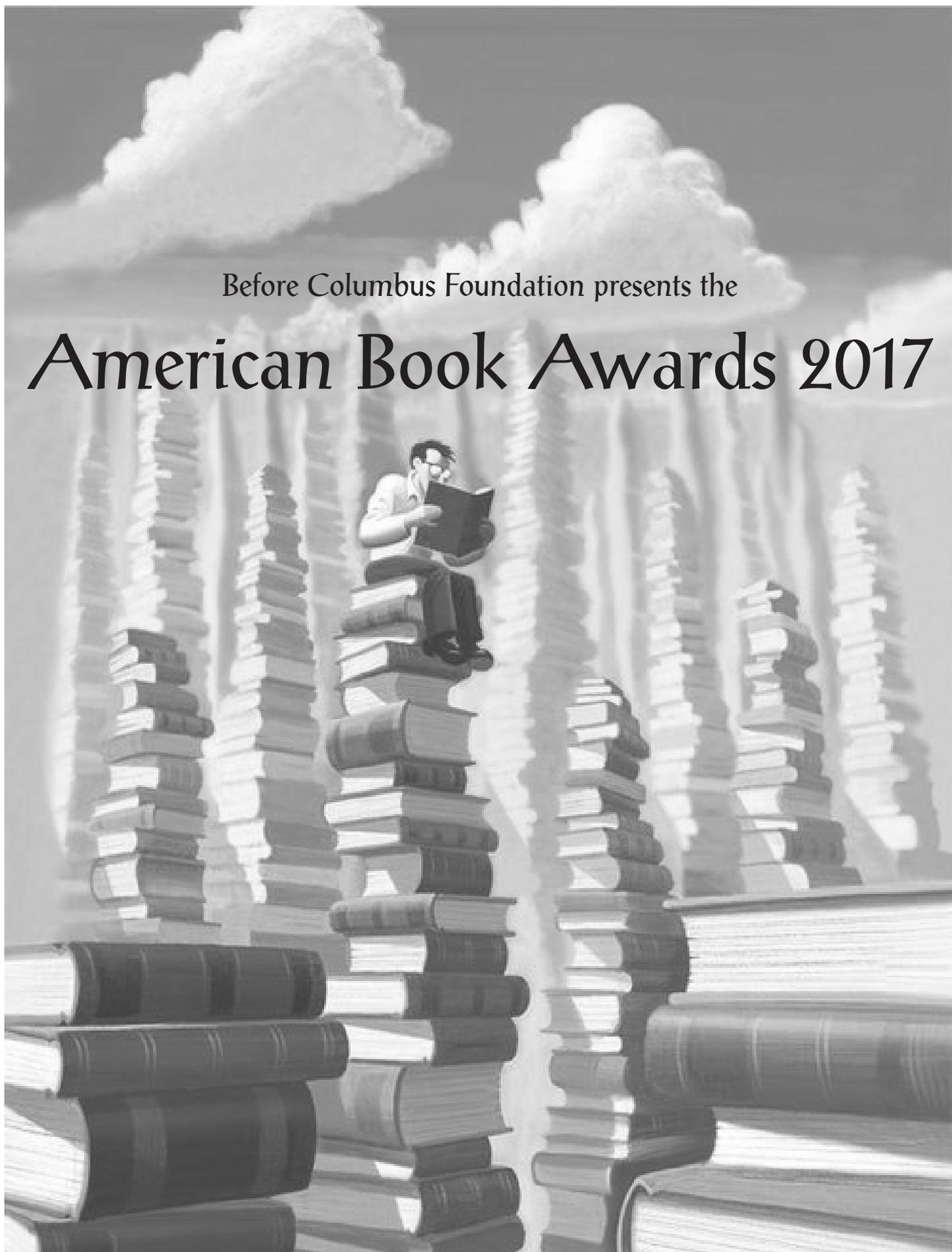


Before Columbus Foundation presents the

American Book Awards 2017



THE AMERICAN BOOK AWARDS

America was intended to be a place where freedom from discrimination was the means by which equality was achieved. Today, American culture is the most diverse ever on the face of this earth. Recognizing literary excellence demands a panoramic perspective. A narrow view strictly to the mainstream ignores all the tributaries that feed it. American literature is not one tradition but all traditions. From those who have been here for thousands of years to the most recent immigrants, we are all contributing to American culture. We are all being translated into a new language. Everyone should know by now that Columbus did not “discover” America. Rather, we are all still discovering America—and we must continue to do so.

The Before Columbus Foundation was founded in 1976 as a nonprofit educational and service organization dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of contemporary American multicultural literature. The goals of BCF are to provide recognition and a wider audience for the wealth of cultural and ethnic diversity that constitutes American writing. BCF has always employed the term “multicultural” not as a description of an aspect of American literature, but as a definition of all American literature. BCF believes that the ingredients of America’s so-called “melting pot” are not only distinct, but integral to the unique constitution of American Culture—the whole comprises the parts.

