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National Book 
Foundation *Presenter of the*
National Book Awards

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NATIONAL BOOK FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES THE 2019-2020 LITERATURE FOR JUSTICE PROGRAM TITLES

In the second year of the Art For Justice–funded program, five new titles—all authored by women—are selected to continue the Foundation’s work contextualizing mass incarceration through literature, chosen by a five-member committee

New York, NY (October 3, 2019) – The National Book Foundation today announced selections in the second year of the Literature for Justice program (LFJ), comprised of five contemporary titles that shed light on mass incarceration in the United States. Also announced today are the five committee members tasked with selecting the titles and elevating their visibility. This committee worked alongside the Foundation as part of Literature for Justice, a three-year campaign that seeks to contextualize and humanize the experiences of incarcerated people through literature of different genres, creating an accessible and thought-provoking collection of books crafted for broad public consumption.

These five titles will serve as the foundation for LFJ’s second year of programming that includes national public events featuring authors and experts on mass incarceration. The selected books are part of a larger, overarching campaign that will include 15 titles over three years, with five new committee members and titles each year. Literature for Justice is made possible by a three-year grant from the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

2019-2020 Reading List selected by this year’s LFJ committee:

asha bandele, *The Prisoner’s Wife: A Memoir*
Scribner / Simon & Schuster

Susan Burton and Cari Lynn, *Becoming Ms. Burton: From Prison to Recovery to Leading the Fight for Incarcerated Women*

The New Press

Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Seven Stories Press

Rachel Kushner, *The Mars Room*

Scribner / Simon & Schuster

Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*

The New Press

Author Biographies:

asha bandele is an award-winning journalist and *New York Times* bestselling author of six books, including the widely acclaimed memoir, *The Prisoner's Wife*, and novel, *Daughter*. Her most recent work is a collaborative effort with Black Lives Matter co-founder, Patrisse Cullors, who courageously shared her story of challenge and triumph with asha in *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*. An advocate for racial justice and prison abolition, asha serves as political and organizational management consultant for foundations, PACs and nonprofits across the field. But of all her work, none has been more central than her role as the single parent of an exquisite daughter, Nisa, and stepmother to a brilliant son, Aundre, who was murdered in 2015.

Susan Burton is the founder and executive director of A New Way of Life, a nonprofit that provides sober housing and other support to formerly incarcerated women. Nationally known as an advocate for restoring basic civil and human rights to those who have served time, Burton was a winner of AARP's prestigious Purpose Prize and has been a Starbucks "Upstander," a CNN Top 10 Hero, and a Soros Justice Fellow. The author, with Cari Lynn, of *Becoming Ms. Burton*, she lives in Los Angeles.

Cari Lynn is a journalist and the author of five books of nonfiction, including *Leg the Spread* and *The Whistleblower* (with Kathryn Bolkovac). Lynn has written for *O, The Oprah Magazine*; *Health*; the *Chicago Tribune*; and *Deadline Hollywood*. The author, with Cari Lynn, of *Becoming Ms. Burton*, she lives in Los Angeles.

For more than fifty years, **Angela Y. Davis** has been active in numerous organizations challenging prison-related repression. Born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1944, Davis studied at Brandeis University, the Sorbonne, and with Herbert Marcuse at the Goethe Institute. Her advocacy on behalf of political prisoners, and her alleged connection to the Marin County courthouse incident, led to three capital charges, sixteen months in jail awaiting trial, and a highly publicized acquittal in 1972. In 1998, Davis was one of the twenty-five organizers of the historic Berkeley, California conference "Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex." She is the author of many books, including *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and *The Meaning of Freedom*. She is Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Rachel Kushner is the bestselling author of *The Flamethrowers*, a Finalist for the National Book Award and a *New York Times* Top Ten Book of 2013; *Telex from Cuba*, a Finalist for the National Book Award; and *The Mars Room*. She lives in Los Angeles.

Danielle Sered leads the award-winning Brooklyn-based Common Justice, which develops and advances solutions to violence that meet the needs of those harmed and advance racial equity without relying on incarceration. She is the author of *Until We Reckon*.

