

**Contact: Mark Lee**  
National Book Foundation  
Phone: (212) 685-0261  
[mlee@nationalbook.org](mailto:mlee@nationalbook.org)  
nationalbook.org | @nationalbook



---

FOR RELEASE 10:00 AM EDT, SEPTEMBER 14, 2018

# 2018 NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS LONGLIST FOR FICTION

## *The ten contenders for the National Book Award for Fiction*

**New York City, September 14, 2018:** The National Book Foundation today announced the Longlist for the 2018 National Book Award for Fiction. Finalists will be revealed on October 10.

The Fiction Longlist includes one title by a previous National Book Award honoree, Lauren Groff, who was a Finalist in 2015. Longlisted authors have been honored with Whiting Awards, the O. Henry Award, the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, Pushcart Prizes, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and more, and their work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, *Tin House*, and *The Best American Short Stories*, among many others. Working from New York, Illinois, Oklahoma, California, Mexico City, and more, the ten Longlisted authors represent a wide geographic range. The Longlist includes multiple *New York Times*–bestselling authors, three story collections, and four debuts, and is made up of narratives addressing issues of addiction, grief, class division, racism, gender roles, cultural identity, American politics, and many more.

In two Longlisted titles, young lives are pushed off course by misfortune, with characters left struggling to pick up the pieces. **Tayari Jones's** *An American Marriage* tells the story of a newlywed couple swiftly approaching the American Dream who are violently interrupted when one of them is incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. A *New York Times* bestseller and 2018 pick for Oprah's Book Club, the novel is an intimate portrait of a relationship, exploring how class divides affect the Black experience, the roles women are asked to play, and a criminal justice system that looms over many communities. In **Daniel Gumbiner's** *The Boatbuilder*, a twenty-eight-year-old man who has moved easily through the world

sustains a concussion with lingering effects, opening a door to opioid addiction and quickly leading to crime. Taken in by a craftsman and a community in Northern California, the young man must learn how to rebuild and sustain his own life in this novel about recovery, redemption, and self-reliance.

Addressing grief and the unexpected places we find solace, **Sigríð Nunez's** *The Friend* is the story of a writer who loses her dearest friend, only to inexplicably be left his aging Great Dane. Infusing its first-person narrative with quotes and anecdotes from numerous literary texts, the novel provides a realistic portrayal of a devoted writer struggling to cope with loss and parsing the complicated legacy of a loved one.

Two story collections, both debuts, gather myriad narratives to render a portrait of contemporary Black identity. In *A Lucky Man*, **Jamel Brinkley** populates nine stories set in New York City with a host of Black boys and men—brothers, friends, classmates—all grappling with questions of masculinity, trauma, and entrenched racism. **Nafissa Thompson-Spires's** *Heads of the Colored People* approaches current events and politics with a dark humor, commenting on racial dynamics and inequality, offering a nuanced look at the Black middle class from multiple perspectives.

Two novels explore the experiences of Native Americans navigating lives deeply impacted by the nation's long history of damaging treatment. **Brandon Hobson's** *Where the Dead Sit Talking* follows a fifteen-year-old Cherokee boy placed in a new foster home, reeling from the effects of his mother's substance abuse and seeking closeness and commiseration with a fellow foster child. In **Tommy Orange's** debut novel, *There There*, a wide range of Native American characters prepare for an Oakland powwow, sifting through difficult questions of identity, betrayal, and intergenerational trauma.

Another Longlisted title, set against a particularly alarming moment in recent history, depicts the many lives upended by the AIDS crisis. In alternating chapters, **Rebecca Makkai's** *The Great Believers* follows a group queer friends in Chicago in the 1980s and a woman in 2015 searching for her daughter in Paris, chronicling the years of the American AIDS epidemic from its terrifying outbreak to the present, and addressing issues of systemic neglect, the burden of memory, and the rippling consequences of loss and grief.