In 1978, the Board of Directors of BCF (authors, editors, and publishers representing the multicultural diversity of American Literature) decided that one of its programs should be a book award that would, for the first time, respect and honor excellence in American literature without restriction or bias with regard to race, sex, creed, cultural origin, size of press or ad budget, or even genre. There would be no requirements, restrictions, limitations, or second places. There would be no categories (i.e., no “best” novel or only one “best” of anything). The winners would not be selected by any set quota for diversity (nor would “mainstream white anglo male” authors be excluded), because diversity happens naturally. Finally, there would be no losers, only winners. The only criteria would be outstanding contribution to American literature in the opinion of the judges.

All winners are accorded equal standing. Their publishers are also to be honored for both their commitment to quality and their willingness to take the risks that accompany publishing outstanding books and authors that may not prove “cost-effective” in the short run. There are special Award designations (such as Lifetime Achievement) for contributions to American literature beyond a recently published book. The American Book Awards Program is not associated with any industry group or trade organization. The American Book Awards offer no cash prize nor do they require any financial commitments from the authors or their publishers. The Award winners are nominated and selected by a panel of writers and editors who also represent the diversity of American literary culture.

The 2017 Board of Directors of the Before Columbus Foundation:

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Before Columbus Foundation presents the winners of the

American Book Awards 2017

Rabia Chaudry

Adnan's Story: The Search for Truth and Justice After Serial (St. Martin's Press)

Flores A. Forbes

Invisible Men: A Contemporary Slave Narrative in the Era of Mass Incarceration (Skyhorse Publishing)

Yaa Gyasi

Homegoing (Knopf)

Holly Hughes

Passings (Expedition Press)

Randa Jarrar

Him, Me, Muhammad Ali (Sarabande Books)

Bernice L. McFadden

The Book of Harlan (Akashic Books)

Brian D. McInnes

Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow (Michigan State University Press)

Patrick Phillips

Blood at the Root: A Racial Cleansing in America (W. W. Norton & Company)

Vaughn Rasberry

Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination (Harvard University Press)

Marc Anthony Richardson

Year of the Rat (Fiction Collective Two)

Shawna Yang Ryan

Green Island (Knopf)

Ruth Sergel

See You in the Streets: Art, Action, and Remembering the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (University of Iowa Press)

Solmaz Sharif

Look (Graywolf Press)

Adam Soldofsky

Memory Foam (Disorder Press)

Alfredo Véa

The Mexican Flyboy (University of Oklahoma Press)

Dean Wong

Seeing the Light: Four Decades in Chinatown (Chin Music Press)

Lifetime Achievement: **Nancy Mercado**

Editor/Publisher Award: **Ammiel Alcalay**

Adnan's Story: The Search for Truth and Justice After Serial

In early 2000, Adnan Syed was convicted and sentenced to life plus thirty years for the murder of his ex-girlfriend Hae Min Lee, a high school senior in Baltimore, Maryland. Syed has maintained his innocence, and Rabia Chaudry, a family friend, has always believed him. By 2013, after almost all appeals had been exhausted, Rabia contacted Sarah Koenig, a producer at *This American Life*, in hopes of finding a journalist who could shed light on Adnan's story. In 2014, Koenig's investigation turned into *Serial*, a Peabody Award-winning podcast with more than 500 million international listeners. But *Serial* did not tell the whole story. In this compelling narrative, Rabia Chaudry presents new key evidence that she maintains dismantles the State's case: a potential new suspect, forensics indicating Hae was killed and kept somewhere for almost half a day, and documentation withheld by the State that destroys the cell phone evidence—among many other points—and she shows how fans of *Serial* joined a crowd-sourced investigation into a case riddled with errors and strange twists. *Adnan's Story* also shares Adnan's life in prison, and weaves in his personal reflections, including never-before-seen letters. Chaudry, who is committed to exonerating Adnan, makes it clear that justice is yet to be achieved in this much examined case.

“Chaudry’s clear, vivid and highly readable account of the case will bring the story to life for readers unfamiliar with the podcast, and even the most devoted ‘Serial’ fans will find fresh insight and a vast amount of new material. Chaudry’s legal training serves her well as she marshals her defense, but so too does the Pakistani heritage and Muslim faith she shares with Syed.” —*Washington Post*

Rabia Chaudry

Rabia Chaudry is an attorney, a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and a national security fellow at the New America Foundation. She is the co-host of *Undisclosed*, one of the top-ranked podcasts in the iTunes store. She is a frequent public speaker, and her writing has appeared in numerous outlets including *Time.com*, *The Huffington Post*, and the *Chicago Sun-Times*.