“These boldly written works—in several cases very intimate accounts—illustrate the many ways that women and families’ lives are impacted by incarceration, from lived experience to fictional narratives,” said Lisa Lucas, Executive Director of the National Book Foundation. “The authors of this year’s selections grant us as readers privileged access and accessible scholarship to the past, present, and future of mass incarceration, fearlessly paving the road to where we collectively can go from here.”

The LFJ committee comprises five esteemed authors who are also experts and leaders within the space of mass incarceration: **Michelle Alexander** is a highly acclaimed civil rights attorney, advocate, legal scholar, and author of the landmark work, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. **Reginald Dwayne Betts** is a poet, memoirist, and lawyer. His writing grapples with the central role of incarceration to the American experience. He is a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow and a 2018 Emerson Fellow at New America. **Zachary Lazar** is the author of five books, including the novels *Vengeance*, *Sway*, and *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*, a *New York Times* Notable Book. Lazar’s honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University, and he also serves on the advisory board of the PEN America Writing’s for Justice Fellowship. **Kelly Lytle Hernandez** is a professor of History, African American Studies, and Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles where she holds The Thomas E. Lifka Endowed Chair in History. She is also a recent recipient of the 2019 prestigious MacArthur Fellowship. **Shaka Senghor** is a leading voice in criminal justice reform and proud native of Detroit. His memoir, *Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison*, was released in March 2016 and debuted on the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* bestseller lists. Shaka is a former MIT Media Lab Director’s Fellow, and a former Fellow in the inaugural class of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Community Leadership Network.

“The fundamental objective of the National Book Foundation is to ensure that books and literature remain at the center of our vibrant national conversation,” said David Steinberger, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Book Foundation. “We believe in the power of storytelling, and we are grateful to work with a distinguished selection of leaders, authors, and advocates to cultivate a list to provide readers with a range of perspectives and insights on the complex issue of mass incarceration.”

As respected voices in this national conversation, the LFJ committee members will lend their expertise and their voices to elevate the selected titles and, in turn, help humanize and contextualize the voices and experiences of incarcerated individuals, using storytelling to reach a wide audience of readers with narratives that reveal the real implications of America’s outsized prison populations.

This year’s LFJ book selections are all written by women, span genres, and focus on those who have experienced incarceration as well as centering a call for systemic change. The five-title list includes two nonfiction works

focused on substantial reform to our nation's carceral system, a memoir by an activist whose own journey through the criminal justice system fueled her life's work, a deeply personal story of a partnership where one person is incarcerated, and a darkly humorous novel set in a women's correctional facility.

Both calls to action, in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, **Angela Y. Davis** seeks to illustrate that the time for the prison system is approaching an end; she argues forthrightly for decarceration and for the transformation of the society as a whole. And in *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*, **Danielle Sered** asks readers to reconsider the purposes of incarceration and argues persuasively that the needs of survivors of violent crime are better met by asking people who commit violence to make amends in ways meaningful to those they have hurt.

Two titles delve into the personal experiences of women inside or with a loved one inside the carceral system. In *The Prisoner's Wife*, **asha bandele** shares her journey meeting and marrying Rashid, while he is in an upstate New York prison serving a sentence of twenty years to life. In **Susan Burton's** memoir *Becoming Ms. Burton*, co-authored with **Cari Lynn**, Burton chronicles her experiences with incarceration, addiction, and loss and how she founded her award-winning organization, A New Way of Life, which is focused on rehabilitation and reentry for formerly incarcerated women.

Set in the Stanville Women's Correctional Facility, deep in California's Central Valley, **Rachel Kushner's** novel *The Mars Room* centers the absurdities of institutionalization as experienced by both the guards and the thousands of women housed in its walls. Romy Hall, a 29-year-old serving two life sentences, plus six years, is the novel's protagonist who captures the slowness and sameness that is the reality of prison.

