

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

**Karen Long:**

Hello, I'm Karen Long. You're listening to the Asterisk\*, a production of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. An asterisk is a reference mark indicating an omission. Today, we're figuring out some of the holes in our knowledge with the scholar Charles King. He won an Anisfield-Wolf Book award in 2020 for "Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century." Jury chair Henry Louis Gates, Jr. called this group biography, a "timely, compelling, and moving portrait of the women whose research revolutionized the way we view the world." Welcome, Charles.

**Charles King:**

Thanks. It's so nice to be with you.

**Karen Long:**

It's so good to be with you as well. On this program, we like to get away from me and toward the art. To that end, do you mind beginning with a bit of your writing from the start of "Gods of the Upper Air."

**Charles King:**

Sure. I'm happy to do that.

"The implications of the idea that we make our own agreed upon truths were profound. It undermined the claim that social development is linear running from allegedly primitive societies to so-called civilized ones. It called into question some of the building blocks of political and social order, from the belief and the obviousness of race to the conviction that gender and sex are simply the same thing. The concept of race, Franz Boas believed, should be seen as a social reality, not a biological one. No different from the other deeply felt, human-made dividing lines from cast, to tribe, to sect that snake through societies around the world.

In the arena of sex, too, the lives of women and men are shaped, not by fixed exclusive sexualities, but by flexible ideas of gender, attraction and eroticism that differ from place to place. The valuing of purity in unsullied race, a chaste body, a nation that sprang fully formed from its ancestral soil should give way to the view validated by observation. That mixing is the natural state of the world.

The members of the Boas circle fought and argued, wrote thousands of pages of letters, spent countless nights under mosquito nets and in rain soaked lodges, and fell in and out of love with one another. For each of them fame, if it ever arrived, was edged with infamy. Their careers became bywords for licentiousness and crudity, or for the batty idea Americans might not have created the greatest country that has ever existed. They were dismissed from jobs monitored by the FBI, hounded in the press, all for making the simple suggestion that the only scientific way to study human societies was to treat them all as parts of one undivided humanity.

A century ago in jungles and on ice flows and pueblos, and on suburban patios, this band of outsiders began to unearth a dizzying truth that shapes our public and private lives even today. They discovered that manners do not in fact maketh man. It's the other way around. "

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

**Karen Long:**

Bravo. Your lucidity is right up there. It's gorgeous writing and it makes the ideas come alive. I love that the wellspring of this is the awkward "failure to launch" Franz Boas, who washed up at Columbia in his forties. If I'd been his mom, I would've been in dismay.

**Charles King:**

Yeah. This is true of so many of the great thinkers and figures in world history that we know the end of the story. We want them always already to be established and geniuses and fully formed, but of course, they were children, they were teenagers, they were ne'er-do-wells at some point in their life. In the case of Frans Boas, born in what would later become Germany, and then eventually, by the 1880s, moved to the United States, trying to make a career as an amateur adventurer or part-time, what we would now call anthropologist, although it took him some time to discover that bird.

And bouncing around as an editorial assistant at Science Magazine and then working on the Chicago World's Fair. One thing after the next before finally getting a job as a part-time lecturer at Columbia, and from there, his career takes off.

**Karen Long:**

One of the other confluences that is striking from "Gods of the Upper Air" is the class at Barnard was able to cross Broadway and hear his lectures. In that, were the seeds of the four women that Dr. Gates spoke off.

**Charles King:**

Yeah, well, in fact, it was kind of the other way around, Boas had to go across Broadway to Barnard. Boas was a great controversialist. I mean, he was a person people tended to have strong opinions about, often in the negative, because he would say very controversial things like, during the first world war, he couldn't quite understand why the United States wanted to support British imperialism, but not German imperialism. Also, as someone who had grown up in a German speaking environment and was part of this very large German diaspora, in the United States at the time, that was hounded and pursued by the police and American officials as alleged spies and informants during the first world war.

Boas couldn't quite understand why any of this made sense, and he would write letters to the editor of *The New York Times* and say scandalous things like that to his students. The university fathers at Columbia decided he could do less damage if he would go across the street and teach at the women's college of Columbia, Barnard, rather than corrupt the young man who would go on to lead American foreign policy and America's great businesses and so forth. But the fact that he had a seminar room, and the fact that he had Barnard, and that the fact that he had some kind of world upending ideas, that I think, especially to a group of ambitious, talented, brilliant young women at the beginning of the 20th century, seemed to explain their own lives and predicaments.