The state of Florida serves as the backdrop for two titles dealing with power, politics, and the many complexities of motherhood. **Jennifer Clement's** novel *Gun Love* tells the story of a teenage girl raised by her mother near a trailer park in the heart of the Sunshine State, forced to confront life-altering violence in a community wrapped up in a casual obsession with firearms. In *Florida* by 2015 National Book Award Finalist **Lauren Groff**, the titular state lives at the heart of eleven disparate stories set in suburbs, swamps, and in the middle of hurricanes, examining themes of love, pain, isolation, and the many expectations and experiences tied to motherhood.

Publishers submitted a total of 368 books for the 2018 National Book Award for Fiction. The judges for Fiction are Chris Bachelder, Laila Lalami (Chair), Min Jin Lee, Laurie Muchnick, and Chinelo Okparanta. These distinguished judges were given the charge of selecting what they deem to be the best books of the year. Their decisions are made independently of the National Book Foundation staff and Board of Directors; deliberations are strictly confidential.

The National Book Award Finalists will be announced on October 10, and the Winners announced at the invitation-only National Book Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner on November 14 in New York City.

**2018 Longlist for the National Book Award for Fiction:**

**Jamel Brinkley**, *A Lucky Man*  
Graywolf Press

**Jennifer Clement**, *Gun Love*  
Hogarth / Penguin Random House

**Lauren Groff**, *Florida*  
Riverhead Books / Penguin Random House

**Daniel Gumbiner**, *The Boatbuilder*  
McSweeney's

**Brandon Hobson**, *Where the Dead Sit Talking*  
Soho Press

**Tayari Jones**, *An American Marriage*  
Algonquin Books / Workman Publishing

**Rebecca Makkai**, *The Great Believers*  
Viking Books / Penguin Random House

**Sigrid Nunez**, *The Friend*  
Riverhead Books / Penguin Random House

**Tommy Orange**, *There There*  
Alfred A. Knopf / Penguin Random House

**Nafissa Thompson-Spires**, *Heads of the Colored People*  
Atria Books / 37 INK / Simon & Schuster

**Fiction Biographies:**

**Jamel Brinkley** is a graduate of Columbia University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He has received fellowships from Kimbilio Fiction, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and Stanford University. *A Lucky Man* is his first book. He lives in California.

**Jennifer Clement** is the author of multiple books, including *Widow Basquiat*. She was awarded an NEA Literature Fellowship and the Sara Curry Humanitarian Award for *Prayers for the Stolen*. She is the president of PEN International and currently lives in Mexico City.

**Lauren Groff** is the *New York Times*–bestselling author of three novels, *The Monsters of Templeton*, *Arcadia*, and *Fates and Furies*, and the celebrated short story collection *Delicate Edible Birds*. Her work has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, and several *The Best American Short Stories* anthologies. She has won the Paul Bowles Prize for Fiction, the PEN/O. Henry Award, and the Pushcart Prize, and has been a Finalist for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Orange Award for New Writers, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize.

**Daniel Gumbiner** was born and raised in Northern California. He graduated from UC Berkeley in 2011 and now lives in Southern Nevada. *The Boatbuilder* is his first novel.

**Brandon Hobson** is a recipient of the 2016 Pushcart Prize, and his writing has appeared in such places as *Conjunctions*, *NOON*, *The Paris Review Daily*, and *The Believer*. He is the author of *Desolation of Avenues Untold*, *Deep Ellum*, and *The Levitationist*. He teaches writing in Oklahoma, where he lives with his wife and two children. He is a member of the Cherokee Nation Tribe.

**Tayari Jones** is the *New York Times*–bestselling author of the novels *Silver Sparrow*, *The Untelling*, *Leaving Atlanta*, and *An American Marriage*. Jones holds degrees from Spelman College, Arizona State University, and the University of Iowa. A winner of numerous literary awards, she is a professor of creative writing at Emory University.

**Rebecca Makkai** is the author of *The Borrower*, *The Hundred-Year House*, and *Music for Wartime*. Her work has appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, *Harper's*, and *Tin House*, among others. She lives in Chicago and Vermont with her husband and two daughters.