2019 LFJ Launch Event:

In partnership with the African American Museum of Dallas, a launch event open to the public will be held on December 12, 2019 at the Museum, and will bring committee members, selected authors, and other prominent figures together to kick off the second year of the program. The event will feature readings of the selected LFJ titles, followed by a panel, Q&A, and book signing, all designed to raise the profile of the selected books, and amplify the stories of authors whose texts help to illuminate the various experiences of mass incarceration.

December 12, 6:00pm CST

African American Museum of Dallas

Literature for Justice: Women Writing Beyond Bars

The National Book Foundation's Literature for Justice program seeks to contextualize mass incarceration through an annual reading list of five books. In 2019, our highlighted titles, all authored by women, were selected by committee members Michelle Alexander, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Zachary Lazar, Kelly Lytle Hernandez, and Shaka Senghor. Join the National Book Foundation and the African American Museum of Dallas for the second-year launch to honor and delve into these works. The event will feature brief readings from four of the recognized authors—asha bandele (*The Prisoner's Wife*), Susan Burton (*Becoming Ms. Burton*), Rachel Kushner (*The Mars Room*), and Danielle Sered (*Until We Reckon*); a conversation with the authors alongside committee members Michelle Alexander (*The New Jim Crow*), Reginald Dwayne Betts (*Shahid Reads His Own Palm*), Zachary Lazar (*Vengeance*), and Kelly Lytle Hernandez (*City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in*

Los Angeles, 1771-1965); and a question-and-answer session with the audience. A book signing will follow. This event is made possible by the Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

2019-2020 Committee Biographies:

Michelle Alexander is a highly acclaimed civil rights attorney, advocate, legal scholar, and author of *The New York Times* bestseller, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. *The New Jim Crow* helped spark a national debate about the crisis of mass incarceration in the United States and inspired racial justice organizing and advocacy efforts nationwide. Alexander has been featured on national radio and television media outlets, including CNN, MSNBC, NPR, *Bill Moyers Journal*, MSNBC, C-SPAN, and *Democracy Now*. She has also written for numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Huffington Post*. Alexander has served as a professor at several universities, including Stanford Law School, where she was an associate professor of law and where she directed the Civil Rights Clinics. Prior to entering academia, Alexander served as the Director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California, where she coordinated the Project's media advocacy, grassroots organizing, coalition-building, and litigation. In addition to nonprofit advocacy, Alexander has worked as a litigator at private law firms, including at Saperstein, Goldstein, Demchak & Baller, in Oakland, California, where she specialized in plaintiff-side class action lawsuits alleging race and gender discrimination. Currently, Alexander is a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City where she is exploring the moral and spiritual dimensions of mass incarceration. She is also an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

Reginald Dwayne Betts is a poet, memoirist, and lawyer. His writing grapples with the central role of incarceration to the American experience. His next collection of poetry, *Felon*, will be published in October 2019 by W. W. Norton & Company. His previous collection, *Bastards of the Reagan Era* (Four Way Books, 2015) received the 2016 New England Award in Poetry. His first collection of poems, *Shahid Reads His Own Palm*, won the Beatrice Hawley Awards and was selected by the National Book Foundation's Literature for Justice Committee as a 2018-2019 title. Betts's memoir, *A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and Coming of Age in Prison*, was the recipient of the 2010 NAACP Image Award for nonfiction. He is a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow and a 2018 Emerson Fellow at New America. He holds a BA from the University of Maryland, an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and a JD from Yale Law School.

Zachary Lazar is the author of five books, including the novels *Vengeance*, *Sway*, and *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*, a *New York Times* Notable Book. His memoir, *Evening's Empire*, an account of his father's murder, led to a further engagement with incarceration and the criminal justice system through a journalism project at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the root of his most recent novel, *Vengeance*. Lazar's honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University, and the John Updike Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for "a writer in mid-career whose work has demonstrated consistent excellence." His journalism has appeared in *The New York Times*, NPR's *All Things Considered*, *Los Angeles Times*, and elsewhere. Lazar lives in New Orleans and is on the creative writing faculty at Tulane University, where he teaches an introductory creative writing course that pairs Tulane students with an equal number of students incarcerated at East Baton Rouge Parish Prison. He also serves on the advisory board of the PEN America Writing's for Justice Fellowship. *Vengeance* is the 2019 selection of One Book One New Orleans and the Tulane Reading Project, the shared reading experience for the incoming freshman class.