Credit: Ayesha Ahmad

Invisible Men: A Contemporary Slave Narrative in the Era of Mass Incarceration

Flores Forbes, a former leader in the Black Panther Party, has been free from prison for twenty-five years. Unfortunately that makes him part of a group of black men without constituency who are all but invisible in society. That is, the “invisible” group of black men in America who have served their time and not gone back to prison. Today the recidivism rate is around 65%. Almost never mentioned in the media or scholarly attention is the plight of the 35% who don’t go back, especially black men. A few of them are hiding in Ivy League schools’ prison education programs—they don’t want to be known—but most of them are recruited by the one billion dollar industry reentry employee programs that allow the US to profit from their life and labor. Whereas, African Americans consist of only 12% of the population in the US, black males are incarcerated at much higher rates. The chances of these formerly convicted men to succeed after prison—to matriculate as leading members of society—are increasingly slim. The doors are closed to them, *Invisible Men* is a book that will crack the code on the stigma of incarceration. When Flores Forbes was released from prison, he made a plan to re-invent himself but found it impossible. While in prison he earned a college degree using a Pell Grant, with hope this would get him on the right track and a chance at a normal life. He was released but that’s where his story and most invisible men’s stories begin. This book will weave Flores’ knowledge, wisdom, and experience with incarceration, sentencing reform, judicial inequity, hiding and re-entry into society, and the issue of increasing struggles and inequality for formerly incarcerated men into a collection of poignant essays that finally give invisible men a voice and face in society.

Flores A. Forbes

His memoir, *Will You Die with Me?: My Life and the Black Panther Party*, was published in 2007.



Credit: Eileen Barroso

Homegoing

Ghana, eighteenth century: two half sisters are born into different villages, each unaware of the other. One will marry an Englishman and lead a life of comfort in the palatial rooms of the Cape Coast Castle. The other will be captured in a raid on her village, imprisoned in the very same castle, and sold into slavery. *Homegoing* follows the parallel paths of these sisters and their descendants through eight generations: from the Gold Coast to the plantations of Mississippi, from the American Civil War to Jazz Age Harlem. Yaa Gyasi's extraordinary novel illuminates slavery's troubled legacy both for those who were taken and those who stayed—and shows how the memory of captivity has been inscribed on the soul of our nation.

“Thanks to Ms. Gyasi's instinctive storytelling gifts, the book leaves the reader with a visceral understanding of both the savage realities of slavery and the emotional damage that is handed down, over the centuries. . . . By its conclusion, the characters' tales of loss and resilience have acquired an inexorable and cumulative emotional weight.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

“Powerful. . . . Gyasi has delivered something unbelievably tough to pull off: a centuries-spanning epic of interlinked short stories. . . . She has a poet's ability to paint a scene with a handful of phrases.” —*The Christian Science Monitor*

“Homegoing is an inspiration.” —Ta-Nehisi Coates

Yaa Gyasi

Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana and raised in Huntsville, Alabama. She holds a BA in English from Stanford University and an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she held a Dean's Graduate Research Fellowship. She lives in Berkeley, CA.



Credit: Cody Pickens

Passings

Passenger pigeon. Carolina parakeet. Eskimo curlew. Heath hen. In a timely, moving collection of elegies, Holly J. Hughes gives voice to these and other bird species that no longer fill our skies. If their names sound as a litany of the hundreds of species we've lost, these fifteen poems ring as a reminder that their stories are still with us. In clear, well-crafted poems, Hughes serves as witness to these birds' stories, offering each a poignant account that acts as a cautionary tale for the many species whose habitats now face threats from climate change. In her preface, Hughes introduces us to the birds she first knew and loved, and her impassioned afterword reminds us that it's not too late to learn from these birds' extinction and take action to protect the species that remain. “Take note,” she writes. “These birds are singing to us. We must listen.”

“Holly Hughes's elegiac meditations on birds that have vanished from earth give us a glimpse of the avian beauty that once filled our skies, and they echo with a sobering reminder of what we still stand to lose. From flocks of passenger pigeons, whose overhead passage “for three days in succession, ‘sounding like a hard gale at sea’” to Australia's paradise parrot, a stunningly beautiful bird whose body “vibrated with the force and intensity of its song — more than 150 species have fallen silent over the past few centuries. Hughes gives eloquent voice to the voiceless in these poems, and strikes a heartfelt call to awareness.” —Tim McNulty, author of *Ascendance*

Holly Hughes

Holly J. Hughes is the author of *Sailing by Ravens* (University of Alaska Press, 2014), coauthor of *The Pen and The Bell: Mindful Writing in a Busy World* (Skinner House Press, 2012), and editor of the award-winning anthology *Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer's Disease* (Kent State University Press, 2009). She has spent over thirty summers working on the water in Alaska, commercial fishing for salmon, skippering a 65-foot schooner, and working as a naturalist on ships. She lives in Washington State.