All of that turned out to be the making of American social science, I mean, not to put too grand a face on it. But it really did because Boas, in his lectures and seminars, suggested that it was not one's own failings that determined one's lot in life, but some combination of talent and circumstance with a big

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

emphasis on the latter. That there are different societies where women or people of color, to use a modern term, or people we would now call disabled, have different roles in different societies, that these people are not considered to be backward or broken, or in the case of women, naturally less able than men in every society of which we have knowledge.

On the contrary, the people who have power, who seem the natural leaders in the society at that place in that time, might not be so viewed if we change circumstance. A lot of these things that we kind of think of as what it means to be a progressive world aware person now, that we were aware of a thing called structure and the way in which structure determines outcomes in life or in society, or in politics, all of this was new and revolutionary, and explained, not only the world as these women found it, but also in many cases, their own lives.

## **Karen Long:**

One of the things you like to say comes from this group of thinkers is this notion of shifting your normal, and it's meant literally, go out of your front porch. The travel and the anthropology and these brilliant minds all had to be there for these revolutions. One of the poignant parts of this story is the abiding love between Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. They recognized, when they were in their twenties, they were unknown to the world, and their work helped create our world where that love is more possible.

## **Charles King:**

Yeah. Well, Ruth Benedict was Boas's teaching assistant. She had done a doctorate at Columbia, a bit later in life. She was what we would call a non-traditional student. She did an undergraduate degree and then got married to a doctor, and would have been expected to kind of keep house and keep quiet in that kind of household, and then she decided to start taking some classes in New York, eventually joined the graduate program at Columbia and then became the right hand person to Boas. As his teaching assistant, she came across Margaret Mead, who was what we would now call a transfer student.

I love, by the way, that all of these figures fit into categories that we use now, that we in a way insider outsider categories. Even in our own moment, I mean, which says so much about the categories that we use, but Mead who had transferred to Barnard fell into this circle, and I think she found a lot of Boas's ideas and Benedict's ideas to be as revolutionary as anybody else in that circle. Mead was married at the time. She had what she later, much to her ex husband's dismay, called a student marriage, and then, but at the same time fell in love with Benedict, who was also married to a man.

That had to of course be kept quiet. It was a kind of open secret to anyone who knew them, but I describe in the book, the first time when they really, I think, fully make their love known to each other, and it happens to be in this brilliant moment that kind of determines the course of the rest of their lives. They're traveling together across the United States on a train, going to the West Coast, where Benedict going to the American Southwest to do some work in the Zuni Pueblo, that will later form the basis of so much of her research as a practicing anthropologist, and Mead is on her first trip out of the United States.

She's going to take a boat to Hawaii and then to American Samoa, where she completes the research that eventually becomes "Coming of Age in Samoa," which is arguably still the most widely read piece of

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

anthropology ever. But at that time, neither one of them knows that this is what your life is going to hold.

**Karen Long:**

No. It's very moving, and it's very interesting to me that you shift your normal and see them. One of the things you've mentioned is, when you look back at your earlier books, much celebrated, awarded books about artists in Istanbul and Odessa, you realize that your gaze excluded some people that you might not exclude now.

**Charles King:**

Yeah. I have to say, just as a writer and a person, writing this book was a revelation to me, because it ... I mean, these figures and so many of the ideas and the social science I had grown up with as well. Anybody who goes to graduate school in the social sciences now will encounter these ideas, but in coming at these people and their lives in a fresh way and exercising my own moral empathy as a writer, yeah, I discovered that, had I really been writing mainly for white men? I mean, kind of imagining that my readers out there, my audience out there belong to that category.

I think, that doesn't make me any less, I guess, proud in a way of the work that I did, because I always included characters from a kind of range of human experiences in the work that I did, but in this book in particular, I think it required me to become a more empathetic writer, and to try to get in the minds of people who were experiencing great hardship, who experienced the world that they were surrounded by as oppressive and constraining of their natural talents and abilities, and to see that played out in lives and then to write that on a page.

Without, at the same time, trying to put them in categories. Because Mead would not have described herself as gay, for example, nor would Benedict. So, to try to put some of those labels to one side and to talk just about two people who are deeply in love and who found in that love, not only a life-transforming connection to another person, but also this incredible font of ideas and insights that also then played out on the pages of the books that they wrote.

