



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 23 2019

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Brooklyn Public Library Announces Shortlist for Fifth Annual Literary Prize

Brooklyn Public Library announced its shortlist today for the 2019 Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize for fiction/poetry and nonfiction. The eight selections—including two books of poetry, a short story collection, a novel and four works of nonfiction—were selected by a team of librarians. The prize is one of only a few major literary awards bestowed by a public library system.

The 2019 shortlist nominees for fiction and poetry are **Fatimah Asghar** for *If They Come for Us: Poems*, **Terrance Hayes** for *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, **N.K. Jemisin** for *How Long 'til Black Future Month?: Stories*, and **Miriam Toews** for *Women Talking: A Novel*. The nominees for non-fiction are **Aaron Bobrow-Strain** for *The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez: A Border Story*, **Tressie McMillan Cottom** for *Thick: And Other Essays*, **Nick Estes** for *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, and **Nathaniel Rich** for *Losing Earth: A Recent History*.

“With the Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize, we harness the knowledge of librarians as they nominate this year’s extraordinary works” said **Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library**. “The award honors the poets, writers and journalists who have so ably captured the turbulent times we are living in today and imagine a more hopeful future.”

Roaming from New York City to the deep South, the books in both the fiction and nonfiction categories cover complex topics from global warming and the border crisis to faith and forgiveness. Their stories range in time from the Ice Age to the first 200 days of the Trump administration to a future in which the world looks remarkably different from the one we know today.

The nominated authors reflect Brooklyn’s vast diversity and include both newcomers and experienced writers who work and write in New York, Toronto, New Orleans, Albuquerque, Richmond and Walla, Walla Washington.

Librarians nominate and evaluate the works. The final judging panel included 13 librarians from across the borough who specializing in fields ranging from adult and children’s literature to business and career services.

“This year’s Brooklyn Public Library’s Literary Prize Shortlist has been designed to chip away at this impression of a fractured society,” said **Robert Weinstein, Senior Librarian and Chair, BPL Literary Prize Selection Committee**. “These provocative books offer challenging perspectives on a wide range of pressing political and cultural issues. In unique and imaginative ways, they tackle charged topics - from global warming to systemic racism and sexism - by telling intimate stories about individuals and communities buffeted by overwhelming forces. We hope this list creates nuanced discussions throughout Brooklyn that acknowledge and celebrate the complex nature of our own humanity while recognizing the roles we can play in making our communities more welcoming and inclusive.”

The Prize was established in 2015 by the Brooklyn Eagles, a group of young patrons who support the library and its programs. It recognizes works that question established ways of thinking and which advance Brooklyn Public Library's mission of bringing together the borough's diverse communities to explore urgent social, political, and artistic issues.

The winners will be announced in late October and celebrated at The Brooklyn Classic, the annual fundraising event of the Brooklyn Eagles, on November 8 at Park Slope Library.

The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize presented by the Brooklyn Eagles is generously underwritten by the Peck Stacpoole Foundation, with additional support from City Point.

The nominated books are below.

Fiction and Poetry

***If They Come for Us: Poems* by Fatimah Asghar**

Published by One World, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House
Debut poetry collection capturing the experience of a young Pakistani Muslim woman in contemporary America

***American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* by Terrance Hayes**

Published by Penguin Books

A collection of 70 poems, all bearing the same title, written in the first 200 days of the Trump administration

***How Long 'til Black Future Month?: Stories* by N.K. Jemisin**

Published by Orbit, an imprint of Hachette Book Group

Debut collection of Afrofuturism-influenced stories from the first author to win the Hugo Award three years in a row

***Women Talking: A Novel* by Miriam Toews**

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing

Inspired by a true event, the novel depicts a two-night debate about faith and forgiveness among eight Mennonite women after a sexual assault scandal in their community

Nonfiction

***The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez: A Border Story* by Aaron Bobrow-Strain**

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Traces the life and recurring border crossings of an undocumented Mexican immigrant to the United States, revealing the human consequences of militarizing the border

***Thick: And Other Essays* by Tressie McMillan Cottom**

Published by The New Press

Eight essays on beauty, money, black women's intersectionality and more by an award-winning sociology professor and essayist

***Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* by Nick Estes**

Published by Verso Books

The author, a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and a professor of American history, reveals the centuries of activism by indigenous peoples in the Americas that fostered the large-scale protests in 2016 against the North Dakota oil pipeline.

***Losing Earth: A Recent History* by Nathaniel Rich**

Published by MCD, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux

The human story of climate change including a critical moment in the 1980s when the federal government fails to heed the warnings of climate scientists

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About Brooklyn Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is an independent library system for the 2.5 million residents of Brooklyn. It is the fifth largest library system in the United States with 60 neighborhood libraries located throughout the borough. BPL offers free programs and services for all ages and stages of life, including a large selection of books in more than 30 languages, author talks, literacy programs and public computers. BPL's eResources, such as eBooks and eVideos, catalog information and free homework help, are available to customers of all ages 24 hours a day at our website: www.bklynlibrary.org.