Him, Me, Muhammad Ali

Jarrar's stories grapple with love, loss, displacement, and survival in a collection that moves seamlessly between realism and fable, history and the present. With humor, irony, and boundless imagination, Jarrar brings to life a memorable cast of characters, many of them “accidental transients”—a term for migratory birds who have gone astray—seeking their circuitous routes back home.

“*Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* is a searing collection of short stories about loving, lusty, losing, and surviving. Randa Jarrar is one of the finest writers of her generation. Her voice is assured, fiercely independent, laced with humor and irony—and always, always, honest.”—Laila Lalami, author of *The Moor's Account* and *The Secret Son*

“Randa Jarrar's prose is bold and luscious and makes the darkly comic seem light. The voices in *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* are powerful individually and overwhelming as a chorus. This wonderful work isn't just a collection; it's a world.”—Mat Johnson, author of *Pym* and *Loving Day*

“These stories showcase the strength and talent of a writer of immeasurable gift and grace, who confronts the poignant and often brutal realities her characters face with sass and verve.”—*Los Angeles Review of Books*

Randa Jarrar

Randa Jarrar is an award-winning novelist, short story writer, essayist, and translator. She grew up in Kuwait and Egypt, and moved to the U.S. after the first Gulf War. Her novel *A Map of Home*, was published in six languages and won a Hopwood Award, an Arab-American Book Award, and was named one of the best novels of 2008 by the Barnes & Noble Review. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Utne Reader*, Salon.com, *Guernica*, *Ploughshares*, and other venues.



The Book of Harlan

The Book of Harlan opens with the courtship of Harlan's parents and his 1917 birth in Macon, Georgia. After his prominent minister grandfather dies, Harlan and his parents move to Harlem, where he eventually becomes a professional musician. When Harlan and his best friend, trumpeter Lizard Robbins, are invited to perform at a popular cabaret in the Parisian enclave of Montmartre—affectionately referred to as “The Harlem of Paris” by black American musicians—Harlan jumps at the opportunity, convincing Lizard to join him. But after the City of Light falls under Nazi occupation, Harlan and Lizard are thrown into Buchenwald—the notorious concentration camp in Weimar, Germany—irreparably changing the course of Harlan's life. Based on exhaustive research and told in McFadden's mesmerizing prose, *The Book of Harlan* skillfully blends the stories of McFadden's familial ancestors with those of real and imagined characters.

“Simply miraculous...As her saga becomes ever more spellbinding, so does the reader's astonishment at the magic she creates. This is a story about the triumph of the human spirit over bigotry, intolerance and cruelty, and at the center of *The Book of Harlan* is the restorative force that is music.”—*Washington Post*

“McFadden's impressive achievement offers us a window into the often very difficult lives of African Americans from the Jim Crow era up to the present—and, unexpectedly, in wartime Germany. Highly recommended for showing us that however badly black citizens have historically been treated, black lives matter.”—*Library Journal*

Bernice L. McFadden

Bernice L. McFadden is the author of nine critically acclaimed novels including *Sugar*, *Gathering of Waters* (a New York Times Editors' Choice and one of the 100 Notable Books of 2012), and *Glorious*, which was featured in *O, The Oprah Magazine* and was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award. McFadden lives in Brooklyn, New York.



Credit: Raya

Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow

Francis Pegahmagabow (1889–1952), an Ojibwe of the Caribou clan, was born in Shawanaga First Nation, Ontario. Enlisting at the onset of the First World War, he served overseas as a scout and sniper and became Canada’s most decorated Indigenous soldier. After the war, Pegahmagabow settled in Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario, where he married and raised six children. He served his community as both Chief and Councillor and was a founding member of the Brotherhood of Canadian Indians, the first national Indigenous political organization. In 1949 and 1950, he was elected the Supreme Chief of the National Indian Government. Francis Pegahmagabow’s stories describe many parts of his life and are characterized by classic Ojibwe narrative. They reveal aspects of Francis’s Anishinaabe life and worldview. Interceding chapters by Brian McInnes provide valuable cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and historical insights that give a greater context and application for Francis’s words and world. Presented in their original Ojibwe as well as in English translation, the stories also reveal a rich and evocative relationship to the lands and waters of Georgian Bay. In *Sounding Thunder*, Brian McInnes provides a new perspective on Pegahmagabow and his experience through a unique synthesis of Ojibwe oral history, historical record, and Pegahmagabow family stories.

Brian D. McInnes

Brian D. McInnes is a professional educator and author dedicated to diversity education, youth engagement, and organizational leadership. He is also a member of the Wasauksing First Nation and a descendant of Francis Pegahmagabow.