**Karen Long:**

What's so inescapable from "Gods of the Upper Air" is how the intellectual and the personal are entwined. You can't disembodify them. I'm really struck by your own love story, which has also contributed to this book.

**Charles King:**

Yeah. I mean, I had the very good fortune to marry an anthropologist, Maggie Paxson, who was writing her own really wonderful and touching book called "The Plateau," at the same time that I was working on "Gods of the Upper Air." If you're writing about anthropologists, having a house anthropologist is a very useful thing to have at your disposal. But it was the same kind of thing. I mean, our breakfast table and dinner table, I mean, we end up having our own private seminars about the social sciences and

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

history and anthropology and you name it. Those continue. It wasn't just because of the book. Those kinds of things continue. I loved and love her brain, and the way that it tries to make sense of the world. Some portion of that is due to the specific training and exercises you do as an anthropologist and forcing yourself to go into a place that is very deeply unlike the one where you're comfortable. If anything, still today, I think that is, to me, the kernel of what anthropology as a discipline has to teach. That, that technique of throwing yourself in an unfamiliar place and intentionally making yourself stupid, not only gives you some real perspective on the people in places you're studying, but perhaps more importantly, shows your own society and yourself in a very different and clarifying light.

## **Karen Long:**

It's such a practice of humility, which is a spiritual practice from the chair I sit in, but I'm a student of dedications, and when I read yours, for Maggie, who else, I thought: *I'm going to like this guy.*

## **Charles King:**

Yeah. I feel like I spent the last several years with two Margarets, mine and Margaret Mead, because in fact, the Mead papers at the Library of Congress, which are just a few blocks from where I'm sitting now at home here in Washington, they were essential to this project. There were about half a million items in the Margaret Mead papers, which now belong to the people of the United States because of her generosity. She saved absolutely everything, old excuses, absence notes from school. Of course, it fitters recommendations. Then, of course, her field notes and notebooks from Samoa. I mean, you can hold in your hand the reporter's notebooks that she had in her hand when she was doing the work for "Coming of Age."

I'm a real archive rat. I love doing that kind of thing, and it gives you this immediate, sort of smelling it, touching, gives this immediate connection to the people you're writing about.

## **Karen Long:**

In terms of making things concrete, one of the best things that happened in Anisfield-Wolf world last year was the documentary that shows you walking in the place you're describing, the Jefferson building outside, which is part of the Library of Congress, which is our temple of knowledge, and there at the front, are figures, faces, and all the way around the building, that set up a racial hierarchy. Once you see that, it's blistered in your mind. How did you first see that?

## **Charles King:**

Well, I think, I mean, I love the Jefferson building. It's where I've written most of my books actually. At some point, it simply occurred to me, I would take a sandwich and go out on the lawn and sit in the shadow of this magnificent building in the middle of my work day. As I started looking up at the building, it occurred to me that there was not a randomness to the keystones on the second story windows. Of course, the building itself opened in the 1890s, it's full of statuary. I mean, it's absolutely gorgeous, inside and out. But that yeah, there's a patterning to how these faces are depicted on the building with people we would now describe as white or of European descent on the front of the building.

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

People of recognizably sort of Asian heritage on the sides and then wrapping around two people of visibly African or Melanesian background on the back of the building. That, somehow sitting in a building working on this book, where the building itself was a carved in stone representation of the racial hierarchies that the Boas circle were trying to dismantle, that was just breathtaking to me. It was yet another one of these moments of awareness that I think people across the United States are having now. This is where the term ... People use with derision, the term wokeness, is absolutely applicable.

Yes, it is. It is a waking up. It is seeing a set of things, that because of one's background or position or power, or just lack of awareness, one has been unable to see. That moment is exactly the thing that Boas and Mead and others wanted people to have. For them, it was going around the world. Yeah, but it can happen in your own backyard.

**Karen Long:**

Did someone point that out to you, Charles, or did you see that yourself?

**Charles King:**

The patterning you mean?

**Karen Long:**

Yes.

**Charles King:**

Oh no. No one ever mentioned it to me. I think it only occurred to me as I started looking. I mean, really, you walk around the building and you take this tour of the racial hierarchy, as it was understood at the turn of the century.

