



ANISFIELD-WOLF BOOK AWARDS

PRESENTED BY THE CLEVELAND FOUNDATION

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A History of Fugitives, a Contemporary Native American Novel and Civil War Voices as Poetry Have All Won the 84th Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

CLEVELAND (April 4, 2019) – The Cleveland Foundation today unveiled the winners of its 84th Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. Jericho Brown, a 2015 Anisfield-Wolf honoree, made the announcement. The 2019 recipients of the only national juried prize for literature that confronts racism and explores diversity are:

- **Andrew Delbanco**, “The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America’s Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War,” Nonfiction
- **Tommy Orange**, “There There,” Fiction
- **Tracy K. Smith**, “Wade in the Water,” Poetry
- **Sonia Sanchez**, Lifetime Achievement

“The new Anisfield-Wolf winners bring us fresh insights on race and diversity,” said Henry Louis Gates Jr., who chairs the jury. “This year, we honor a breakout novel that jars awake our notions of contemporary Native Americans, a book of exceptional poetry from the U.S. Poet Laureate and a brilliant history right on time to depict the moral stakes testing every American generation. All is capped by the lifetime achievement of Sonia Sanchez, poet and an architect of the Black Arts Movement.”

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.

Karen R. Long, manager of the book awards at the Cleveland Foundation, praised the prescience of philanthropist Edith Anisfield Wolf in founding the prize in 1935. “She intuited that a commitment to civic justice through literature would be as important now as it was during the Great Depression,” Long said. “We are proud to add the 2019 winners to this important canon. These marvelous books scrutinize racism and explore human diversity from many perspectives even as reading them knits 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 244 recipients of the prize.

About the 2019 Winners

Andrew Delbanco is a public intellectual who serves as the Alexander Hamilton Professor of American Studies at Columbia University, where he was honored with the Great Teacher Award by the Society of Columbia Graduates. His “The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America’s Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War” focuses history on the courageous people who risked their lives to flee bondage, the slave-owning citizens who demanded the return of their “property” and the political, legal and moral furor that lit the fuse of the Civil War. Anisfield-Wolf Jury Chair Henry Louis Gates Jr. praises the work as “brilliant historical analysis” and “a source of strength for the road ahead.” The book also won the Mark Lynton History Prize. At 67, Delbanco is author of numerous books and a respected scholar of American literature, religion and higher education. He received the

THE JURY

Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Rita Dove

Joyce Carol Oates

Steven Pinker

Simon Schama

National Humanities Medal from President Barack Obama in 2012. Delbanco lives in New York City with his wife Dawn Ho Delbanco.

Tommy Orange burst onto the American literary scene last year with his first novel “There There.” It tells the story of 12 contemporary Native Americans who converge at a fictional powwow at the Oakland Coliseum, which is Orange’s California hometown. It won the PEN/Hemingway award and a National Book Critics Circle prize. “This book is a fierce beauty,” notes the poet and Anisfield-Wolf juror Rita Dove. Fellow fiction winner Marlon James (2015) writes that “‘There There’ drops on us like a thunderclap, the big, booming explosive sound of 21st-century literature finally announcing itself.” Orange, 36, is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho nations, and, like most Native Americans, lives outside a reservation. It struck him that urban American Indian life was under-explored in fiction. He holds an MFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he also teaches. Orange lives with his wife and son in Angel Camp, California.

Tracy K. Smith is the U.S. Poet Laureate. Her fourth book of poems, “Wade in the Water,” is “like the ‘bold, blood-deep song’ of its title, pulling us into the whirling eddies of the soul,” said Anisfield-Wolf Juror Rita Dove. These 52 poems range widely, from learning to ride a bike, to the poisoning of the Ohio River, to a series of letters and testimonies from African-American soldiers in the Civil War. Anisfield-Wolf Juror Joyce Carol Oates called the book “profound, yet full of sympathy, like an impersonal but abiding love.” Smith, 46, grew up the youngest of five children in Fairfield, California, and went on to earn degrees at Harvard and Columbia universities. She won a Pulitzer Prize for her third book, “Life on Mars,” in 2012, and her memoir, “Ordinary Light,” was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2015. Smith is a professor at Princeton University, where she directs the creative writing program. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, daughter and twin sons.

Sonia Sanchez is a poet, playwright, activist and educator best known as one of the architects of the Black Arts Movement, a mid-20th century renewal of black will, energy and artist awareness. Anisfield-Wolf Jury Chair Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes her work in the Civil Rights and Black Arts movements as molding generations. Sanchez, 84, has written more than a dozen poetry books, several plays and essays. She is celebrated for elevating the performative aspect of language, its musicality and repetition. Sanchez is also lauded as a pioneer who helped bring both black studies and women’s studies into the American mainstream. She has lectured on more than 500 campuses around the world and was the first Presidential Fellow at Temple University, from which she retired in 1999. Last year, she won the \$100,000 Wallace Stevens Prize from the American Academy of Poets. Sanchez, the mother of three children, lives in Philadelphia, a city she served as its first poet laureate in 2012-13.

The Anisfield-Wolf winners will be honored Sept. 26 at the KeyBank State Theatre in Cleveland, hosted by the Cleveland Foundation and emceed by Jury Chair Gates. The ceremony will be part of the fourth 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.

For More Information:

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About the Cleveland Foundation

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