Blood at the Root: A Racial Cleansing in America

Forsyth County, Georgia, at the turn of the twentieth century, was home to a large African American community that included ministers and teachers, farmers and field hands, tradesmen, servants, and children. But then in September of 1912, three young black laborers were accused of raping and murdering a white girl. One man was dragged from a jail cell and lynched on the town square, two teenagers were hung after a one-day trial, and soon bands of white “night riders” launched a coordinated campaign of arson and terror, driving all 1,098 black citizens out of the county. The charred ruins of homes and churches disappeared into the weeds, until the people and places of black Forsyth were forgotten. Phillips tells Forsyth’s tragic story in vivid detail and traces its long history of racial violence all the way back to antebellum Georgia. Recalling his own childhood in the 1970s and 1980s, Phillips sheds light on the communal crimes of his hometown and the violent means by which locals kept Forsyth “all white” well into the 1990s.

“There are places the civil rights movement literally passed by, and for decades Forsyth County was one of those pockets. *Blood at the Root* is a vital investigation of Forsyth’s history, and of the process by which racial injustice is perpetuated in America.” — U.S. Congressman John Lewis, author of *March*

“The burden of southern history lies not in what we know about the past but what we do not know. Patrick Phillips uncovers an important untold piece of history... What he reveals in this important book does not make this chilling piece of the past any easier to bear, but he brings it into sharper focus, which is long overdue.” — W. Ralph Eubanks, author of *Ever is a Long Time: A Journey in Mississippi’s Dark Past*

Patrick Phillips

Patrick Phillips is an award-winning poet, translator, and professor. A Guggenheim and NEA Fellow, his poetry collection, *Elegy for a Broken Machine*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. Phillips lives in Brooklyn and teaches at Stanford University.



Credit: Marion Ettlinger

Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination

Few concepts evoke the twentieth century's record of war, genocide, repression, and extremism more powerfully than the idea of totalitarianism. Today, studies of the subject are usually confined to discussions of Europe's collapse in World War II or to comparisons between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In *Race and the Totalitarian Century*, Vaughn Rasberry parts ways with both proponents and detractors of these normative conceptions in order to tell the strikingly different story of how black American writers manipulated the geopolitical rhetoric of their time. During World War II and the Cold War, the United States government conscripted African Americans into the fight against Nazism and Stalinism. An array of black writers, however, deflected the appeals of liberalism and its antitotalitarian propaganda in the service of decolonization. Richard Wright, W. E. B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham, C. L. R. James, John A. Williams, and others remained skeptical that totalitarian servitude and democratic liberty stood in stark opposition. Their skepticism allowed them to formulate an independent perspective that reimagined the antifascist, anticommunist narrative through the lens of racial injustice, with the United States as a tyrannical force in the Third World but also as an ironic agent of Asian and African independence. Bringing a new interpretation to events such as the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, Rasberry's bird's-eye view of black culture and politics offers an alternative history of the totalitarian century.



Vaughn Rasberry

Vaughn Rasberry studies African American and African Diaspora literature, twentieth-century American fiction, postcolonial theory, and philosophical theories of modernity. *Race and the Totalitarian Century* is also a recipient of the American Political Science Association's 2017 Ralph Bunche Award ("awarded annually for the best scholarly work in political science on ethnic and cultural pluralism"). He is an Associate Professor of English at Stanford University.

Year of the Rat

In *Year of the Rat*, an artist returns to the dystopian city of his birth to tend to his invalid mother only to find himself torn apart by memories and longings. Narrated by this nameless figure whose rants, reveries, and Rabelaisian escapades take him on a Dantesque descent into himself, the story follows him and his mother as they share a one-bedroom apartment over the course of a year. Despite his mother's precarious health, the lingering memories of a lost love, an incarcerated sibling, a repressed sexuality, and an anarchic inability to support himself, he pursues his dream of becoming an avant-garde artist. His prospects grow dim until a devastating death provides a painful and unforeseeable opportunity. With a voice that is poetic and profane, ethereal and irreverent, cyclical and succinct, he roams from vignette to vignette, creating a polyphonic patchwork quilt of a family portrait.

