

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*

Fearless Stories About Lynching, Resilience, the Rise of Xenophobia and a Black Family Heirloom Have All Won the 87th Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

CLEVELAND (April 5, 2022) – The Cleveland Foundation today unveiled the winners of its 87th Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. The 2022 recipients of the only national juried prize for literature that confronts racism and explores diversity are:

- **Percival Everett**, “The Trees,” Fiction
- **Donika Kelly**, “The Renunciations,” Poetry
- **George Makari**, “Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia,” Nonfiction
- **Tiya Miles**, “All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake,” Nonfiction
- **Ishmael Reed**, Lifetime Achievement

“This round of Anisfield-Wolf winners brings us important insights on race and diversity,” said Henry Louis Gates Jr., who chairs the jury. “This year, we honor a satiric novel about lynching disguised as a detective story, a poetry collection that remakes the meanings of childhood abuse, an innovative look at the idea of xenophobia, and a story of recovered history based on an embroidered sack. All is capped by the lifetime achievement of Ishmael Reed, a genre-bending and genre-transcending colossus of literature.”

Dr. Gates directs the Hutchins Center for African & 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.

Karen R. Long, manager of the book awards at the Cleveland Foundation, noted the prescience of philanthropist Edith Anisfield Wolf in founding the prize in 1935. “Her notion that literature can enhance justice is on point nearly 90 years later, and we are honored to add the 2022 winners to the canon,” Long said. “We are proud the newest books tackle the toughest topics, and hint at possible ways forward.”

Past winners include six writers who later won Nobel prizes – Ralph J. Bunche, Nadine Gordimer, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, Gunnar Myrdal, and Wole Soyinka. They are among the 257 recipients of the prize.

About the 2022 Winners

Percival Everett, 65, is an experimental writer of novels, short stories and poetry. He is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California. He received his bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the University of Miami before going on to earn his master’s in writing from Brown University. “The Trees” opens as a comic story in Money, Miss. before morphing into a metaphysical commentary on lynching, racism and police brutality – a mystery tied to the 1955 lynching of Emmett Till. “This is a wickedly clever novel of ideas in the guise of genre fiction, a combination of mystery, thriller, police procedural and absurdist comedy,” said Anisfield-Wolf Juror Joyce Carol Oates. Everett won the 2002 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for his novel “Erasure,” and the PEN USA 2006 Literary Award for his novel “Wounded.” He lives with his wife, novelist Danzy Senna, in Los Angeles.

Donika Kelly, 39, graduated from Southern Arkansas University and went on to earn her Master of Fine Arts in writing from the Michener Center for Writers and a doctorate in English from Vanderbilt University. Her first book of poetry, “Bestiary,” won the 2015 Cave Canem Poetry Prize and the 2017 Hurston/Wright Award. “The Renunciations” responds to her childhood trauma and exists in part to recast its meanings. It also speaks to a wife and lover exiting the speaker’s life. Anisfield-Wolf Juror Rita Dove lauded these poems: “Several mini-sequences are woven throughout; their periodic reappearance – the “Dear –” erasures, Self-Portraits, Sightings, Oracles – acts as a subtle yet devastating reminder of the cycle of violence. I returned to Kelly’s book, and she set me

THE JURY

Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Rita Dove

Joyce Carol Oates

Steven Pinker

Simon Schama

gasping anew. This is poetry of the highest order.” Kelly is a native of Los Angeles and now lives with her wife, the nonfiction writer Melissa Febos, in Iowa City, where she is a professor of creative writing at the University of Iowa.

George Makari, 60, is an historian, psychoanalyst, and psychiatrist whose “Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia” was a Bloomberg Best Nonfiction Book of 2021. The text is a riveting investigation into the history of an idea, xenophobia, which was declared the 2016 word of the year by Dictionary.com. The word, unlike antisemitism and racism, puts the emphasis on the perpetrator — not the victim — of these irrational fears, bigoted hatreds, and indefensible acts. “We see countless books that consider instances of racism,” Anisfield-Wolf Juror Steven Pinker notes. “Very few seek to understand it as a phenomenon to be studied and analyzed. ‘Of Fear and Strangers’ does that, free of cliché and jargon.” Makari received his bachelor’s degree from Brown University and his Doctor of Medicine from the Medical College of Cornell University. He is the director of the DeWitt Wallace Institute for the History of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medicine and lives in Manhattan with his wife, the painter and curator Arabella Ogilvie-Makari.

Tiya Miles, 52, is a public historian who wrote the 2021 National Book Award-winning “All That She Carried” after learning about a plain cotton sack discovered at a flea market near Nashville. Born and raised in Cincinnati, she received her bachelor’s degree in Afro-American studies from Harvard University, before going on to earn a master’s in women’s studies from Emory University and a doctorate in American studies from the University of Minnesota. “All That She Carried” traces the history of three women, Rose; her daughter, Ashley; and her great-granddaughter, Ruth, who embroidered 10 lines of their matrilineal story of coming out of slavery on the sack. “I found it enormously illuminating, incredibly moving – it made me think in fresh ways about this long and difficult and challenging history,” writes Anisfield-Wolf Juror Simon Schama. Miles won a 2011 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. She is a professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and lives in Cambridge, Mass., with her husband Joseph Gone and their three children.

Ishmael Reed, 84, a poet, novelist, playwright, lyricist, cartoonist, musician and founder of small presses and publications, has remade literature. He has done so across six decades with satire, curiosity, teaching and an increasingly global reach. Known as “Uncle Ish” to his many admirers, the 1998 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship recipient remains a fierce critic of the tokenism of multi-cultural artists and of establishment media. The New Yorker magazine positioned Reed in 2021 as “a canonical author of the 20th century and an underground voice of the 21st.” Best known for the groundbreaking novel “Mumbo Jumbo” – which will see its 50th anniversary edition out this year – Reed taught for more than 30 years at the University of California, Berkeley, where he counted among his students playwright Adrienne Kennedy, novelist Terry McMillan and the experimental poet John Keene. “Reed is one of the most extraordinary and fearless authors in the great tradition of American satire. He is also, without question, the godfather of Black postmodernism, and one of the most continuously innovative and prolific writers at work today,” said Anisfield-Wolf Jury Chair Henry Louis Gates Jr. Reed serves as a distinguished professor at California College of the Arts. He lives in Oakland, California, with Clara Blank, his wife of more than 50 years. She is a noted author, choreographer and director.

The Anisfield-Wolf winners will be honored Thursday, Sept. 15 at the KeyBank State Theatre, marking the first in-person ceremony since 2019. The awards will anchor the seventh annual Cleveland Book Week. For additional information, a complete list of the recipients since 1935, and to learn more about The Asterisk* podcast featuring previous winners, visit www.Anisfield-Wolf.org.

For More Information:

Alan Ashby, Media Relations Officer, Cleveland Foundation
p: 216.615.7591 | c: 330.212.0994 | e: aashby@clevefdn.org

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