the first tenured Black law professor at Harvard University. Many know her as a critical voice of reason and a champion of true democracy. I know that you will want to know more about her, so here is a link to her page:

<http://hls.harvard.edu/faculty/directory/10344/Guinier>. Guinier is known for writing scholarly texts in clear prose so that all interested citizen readers can engage with her in the important ideas and work of our times. I see her analysis on education and democracy as another bridge to cross.

The second reading is *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy In The Post Civil Rights Imagination* by Salamisha Tillet. Dr. Tillet is Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also considered a “public intellectual,” and is a regular presence on the Melissa Harris-Perry issues program on MSNBC. (I know I don’t have to provide the links to web pages this time!). Tillet’s book is exciting because she has decided to tackle the ongoing effort to erase the struggles of Africans in America from our public and policy discourses and our critical consciousness. You will emerge from this book newly empowered!

The third book should be a lot of fun to read, and also relevant. It is *Twisted: My Dreadlock Chronicles* by Bert Ashe. He opens his book with a quote from Lisa Jones, from her book *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex and Hair*. She says, “Hair issues are among us. We must tease them out, hold them up to the light, and coax them into art.” Bert Ashe tells the story of how he “got twisted.” As always, finding oneself is the first step in finding one’s purpose.

All of the books for summer reading are relatively inexpensive and available (if you prefer) to your e-reader.

“Read everything.” It’s good advice for a young scholar in the making. But also, it is valuable to talk about ideas with people who have ideas. Githii Honors takes seriously the importance of the undergraduate experience as a chance to engage what political theorist Hannah Arendt referred to as “the life of the mind.” Arendt, often considered a political philosopher, wrote about the nature of power, authority and democracy. At Spelman College, we speak often of the importance of critical questioning and intellectual engagement as the path to agency, which is another word for power. We connect our program reading history to Phillis Wheatley on to Frederick Douglass then to W.E.B. DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper, to one of our most literate

American presidents, Mr. Barack Obama. We connect reading to the possibility of equal democracy.

I hope you will find your entry into the College exciting—a chance to explore another part of yourself, and a chance to challenge yourself to find your personal power and the power that is unleashed in collaborative thought.

On June 8, we will launch the web page, *In the Castle of My Mind*, for the initial discussion of these works. You will easily find the link on our Honors Page <http://sites.spelman.edu/honorsprogram/> under “What We’re Reading—Intellectual Community. We will be posting other useful resources that we hope you will find provocative and provide context for your reading.

I am confident that you will enjoy these works. Be ready, in the fall, to take charge of the student-led book talks and feel free to add other links and information to our reading.

I look forward to seeing you in August. When possible, the Honors students at Morehouse College and the Honors students at Clark Atlanta University will join us in lively discussion.

## **Summary of your Summer Reading List:**

*The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America*  
by Lani Guinier.

*Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy In The Post Civil Rights Imagination*  
by Salamisha Tillet.

*Twisted: My Dreadlock Chronicles*  
by Bert Ashe

All available on Amazon.com, and for e-readers, if preferred.