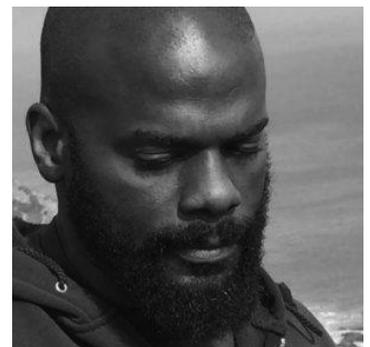
"Trust me, you've never read anything like Marc Anthony Richardson's *Year of the Rat*, and you must stop everything you're doing right now and make time for it. Gorgeous, unsparing, heartbreaking, the book is a prose poem of a testament to motherhood, to manhood, to lost generations, to hope itself."—Cristina García, author of *King of Cuba*

"In language that is at times phantasmagoric, at times ribald, and always beautiful, Marc Anthony Richardson's debut novel astounds. Bold, provocative, and ambitious: we have a new, indispensable voice in American letters."—Micheline Aharonian Marcom, author of *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* and *The Mirror in the Well*

"As word-drunk as Joyce, as sharp-eyed as Ellison, Richardson has a mesmerizing voice that grabs you by the ears and won't let go. This poignant tale of a young man's devotion to his family while he struggles to succeed in a surreal art world introduces Richardson as an important new voice."—Cornelia Nixon, author of *Jarrettsville* and *Angels Go Naked*

Marc Anthony Richardson

Marc Anthony Richardson received his MFA from Mills College. He is an artist and writer from Philadelphia. *Year of the Rat* is his debut novel.



Green Island

Taipei, February 28, 1947: As an uprising rocks Taiwan, a young doctor is taken from his newborn daughter by Chinese Nationalists, on charges of speaking out against the government. Although he eventually returns to his family, his arrival is marked by alienation from his loved ones and paranoia among his community. Years later, this troubled past follows his youngest daughter to America, where, as a mother and a wife, she too is forced to decide between what is right and what might save her family—the same choice she witnessed her father make many years before. A stunningly lyrical story of a family and a nation grappling with the nuances of complicity and survival, *Green Island* raises the question: how far would you go for the ones you love?

“A tough, unsentimental, and moving novel that is a memorial not only to the heroes, but also to the survivors.”
—Viet Thanh Nguyen, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*

“Sweeping . . . as epic in scope as the story is intimate.” —*The Arizona Republic*

“Ryan embraces the complexity of the situation, by not creating heroes but instead exploring the truth of compromise, survival and belonging.” —*The New York Times*

Shawna Yang Ryan

Shawna Yang Ryan is a former Fulbright scholar and the author of one previous novel, *Water Ghosts*. She teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Her short fiction has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *The Asian American Literary Review*, *Kartika Review*, and *Berkeley Fiction Review*. She lives in Honolulu.



Credit: Anna Wu

See You in the Streets: Art, Action, and Remembering the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

In 1911, a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City took the lives of 146 workers, most of them young immigrant women and girls. Their deaths galvanized a movement for social and economic justice then, but today's laborers continue to battle dire working conditions. How can we bring the lessons of the Triangle fire back into practice today? For artist Ruth Sergel, the answer was to fuse art, activism, and collective memory to create a large-scale public commemoration that invites broad participation and incites civic engagement. *See You in the Streets* showcases her work. This project inspired Sergel to found the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, a broad alliance of artists and activists, universities and unions—more than 250 partners nationwide—to mark the 2011 centennial of the infamous blaze. This book offers an exuberant perspective on building a social art practice and doing public history through argument and agitation, creativity and celebration with an engaged public.

“In this passionate book, Sergel, a remarkable activist and artist, writes eloquently about one of history's worst workplace tragedies—the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911. Sergel also explains how art can be used ingeniously to keep memories of that tragedy alive so that we in the twenty-first century never forget the hugely important lessons to be drawn from it.”—Steven Greenhouse, author of *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker*

Ruth Sergel

Ruth Sergel's projects bridge art and technology, memory and public history to create compassionate works that invite active civic engagement. Her films, public interventions, and interactive installations have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, Boston Museum of Fine Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts. Her work has been shown internationally including as well as broadcast on the Independent Film Channel (IFC) and PBS. She lives in Berlin.



Look

Solmaz Sharif's astonishing first book, *Look*, asks us to see the ongoing costs of war as the unbearable losses of human lives and also the insidious abuses against our everyday speech. In this virtuosic array of poems, lists, shards, and sequences, Sharif assembles her family's and her own fragmented narratives in the aftermath of warfare. Those repercussions echo into the present day, in the grief for those killed, in America's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and in the discriminations endured at the checkpoints of daily encounter. At the same time, these poems point to the ways violence is conducted against our language. Throughout this collection are words and phrases lifted from the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms; in their seamless inclusion, Sharif exposes the devastating euphemisms deployed to sterilize the language, control its effects, and sway our collective resolve. But Sharif refuses to accept this terminology as given, and instead turns it back on its perpetrators. "Let it matter what we call a thing," she writes. "Let me look at you."

