



**Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Inc.  
BCALA Literary Awards**

Press Release  
For Immediate Release  
January 23, 2021

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Press Room – via Zoom

**BCALA Announces the 2021 Literary Awards Winners**

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Inc. (BCALA) announces the winners of the 2021 BCALA Literary Awards during the virtual Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association. The awards recognize excellence in adult fiction and nonfiction by African American authors published in 2020, including an award for Best Poetry and a citation for Outstanding Contribution to Publishing. The recipients will receive awards recognition during the **2021 virtual National Conference of African American Librarians**.

This year acknowledges two winners for the 1st Novelist Award. ***Everywhere You Don't Belong: a novel*** by Gabriel Bump (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, a division of Workman Publishing) is dedicated in honor of Mr. Cecil Hixon, who founded the BCALA Literary Awards for adult audiences in 1992 with Dr. Alex Boyd; and ***Fifty Words for Rain: a novel*** by Asha Lemmie (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House).

In ***Everywhere You Don't Belong***, Claude isn't dangerous or brilliant—he's an average kid coping with abandonment, violence, riots, failed love, and societal pressures. As he steers his way past the signposts of youth: childhood friendships, basketball tryouts, first love, first heartbreak, picking a college, moving away from home, he just wants a place where he can fit. But as he discovers, he cannot; there is no safe haven for a young black man in this time and place called America. Gabriel Bump lives in Buffalo, New York.

In her debut novel, ***Fifty Words for Rain***, Asha Lemmie gives us the riveting story about a biracial girl named Nori. She is abandoned by her mother and sent to live with her grandparents who disapprove of her heritage and as a result keep her locked away in the attic. It is not until her brother Akira comes to live with their grandparents does Nori have a glimmer of hope. Through this thought-provoking story, Lemmie gives us a glimpse into Nori's life and her journey for love and happiness. Asha Lemmie currently lives in New York City and works in book publishing.

The Fiction category winner is ***The Vanishing Half: a novel*** by Brit Bennett (Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House).

Twin sisters that will always be identical, but after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything. In ***The Vanishing Half***, Bennet weaves an intriguing story of their families, their communities, AND their racial identities. One sister never leaves the same southern town she once tried to escape, while the other secretly passes for white. Even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. Brit Bennett is an American writer based in Los Angeles.

The Honor Books for Fiction are ***Blacktop Wasteland: a novel*** by S. A. Cosby (Flatiron Books) and ***Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Stories*** by Zora Neale Hurston, edited by Genevieve West (Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins).

***Blacktop Wasteland***, embodies the thrill and the danger of chasing the American dream. Protagonist “Bug” Montage is a Black man overextended, with the best of intentions, risking what he’s earned thus far in order to provide more for his mother, his wife and his children. S.A. Cosby captures the exhilaration of car culture and precision driving, alongside the urgency of a father focused on his family’s survival. A nod to the forced choices in life, ***Blacktop Wasteland*** will resonate for generations of Black fathers, sons, and families making it one day at a time. S. A. Cosby is an award-winning author from southeastern Virginia.

In ***Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*** we are reminded of Zora Neale Hurston’s strong skills in the use of vernacular. We are gifted with treasures in the form of short stories that explore African American life, community, and culture. Although the stories take place so long ago, Hurston’s writing is sharp, timely and relevant. Hurston’s storytelling ability is evident in this newly edited volume that includes eight of Hurston’s tales that contemporary readers may have never seen before and allows readers to see Hurston’s growth over time. Zora Neale Hurston was a novelist, folklorist, dramatist, ethnographer, and cultural anthropologist.

The winner in the Nonfiction category is ***Begin Again: James Baldwin’s America and its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*** by Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Crown, an imprint of Random House).

Eddie S. Glaude covers the life and works of American writer James Baldwin, and racial inequality in the United States. Glaude points out historical failed opportunities for America to “***begin again***.” He analyzes Baldwin’s life, ideas and writings to comment on society’s ongoing inability to confront the “lie” at the center of our American self-conception and how the nation refuses “to turn its back on racism and to reach for its better angels.” It is at times both loving and angry, challenging and uplifting, and always beautiful. Both Baldwin and this book speak directly to today. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University.

The Honor Books for the Nonfiction category are ***Memorial Drive: a Daughter’s Memoir*** by Natasha Trethewey (ECCO, an imprint of HarperCollins) and ***Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*** by Isabel Wilkerson (Random House).

Natasha Trethewey, describes in the tragic true story, ***Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir***, the never-ending grief she feels after her mother’s horrific murder. As she grows older, she explores her mother’s life and also her pain at the hands of her abusive stepfather. Eloquently written, Trethewey reiterates everyday moments where she shows the love her and her mother shared with each other. Using her poetic prowess, only Trethewey can muster, she gives us images through words we will never forget. Natasha Trethewey is an American poet who was appointed United States Poet Laureate in 2012 and again in 2013.

***Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*** explores the many atrocities that are affecting black people in the history of this country. Wilkerson compares the Caste system in India and Nazi Germany to the system of oppression in the United States. She takes the reader through the histories of the world that have contributed to the caste system that continues to create worlds of friction for black and brown people in America. Isabel Wilkerson has taught at Princeton, Emory, and Boston universities and has lectured at more than 200 colleges and universities across the globe.

The winner for BCALA's Best Poetry Award is ***African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song*** edited by Kevin Young (The Library of America).

A literary landmark: the biggest, most ambitious anthology of Black poetry ever published, the book gathers 250 poets from the colonial period to the present. The nearly 1000-page collection starts with a poem from Phillis Wheatley, the first Black writer to publish in the United States, and highlights both well-known and lesser-known Black poets over the centuries – through slavery, emancipation, the Harlem and Chicago Renaissances, Jim Crow and into the 21st century. Here, in this unprecedented anthology expertly selected by poet and scholar Kevin Young, this precious living heritage is revealed in all its power, beauty, and multiplicity. Young is a poet, professor, essayist, and editor.

The Honor Book for Best Poetry is ***We Want Our Bodies Back: Poems*** by Jessica Care Moore (Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins).

***We Want Our Bodies Back: Poems***, deftly documents the repeated trauma visited upon the Black body and the Black community in verse. Calling out to visionaries such as Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange and Maya Angelou, while memorializing peers such as Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown, each work in Moore's volume of poetry is an act of resilience. An exemplar of both protest and spoken word, ***We Want Our Bodies Back*** enables voices from today's social justice movement to converse with those of the past and our future. Moore lives and writes in a historic Detroit neighborhood.

The BCALA Literary Awards Committee presents the Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation to ***Overground Railroad: the Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America*** by Candacy Taylor (Abrams Press).

The Green Book, also known or referred to as the "Bible of Black Travel", was used as the genesis for ***Overground Railroad***. "Are we there yet?" Victor Green's publication of ***The Green Books***, published between 1936 and 1967, was the guide African Americans needed to safely drive to reach their desired destinations. The author revisits and drives to more than four-thousand sites listed in editions of the Green Book and brings to life many of the places to eat, sleep, and buy gas. Candacy Taylor is an award-winning author, photographer and cultural documentarian. She lives in Harlem.

Members of the BCALA Literary Awards Jury are: Gladys Smiley Bell (Chair), Hampton University, Hampton, VA; Tiffany A. Duck, Suffolk Public Library, Suffolk, VA; Dana Gray Evans, Hampton University, Hampton, VA; Ritchie A. Momon, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO; and John Page, Retired, Washington, D.C.; Jamar Rahming, Wilmington, DE; and Deimos Webber-Bey, New York, NY.