Kelly Lytle Hernandez is a professor of History, African American Studies, and Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where she holds The Thomas E. Lifka Endowed Chair in History and is a recipient of the 2019 MacArthur Fellowship from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. She is also the Director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA. One of the nation's leading experts on race, immigration, and mass incarceration, she is the author of the award-winning books, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* and *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles*. *City of Inmates* recently won the 2018 James Rawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians, 2018 Robert G. Athearn Prize from the Western History Association, the 2018 John Hope Franklin Prize from the American Studies Association, and a 2018 American Book Award. Currently, Professor Lytle Hernandez is the Director and Principal Investigator for Million Dollar Hoods, a university-based, community-drive research project that maps the fiscal and human cost of mass incarceration in Los Angeles. For her leadership on the Million Dollar Hoods team, Professor Lytle Hernandez was awarded the 2018 Local Hero Award from KCET/PBS and the 2019 Catalyst Award from the South LA parent/student advocacy organization, CADRE.

Shaka Senghor is a leading voice in criminal justice reform and proud native of Detroit. His memoir, *Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison*, was released in March 2016 and debuted on the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* bestseller lists. Shaka is a former MIT Media Lab Director's Fellow, and a former Fellow in the inaugural class of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Community Leadership Network. Shaka's 2014 TED Talk was featured in their "Year in Ideas" roundup, a curated collection of the year's most powerful TED Talks and has over 1.5 million views. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2012 Black Male Engagement Leadership Award, the 2015 Manchester University Innovator of the Year Award, the 2016 Ford Man of Courage Award, and the 2016 NAACP Great Expectations Award. Shaka was recently recognized by OWN (the Oprah Winfrey Network) as a "Soul Igniter" in the inaugural class of the SuperSoul 100, a dynamic group of trailblazers whose vision and life's work are bringing a higher level of consciousness to the world around them and encouraging others to do the same. He is a 2016 *Ebony Magazine* Power 100 Honoree. He has taught at the University of Michigan and shares his story of redemption around the world. Shaka was selected as one of 24 icons being featured in the upcoming Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service entitled "Men of Change," debuting in the fall of 2019. Today, Shaka sits as President of Shaka Senghor, Inc. and his priority is shifting societal narratives by creating content with deep social impact and high entertainment value.

LFJ 2018-2019:

In the first year, committee members Sergio De La Pava, James Forman Jr., Mitchell S. Jackson, Rachel Kushner, and Dr. Heather Ann Thompson selected *A Place to Stand* by Jimmy Santiago Baca (Grove Press), *Shahid Reads His Own Palm* by Reginald Dwayne Betts (Alice James Books), *Upstate* by Kalisha Buckhanon (St. Martin's Griffin), *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* by James Kilgore (The New Press), and *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives From Women's Prisons*, edited by Ayelet Waldman and Robin Levi (Verso Books).

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The mission of the **National Book Foundation**, presenter of the **National Book Awards**, is to celebrate the best literature in America, expand its audience, and ensure that books have a prominent place in American

culture. The Foundation approaches this work from three programmatic angles: **Awards & Honors**, recognizing exceptional authors, literature, and literary programs; **Education & Access** initiatives, helping young and adult readers develop a lifelong passion for books; and **Public Programs**, bringing acclaimed authors to communities nationwide to engage in conversations about books and the power of literature as a tool for understanding our world, cultivating meaningful discourse around the issues of our age. Information on all of the Foundation's programs can be found online at nationalbook.org.

The National Book Awards, established in 1950, is one of the nation's most prestigious literary prizes and has a stellar record of identifying and rewarding quality writing. Many previous Winners of the National Book Awards are now firmly established in the canon of American literature, including Robert A. Caro, Ralph Ellison, Louise Erdrich, Denis Johnson, Flannery O'Connor, Adrienne Rich, Maurice Sendak, and Jesmyn Ward.