"[An] excellent debut collection. . . . In Sharif's rendering, 'Look' is at once a command to see and to grieve the people these words describe—and also a means of implicating the reader in the violence delivered upon these people. . . . An artful lexicographer, Sharif shows us that the diameter of a word is often as devastating as the diameter of a bomb."—*The New York Times Book Review*

"[Solmaz] Sharif is poised to influence not only literature but larger conversations about America, war, and the Middle East."—*The Paris Review*

Solmaz Sharif

Solmaz Sharif has published poetry in the *New Republic* and *Poetry*, and has received a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is currently a Jones Lecturer at Stanford University.



Credit: Arash Saedinia

Memory Foam

Line by line, Soldofsky questions what the hell it is we are doing on this planet. These poems have us reveling in the confusion that comes with human existence.

"Such a quiet, personal, deep, philosophical, unflinching, peaceful voice."—U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera

"These poems are a mood, a way of seeing, an abandoned house full of creaks and signs of life. They are both archive and confession, naked and shameless in their truth. I'm enamored with Soldofsky's voice—it's meditative and prying, both anxious and accepting. This book is a memory of the present, instantaneous nostalgia. 'Behold,' the beginning of the book instructs, both to the reader and the self, and that is the work of these poems: to be aware. Of discontent, of anticipation, of regret, of the distance between human beings, of limitations. I clench my chest at these poems ('Do you feel cobbled together?'). I scream *Ain't that the truth?!* ('Every person, of course, is inconceivable'). I want to wrap myself in their perception—not laughing exactly, not weeping, just acknowledging, bearing witness, knowing."

—Morgan Parker, author of *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé*

Adam Soldofsky

Adam Soldofsky's work has appeared in various journals including *Paperbag*, *Bodega*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Prelude*, and on the Tin House Blog. His series of screenshot poems, *The Blind Swordsman Poems*, can be found at: <http://theblindswordsmanpoems.tumblr.com>. He lives in Los Angeles, CA.



The Mexican Flyboy

What if we could travel back in time to save our heroes from painful deaths? What if we could rewrite history to protect and reward the innocent victims of injustice? In Alfredo Vía's daring new novel, one man does just that, taking readers on a series of remarkable journeys. Abandoned as a child, brooding and haunted as an adult, Simon Vegas, "the Mexican Flyboy," toils for years to repair a time machine that fell into his hands in Vietnam. With the help of his friend, eccentric Hephaestus Segundo, Simon uses the device to fly through time. Wherever acts of human cruelty take place, in the past or in the present, the machine lets him lift the suffering away and deliver them to a utopian afterlife. Blending magical realism, science fiction, history, and comic-book fantasy, *The Mexican Flyboy* swoops readers from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the vineyards of Northern California, from Ethel Rosenberg's execution to Joan of Arc's pyre, in a tale of justice, trauma, regret, and redemption. The dead pass through the narrative in a parade at once heartbreaking and hopeful, among them Vincent van Gogh and Malcolm X, Ernest Hemingway and Amadou Diallo. But the living—Simon's pregnant wife, Elena, his old friend Ezekiel Stein, prisoner Lenny Hudson—all throw doubt onto Simon's story. Is Simon truly a "magus," transporting martyrs to a shared community in paradise? Or is he just a man broken by loss, guilt, and the trauma of war, hopelessly lost in an illusion of his own making? Crossing genres and blending comedy with tragedy, Alfredo Vía imagines a world where we can rewrite our pasts and heal the wounds inflicted by history. Inviting comparisons to the work of James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges, Junot Díaz and Michael Chabon, this powerful book is like nothing else you have ever read.

"With heart, imagination, and wit, Alfredo Vía gives us a rollicking tale of magical realism and science fiction, historical acuity and human truths. If Gabriel García Márquez were to magically collaborate with E. L. Doctorow, Luis Alberto Urrea, and Ray Bradbury, the result would be something as delightfully moving as *The Mexican Flyboy*." —Rilla Askew, author of *Fire in Beulah* and *Kind of Kin*

Alfredo Vía

Alfredo Vía is a criminal defense lawyer in San Francisco and author of three other novels, *La Maravilla*, *The Silver Cloud Café*, and *Gods Go Begging*.



Seeing the Light: Four Decades in Chinatown

Photojournalist Dean Wong has been chronicling life in America's Chinatowns for four decades. His sensitive eye and man-of-the-people interviews bring these ghettos disguised as tourist traps to life. Through Wong, we meet the drag queen deciding to stop his medications and die of AIDS with dignity; the elderly Chinese American facing eviction as the neighborhood gentrifies; the artist told by the city that his shop is a fire hazard, and the man who challenged Bruce Lee to a fight . . . and lost. Wong focuses his attention on the Chinatowns of Seattle, San Francisco, Vancouver, and New York. He reveals how "Chinatown" is sometimes a misnomer because these neighborhoods often include large pockets of Vietnamese, Japanese, and other Asian American families. He also chronicles the celebratory side of life in these communities, from the events around Lunar New Year to a much-anticipated visit by the Dalai Lama. Building on the groundwork of Bonnie Tsui's *American Chinatown* (2009), *Seeing the Light* exposes an oft overlooked American community and reminds the reader that these neighborhoods are filled with much more than good places to get dim sum. The city of Seattle and King County, Washington, declared March 8, 1995, Dean Wong Day to honor his efforts documenting the Asian and Pacific American community.

