



**ANISFIELD-WOLF  
BOOK AWARDS**

PRESENTED BY THE CLEVELAND FOUNDATION

www.Anisfield-Wolf.org

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **A History of Hoaxes, a Mississippi Ghost Story and the Interplay of Freedom and Captivity Are All Subjects of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards**

CLEVELAND (March 29, 2018) – The Cleveland Foundation today unveiled the winners of its 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. Marlon James, a 2015 Anisfield-Wolf honoree, made the announcement. The 2018 recipients of the only national juried prize for literature that confronts racism and explores diversity are:

- **Shane McCrae**, *In the Language of My Captor*, Poetry
- **N. Scott Momaday**, Lifetime Achievement
- **Jesmyn Ward**, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Fiction
- **Kevin Young**, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*, Nonfiction

“The new Anisfield-Wolf winners deepen our insights on race and diversity,” said Henry Louis Gates Jr., who chairs the jury. “This year, we honor a lyrical novel haunted by a Mississippi prison farm, a book of exceptional poetry on what freedom means in captivity and a breakthrough history of the hoax that speaks to this political moment. All is capped by the lifetime achievement of N. Scott Momaday, the dean of Native American letters.”

Dr. Gates directs the Hutchins Center for African and African-American Research at Harvard University, where he is also the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor. Joining him in selecting the winners each year are poet Rita Dove, novelist Joyce Carol Oates, psychologist Steven Pinker and historian Simon Schama.

Cleveland Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Ronn Richard said, “With every passing year, it becomes even more clear that Edith Anisfield Wolf was a civil rights advocate well ahead of her time. Her passionate commitment to social justice is as important now as it was in the first half of the 20th century, and we are thrilled to raise up our 2018 winners as a reflection of her ideal. Their books serve as striking examples of how the written work can tackle racism and diversity from many perspectives – while simultaneously bringing us closer together.”

Past winners include five writers who later won Nobel prizes – Gunnar Myrdal, Nadine Gordimer, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison and Wole Soyinka. They are among the 240 recipients of the prize.

### **About the 2018 Winners**

**Shane McCrae** interrogates history and perspective with his fifth book, *In the Language of My Captor*, including the connections between racism and love. He uses historical persona poems and prose memoir to address the illusory freedom of both black and white Americans. “These voices worm their way inside your head; deceptively simple language layers complexity upon complexity until we are shared in the same socialized racial webbing as the African exhibited at the zoo or the Jim Crow universe that Banjo Yes learned to survive in (‘You can be free//Or you can live’),” says Anisfield-Wolf Juror Rita Dove. Raised in Texas and California, McCrae taught at Oberlin College for three years before joining the faculty of Columbia University last year. He lives in Manhattan with his family.

**N. Scott Momaday** remade American literature in 1966 with his first novel, *House Made of Dawn*. It tells the story of a modern soldier trying to resume his life in Indian Country. The slim book won a Pulitzer Prize, but Momaday prefers writing poetry, the form his work most often takes. Anisfield-Wolf Jury Chair Gates says Momaday “is at root a storyteller who both preserves and expands Native American culture in his critically praised, transformative writing.” He is also a watercolorist, playwright, scholar, professor and essayist. Momaday was born a Kiowa in Oklahoma and grew up in the Indian southwest. He earned a doctorate at Stanford University, joined its faculty, and taught American literature widely, including in Moscow. In 2007, President George W. Bush awarded Momaday a National Medal of Arts. He lives in Santa Fe, N.M.

**Jesmyn Ward** is the only woman in American letters to receive two National Book Awards, one for her second novel, *Salvage the Bones*, and another last year for *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Both are set in fictional Bois Sauvage, a place rooted in the rural Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Critics have compared Bois Sauvage to William Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County and Ward’s prose to Toni Morrison’s. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* serves as a road book, a ghost story and a tale of sibling love. Anisfield-Wolf juror Joyce Carol Oates called it “a beautifully rendered, heartbreaking, savage and tender novel.” Ward, who won a MacArthur “genius grant” last fall, lives with her family in DeLisle, Miss. She is a professor at Tulane University.

**Kevin Young** is a public intellectual, the editor of eight books and the author of 13, including *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News*. He spent six years researching and writing this cultural history of the covert American love of the con, and its entanglement with racial history. After 12 years teaching at Emory University, Young became the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the poetry editor for *The New Yorker*. Anisfield-Wolf Juror Steven Pinker calls *Bunk* “rich, informative, interesting, original and above all timely,” and Juror Joyce Carol Oates says the book “disturbs, amuses, outrages and illuminates by turn. It should be required reading in all U.S. schools.”

The Anisfield-Wolf winners will be honored Sept. 27 at the State Theatre in Cleveland, hosted by the Cleveland Foundation and emceed by Jury Chair Gates. The ceremony will be part of the third annual Cleveland Book Week slated for Sept. 24-29. For additional information, and a complete list of the recipients since 1935, visit [www.Anisfield-Wolf.org](http://www.Anisfield-Wolf.org).

### For More Information:

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### About the Cleveland Foundation

Established in 1914, the Cleveland Foundation is the world’s first community foundation and one of the largest today, with assets of \$2.45 billion and annual grants of \$90 million. For more information on the Cleveland Foundation, visit [www.ClevelandFoundation.org](http://www.ClevelandFoundation.org) and follow us on Facebook and on Twitter and Instagram @CleveFoundation.