**Karen Long:**

Now we'll pause for a short break. The Asterisk\* is a project of the Cleveland Foundation to bring more readers and listeners into conversation with the best writers in English, in this case, recipients of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award.

We now return to the conversation.

One thing I learned from your book that staggered me and I continue to think about is, as we have celebrated ourselves, your title comes from the Zora Neale Hurston's book that won an Anisfield-Wolf Book Award about 80 years earlier, "Dust Tracks on a Road." But what I learned in your book is her book was bowdlerized around by the editors who weren't in the mode for a racially critical text as the country headed back into war.

**Charles King:**

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

Yeah.

**Karen Long:**

When we pick up that book now, is it the original edit or is it closer to what she wanted to put into the world?

**Charles King:**

"Dust Tracks on a Road," her autobiography, as it's published now, has been restored, and so most of the versions you would buy will have the deleted chapters either where they originally went or at the back of the book, so you can read the text as she intended it. But you're exactly right that she was, herself, like all of these individuals, a contrarian. She wondered during the second world war, was the United States fighting one kind of racial hierarchy in order to preserve another. Simply asking that question was considered a bit too controversial for the readership of the time. But Hurston ends up being kind of the beating heart of my own book, not only from the title itself. In fact, I was going back and forth with the publisher for some time about a title, and they were getting more and more nervous as the publication date approached, and we don't even have a title.

And if you don't have a title, you can't have a cover and the dominoes begin to fall. But Maggie and I were actually sitting in our living room and I was reading out loud to a section from "Dust Tracks on a Road," and she said, "There is your title," when I came to Gods of the Upper Air. Then I used a little snippet from Hurston as an epigraph in the book, talking about seeing the world from the perspective of on high, if you like, and how you begin to understand the essential connectedness of human beings, the categories that seem so important and obvious to you here and now turn out not to be universal.

Hurston, in her own life, as a writer, as a novelist, and as a social scientist, the part of her identity that I think has not been very well understood, she lived that truth, this throwing yourself into places that are very difficult and very unfamiliar. She did that at every stage of her life, and it's glorious to watch as you read her letters or go through her biography, but what I wanted to do in this book was to connect those experiences with her ideas, which are pretty profound.

**Karen Long:**

What she says in that very quote is the experience of it is both sweet and bitter.

**Charles King:**

That's exactly right. Yeah. I think to anyone who works as a social scientist or an anthropologist in this kind of way, you know there are costs to this. The relationships in this book often did not survive, the marriages not infrequently fell. People fell out with each other. There's a cost to destroying the world as you know it. But the hope is that the world, as you find it, turns out to be even more glorious and surprising than you might've imagined.

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

**Karen Long:**

I love that as a former journalist, that finding the world, and you intrigued me by saying that people are obsessed with Mead, but if you had to pick one of the four to walk out into the world with, it would have been Hurston. Say more about that.

**Charles King:**

Yeah. Well, I think, not only had she lived this amazing life, already, by the time she gets to Barnard, and she always lied about her age, so by the time she got to Barnard, she was older than your typical undergraduate. But she had worked as a dresser in a Gilbert and Sullivan company. She had, of course, grown up in Jim Crow, Florida, which was its own terror and adventure at the same time. She had then worked as a waitress at the Cosmos club here in Washington, which had been founded by John Wesley Powell, one of the great creators of American ethnography. Then is the only African-American student at Barnard at the time and they, as a result, place her right in the middle of the class photo, although she's trying to hide a little bit behind a tree, so she's a little bit difficult to spot.

And then begins, and is at the center of the Harlem Renaissance, at a time when I think Mead and Benedict couldn't quite see that actually, even though everybody was Columbia and she only had to go uptown to Harlem to be really at the center of parties, and literary life, and this artistic swirl that was the Harlem Renaissance to meet. And others, she was kind of another graduate student. I mean, even the veil of race was, even if, among this group of people who are dedicated to unpacking the concept of race, it was still powerful and had an effect in their lives and how they dealt with colleagues.

**Karen Long:**

Yes. The last time you and I spoke was January 5th. I remember that because of what happened on your doorstep, January 6th. When we chatted, you were mentioning there were helicopters in the air, and there have been helicopters in the air through 2020. Because you and Maggie had lived in authoritarian states, it was setting up and setting off some triggers to have this occupation of the air, which is mild compared to what unfurled on the 6th. We're a few months out from it now, but I watched the country turning away from grappling in a lot of respects to what happened with the Confederate flag for the first time paraded in the building, and I am keen to know, with your political science mind, how you're thinking about that day.

