



Brooklyn Public Library Announces 2020 Literary Prize Winners

Nonfiction Prize Awarded to Dr. Ruha Benjamin for
Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code

Fiction and Poetry Prize Awarded to Ocean Vuong for
On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

Brooklyn, NY – November 23, 2020 – Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) has announced the winners of the sixth annual **Brooklyn Public Literary Prize**, awarding **Dr. Ruha Benjamin** the 2020 Nonfiction Prize for *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* and **Ocean Vuong** the 2020 Fiction and Poetry Prize for *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. Nominees and winners for the Prize are selected by a team of BPL librarians.

"We congratulate our extraordinary winners: Dr. Ruha Benjamin, for exposing the racism coded into our technology and demanding we do better, and Ocean Vuong, for reminding us, in the midst of a year rife with isolation and loss, language can bridge the gaps between us and across time," said **Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library**. "We congratulate, too, the librarians who pour themselves into this Prize year after year, and all librarians who have leapt the many hurdles of 2020 to ensure that everyone has access to the essential resource of literature."

Librarians working throughout BPL's 59 branches nominated 110 books this year. Each year, BPL's librarians draw on their extensive knowledge of both contemporary literature and the community of readers which they serve throughout the borough. The prize comes with a \$5,000 award.

In her groundbreaking book titled *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, **Dr. Ruha Benjamin** describes how technology—from the apps on our phones to the algorithms that guide our search and social media experiences—contains the same prejudices ingrained in our social and political systems, reinforcing White supremacy and deepening social inequity.

Dr. Benjamin, reflecting on her experiences growing up in Los Angeles and visiting the library, said "To this day, I remember the feeling of standing in front of a huge wooden desk while the librarian scanned my big stack of books...I vividly remember the feeling of being entrusted to take this stack of valuables out of the building and bring them back...as an adult my love of

libraries has grown...libraries are the heart of any community...and no words fully describe what it means to have my work recognized by librarians and by BPL in particular.”

The librarians also honored **Ocean Vuong** for his novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, describing the book as both shattering and healing. With a poet's attention to language, Vuong's beautiful prose evokes the subtle and profound connections between people, illuminating intermingled joy and pain in a queer coming-of-age story about what it means to know oneself and to see other people for who they are.

“It's a true honor to receive this recognition from a library and a library that's so important to me, no less. Brooklyn being the seat of where my career began, my education as a writer began,” said Ocean Vuong. “You know, as a writer who comes from a working class background who, you know, doesn't have access most of my life to books, you know, a book, especially a hardback book, it's a lot of money and libraries, I think, like the Brooklyn Public Library, makes it possible for writers like myself to engage in books and to have access to this great wealth of knowledge in order so that we can take our careers, our aspirations and dreams into our own hands. And I really honestly say I try not to be hyperbolic, but I wouldn't be here without librarians.”

In addition to Ocean Vuong, the 2020 shortlist nominees for fiction and poetry were **Rivers Solomon** (with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, Jonathan Snipes) for *The Deep*; and **Amal El-Mohtar** and **Max Gladstone** for *This Is How You Lose the Time War*. The other shortlist nominees for the nonfiction category included **Saeed Jones** for *How We Fight for Our Lives: A Memoir* and **Ian Urbina** for *The Outlaw Ocean: Journeys Across the Last Untamed Frontier*. To borrow an e-book copy of the winning selections, click [here](#).

A virtual celebration for the authors was held on November 20, hosted by the Brooklyn Eagles, a group of young professionals who support the Library through volunteering and fundraising.

The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize was established in 2015. Previous winners have gone on to win MacArthur Genius Grants. Others have produced television shows based on their books; were selected for Oprah's book club, landed on the best seller list, and nominated for National Book Awards and the Pulitzer Prize.

The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize is generously underwritten by the Peck Stacpoole Foundation.

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About Brooklyn Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library is one of the nation's largest library systems and among New York City's most democratic institutions. As a leader in developing modern 21st-century libraries, we provide resources to support personal advancement, foster civic literacy, and strengthen the fabric of community among the more than 2.6 million individuals who call Brooklyn home. We provide nearly 65,000 free programs a year with writers, thinkers, artists, and educators from around the corner and around the world. And we give patrons millions of opportunities to enjoy one of life's greatest satisfactions: the joy of a good book.

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