Dean Wong

Dean Wong is an award-winning photojournalist who has been chronicling Asian American life for nearly forty years. The city of Seattle and King County, Washington, declared March 8, 1995, Dean Wong Day to honor his efforts documenting the Asian and Pacific American community.



Credit: Owen Lei

Lifetime Achievement Award: Nancy Mercado

“Nancy Mercado is one of the nation’s leading persons of letters. Her work plumbs the experience of an individual of Puerto Rico ancestry living in America, but as a multicultural and bi-lingual poet she has an edge like someone having eyes at the back of one’s head. A listing of her entries in anthologies and scholarly publications would takes up a number of pages. She is one of those rare writers who does it all. Poetry. Plays. Short Stories. Performance. Many writers quote T.S. Eliot but they overlook this statement. “All ethnic poets might not be great, but all great poets are ethnic.” Hers has been a rise from humble beginnings to the Academy. A PhD from SUNY Binghamton. Museum curator. She can write about her personal experiences but when other poets ducked and ran, she tackled the date when the terror came home. 9/11. I’ve lived long enough to see some of the people with whom I use to hang, memorialized in statues, street names, institutions, landmarks, etc. They gave it all like Nancy has. She keeps on giving. She is an inspiration to children and to us all and a member of one of the most influential movements of the last hundred years, The Nuyoricans. She’s up there with Algarin, Pietri, Pinero, all of whom gave us all another look.” — Ishmael Reed

Poet, writer, educator, and activist Nancy Mercado is the author of *It Concerns the Madness* (2000) and editor of the children’s anthology *if the world were mine* (2003). She earned a BA from Rutgers University, an MA from New York University, and a PhD in English from SUNY-Binghamton. *Latino Leaders Magazine* hailed Mercado as “one of the most celebrated members of the Puerto Rican literary movement in the Big Apple.”

Mercado’s work has been featured in many literary journals and included in dozens of anthologies, including *Looking Out Looking In: Anthology of Latino Poetry*, *Breaking Ground: Anthology of Puerto Rican Women Writers in New York 1980-2012*, *Poetry After 911 An Anthology of New York Poets*, *From Totems to Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas 1900-2002*, *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*, *Identity Lessons: Contemporary Writing About Learning to be American*, and *ALoud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café*.

She authored and directed seven plays that have all been produced in venues such as the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). One of these works is co-authored with the writer Pedro Pietri. Mercado also authored a hip-hop educational curriculum for the Mayhem Poets featured at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC).

Her film, television and radio credits include the documentary film *Yari Yari Pamberi: Black Women Writers Dissecting Globalization* directed by Jayne Cortez; the “PBS NewsHour Special: America Remembers 9/11”; Public Television’s “Poetry Spots” series directed by Bob Holman; National Public Radio’s “The Talk of the Nation,” among many others.

Mercado has toured throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe as a featured poet and conference panelist. She is an assistant editor and advisory board member of Eco-Poetry.org; a website for “poetry and commentary dealing with climate crisis concerns: ecological literature dedicated to inspiring action against global warming and respect for our biosphere and all human and animal life on our planet.”



Credit: Ricardo Muniz

Editor/Publisher Award:
Ammiel Alcalay

“The Lost & Found project is a place where I go to find myself again. I meet geniuses and early-day friends that I met on the road like Kathy Acker, Diane di Prima, and Adrienne Rich.”— Juan Felipe Herrera, the U.S. Poet Laureate from 2015 to 2017

“Under the leadership of Ammiel Alcalay, Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative has created invaluable resources in literature for the academic scholar and general reader alike. Reviving and resuscitating an archive of rare vibrancy, displaying intellectual rigor, honesty and courage, the Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative has brought into print a unique vision of American and international letters. Daring, bold, and above all challenging to the preconceived notions of what defines the parameters of literary art, Alcalay has helped map a new territory of moral urgency and ethical beauty.”— Justin Desmangles

Ammiel Alcalay is an American poet, scholar, critic, translator, and prose stylist. Born and raised in Boston, he is a first-generation American, son of Sephardic Jews from Serbia. His work often examines how poetry and politics affect the way we see ourselves and the way Americans think about the Middle East, with attention to methods of cultural recovery in the United States, the Middle East, and Europe. Alcalay is the initiator and General Editor of Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative, a series of student- and guest-edited archival texts emerging from New American Poetry.



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