**Charles King:**

Well, yes, we were here on January 6th and had been here in the previous summer as well for the fighting around Lafayette Square, and the attack by the police on protesters, and then the creation of both downtown and then after the 6th here on Capitol Hill of a landscape that was so foreign to us here at home, but so familiar to us from traveling in the former Soviet Union or the Balkans or elsewhere. I mean, much of our neighborhood was surrounded by 10 foot fencing and razor wire for months after January 6th, with National Guard at every 10 or 12 feet. It was a pretty shocking scene that I think many Americans weren't really aware of unless you kind of lived here.

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

But I think anybody who looks at these events, and also reflects on the last four years, has to have a kind of bifurcated view of things in a way. On the one hand, seeing what an American authoritarianism right in your face looks like, not the quiet version, but the really loud bullhorn version of American authoritarian politics of racism, of this cult of personality that surrounded the former president. On the other hand, I think the country has been through an unprecedented awakening to issues of race and privilege, and power, and how all those things work.

In other words, definitely exactly the things that the Boas circle tried a century ago to have people pay attention to. Folks in that circle would have really understood this, because they were trying to get Americans to think more comparatively, more universally about themselves, exactly at a time of anti-immigrant backlash of pro war boosterism of the attack on versions of America, which didn't look white and Anglo Saxon. Even the fact that we have the resurrection of this word, Anglo-Saxon, and that sort of ... In some of the political discourse these days, Boas would probably slap his forehead with disbelief.

In a way, the entirety of the country's predicament is contained between sort of two phrases that you hear at war with each other a lot these days, and one is, this isn't America, that this kind of thing doesn't look like America. It's not the values that the country espouses. On the other hand, this is America, that it actually is part of the history, and getting your head around that fact, the braided history of this country, both 1619 and 1776, holding both of those things in your head at once is, I think the only way to be kind of aware American these days. Lincoln, in one of his addresses to Congress, put it brilliantly.

He said, "The first thing Americans must do is to disentrall themselves and then we may save our country." I love that quote because he was exactly right, and it was a theme that Hurston and Boas and others would take up later. Disentrall yourself. Take a view from the gods of the upper air, and the world will look rather different.

## **Karen Long:**

I so love the way you're framing it because it's echoing so strongly with Eric Foner, another 2020 recipient for lifetime achievement, who is the leading scholar of Reconstruction, and who startled me by saying he was glad to see the Confederate flag in the Capitol, because it made the value in the heart of the person carrying that, and that this battle, especially on the state level, violent attempts to overthrow legitimate elections is not new to American history and gave us a lesson on that. The simultaneous nightmare of authoritarian insurgency sits with Eric's own astonishment in rural white Connecticut, where white people were gathering to March about black lives matter. He didn't think he'd live to see that. It's a both and.

## **Charles King:**

Yeah. I think, as you say, I think for many people, the simply making explicit of the reality that so many Americans have lived with throughout the history of this country, it's the same kind of thing with the ubiquity of cell phones and video, or of police cameras, or of closed circuit television. I mean, these things that can now be made visible to a segment of the population that was perfectly happy to ignore

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

these things or living in a kind of veiled ignorance or willful ignorance of the reality as it was experienced by other folks.

This again, is a very Boasian idea, that you have to viscerally be confronted by things. That may entail getting yourself on a plane or a ship and going around the world to a society that seems about as different from your own as you can imagine, or try empathetically to see the world from the perspective of somebody else who happens to be really quite close to you. Both of those things, in different ways, turn out to be extremely difficult, but both science and morality, I think, point toward the necessity of doing exactly that.

**Karen Long:**

In conscience that we haven't mentioned Ella Deloria, who's the fourth woman in this quartet, who we made our worldview. Do you have a thought about that brings her into the present moment?

**Charles King:**

Well, she is a fascinating figure who was studying at a teacher's college, another unit of Columbia in the '20s Boas was there, and she falls into his orbit, not as a student, really, but as a kind of research assistant when he's doing some work on the languages and cultures of the Plains. She is a native Dakota speaker, and ended up being his critical partner in creating a grammar of the Dakota language, which preserved a way of speech that had been buffeted and fought against with the entire power of the United States government for the better part of a century.

She plays a couple of different roles in the book, but one of them is to demonstrate the way in which even members of the Boas circle, who were very concerned about what they saw as the preservation of cultures and the belief that the richness of human society had to be cataloged because it was all disappearing very, very quickly. They were not beyond things that we would now recognize to be horrific practices in pursuing those ends.

**Karen Long:**

You include that in your book with some incredible examples of grave robbing and others.

**Charles King:**

Yeah. Now we recognize those things to be deeply dehumanizing, not only of a cadaver, but of the things that are held most dear and most sacred to real living people as well. I don't want to let Boas or Mead, or others off the hook in this regard. We would now recognize those things to be awful. Deloria, herself, becomes one of the central figures in the maintenance of and the scientific study of folklore and language on the American Plains. She also, she says at one point that she's a figure who stands in the middle, because she had been, of course educated in New York, but went back and forth between Standing Rock and New York City, lived at times out of her car. Her last known address was a motel.

Yet, figures like these, who like Hurston, when Hurston herself who died in poverty and a fair amount of her work was destroyed in a trash fire when they were cleaning out the place where she lived, and for each of these people, to me, is a way of paying tribute to a set of ideas that have, in so many ways, one

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

out. We still struggle over them. Certainly not everyone on the political scene agrees with them, but we have redefined our sense of normal. We've redefined our sense of what an educated person is. We've redefined our sense of what it means to think of yourself as a citizen of the world, for lack of a better phrase, and it is in large part due to the ideas that these folks pioneered.

**Karen Long:**

Thank you. The work's unfinished, so what would you, Professor King of Georgetown, tell us, your listeners, to pick up next?

**Charles King:**

Well, I think the most important thing, and this comes exactly from these, sometimes rather complicated ethnographic studies and scientific ideas and so forth and political theory, but the important every day takeaway from the Boas circle is practice. Practice every day this idea of empathy, or of trying ... Of beginning with the idea that the people who seem very, very different from you are not, as my wife, let me quote my other Maggie says all the time, "You can't begin with the idea that people who are different from you are crazy, stupid, or evil."

If you're drawn to one of those explanations for why they're behaving in the way that they are, you just stop yourself, stop for a moment and see if there are other ways of doing that. Even for people whose ideas might seem ridiculous or abhorrent or evil to you. That's very, very hard to do, but keep in mind, Mead, in suggesting that there might be something in Samoa that, if not worth bringing back to American society, at least I will help you understand why Samoans behave the way they do, or in Papua New Guinea, or on the Pacific Northwest, or in all of these societies, Haiti, Jamaica, where Hurston went, in all of these societies, there are local tools for understanding reality as it's understood there.

You have to become expert in those tools. You are not an expert when you arrive. The experts are the ones who live there, who actually use those tools intellectually, or even material tools all the time. The hope is that, not only will you expand your sense of what humanity is by looking at people very, very different from yourself, but you may come to see your own predicament, your own station in life, it's kind of weird. In that little insight, I think grows not only one's heart, but also one's mind.

It's the union of those two things, that morality and science point in exactly the same direction toward the essential unity of human beings. That's the core idea in the book and in their lives.

**Karen Long:**

Deep weirdness too, that the stabilization of not having yourself at the center is a practice and requires some curiosity. I read Alice Munro for that, a Canadian Plains woman herself, who got that, as Sherwood Anderson. It's so interesting to me that these rigorous scientists, Boas being a physicist, found their way to that insight through that channel as well.

**Charles King:**

It was in part because they themselves were all outsiders in one form or another. The great insights about life do not come from people who already have power. The great insights about life come from the

# Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards\*

edges. There's a famous line from Toni Morrison where she said, "I stand at the edge and claim it is the center."

**Karen Long:**

Well, that sounds like a perfect note on which to end our conversation, though I'm sad about it because I enjoyed being one of your students as well.

**Charles King:**

Thanks so much. Let me say again, how absolutely thrilled I am by this award, and I'm so thankful to you, and the jury, and everyone who has made this possible. It is deeply moving to me that, in receiving the award, it's also another way of honoring Hurston and her legacy, and thank you for that chance.

**Karen Long:**

The Asterisk\* is brought to you by the Cleveland Foundation. The executive producer is Alan Ashby, and the producer is Jae Williams of WOVU Radio. I'm Karen Long, who manages the prizes. Thank you for listening.