**Sigrid Nunez** is the author of the novels *Salvation City*, *The Last of Her Kind*, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, and *For Rouenna*, among others. She has been the recipient of several awards including a Whiting Award, the Rome Prize in Literature, and a Berlin Prize Fellowship. She lives in New York City.

**Tommy Orange** is a recent graduate from the MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He is a 2014 MacDowell Fellow, and a 2016 Writing by Writers Fellow. He is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. He was born and raised in Oakland, California, and currently lives in Angels Camp, California.

**Nafissa Thompson-Spires** earned a PhD in English from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Illinois. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The White Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books Quarterly Journal*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *The Feminist Wire*, among other publications. She was a 2016 fellow of the Callaloo Writing Workshop, a 2017 Tin House Workshop fellow, and a 2017 Sewanee Writers' Conference Stanley Elkin Scholar. Born in San Diego, California, she now lives in Illinois with her husband.

**2018 National Book Awards Judges for Fiction:**

**Chris Bachelder** is the author of *Bear v. Shark*, *U.S.I.*, and *Abbott Awaits*. His most recent novel, *The Throwback Special*, was a Finalist for the National Book Award. His fiction and essays have appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Believer*, and *The Paris Review*. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Cincinnati, where he teaches at the University of Cincinnati.

**Laila Lalami (Chair)** is a novelist. Her most recent book, *The Moor's Account*, won the American Book Award, was on the Man Booker Prize longlist, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. She is a columnist for *The Nation* and a critic-at-large for the *Los Angeles Times*. The recipient of Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships, she is currently a professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside.

**Min Jin Lee's** *Pachinko* was a Finalist for the National Book Award. A *New York Times* bestseller, *Pachinko* was a Top 10 Book of the Year for the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, BBC, and the New York Public Library, and on over 75 Best Books of the Year lists, including NPR, PBS, and CNN. Lee's debut novel *Free Food for Millionaires* was a Top 10 Book of the Year for *The Times*, NPR's *Fresh Air*, and *USA Today*.

**Laurie Muchnick** is the fiction editor at *Kirkus Reviews* and has been writing and editing book reviews for more than 25 years. Her career began at the *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, and as the book editor of *Newsday* and Bloomberg News. A former president of the National Book Critics Circle, her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, and many other publications.

**Chinelo Okparanta** is the author of the novel *Under the Udala Trees* and the short story collection *Happiness, Like Water*. Her honors include two Lambda Literary Awards, an O. Henry Award, and finalist selections for the International DUBLIN Literary Award and the NYPL Young Lions Fiction Award. She has been nominated for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award as well as the NAACP Image Award in Fiction. In 2017, Okparanta was named one of *Granta's* Best of Young American Novelists.

###

The mission of the **National Book Foundation** is to celebrate the best literature in America, expand its audience, and ensure that books have a prominent place in American culture. In addition to the **National Book Awards**, for which it is best known, the Foundation's programs include **5 Under 35**, a celebration of emerging fiction writers selected by former National Book Award Finalists and Winners; **NBF Presents**, which brings NBA authors to universities, libraries, festivals, and conferences across the country; **Literature for Justice**, a project that uses literature to contextualize and humanize the issue of mass incarceration in America; **Author in Focus**, a series comprised of panels, lectures, and film screenings designed to connect a broad audience with the works of seminal NBF-honored authors, beginning with James Baldwin in 2018; the **Innovations in Reading Prize**, awarded to individuals and institutions that have developed innovative means of creating and sustaining a lifelong love of reading; the **Why Reading Matters** conference, an opportunity for writers, activists, educators, librarians, and nonprofit leaders to explore innovative ways to celebrate literature and expand its influence; **Book Rich Environments**, a partnership with HUD, the US Department of Education, the Urban Libraries Council, and the National Center for Families Learning, which has provided nearly 700,000 books to children and families in public housing authorities around the country; the **Teen Press Conference**, an opportunity for students to interview the current National Book Award Finalists in Young People's Literature; **Raising Readers**, an adult-focused reading initiative to empower adults who work with and raise children to expand their own love of books and reading; and **BookUp**, a writer-led, after-school reading club for middle-school students.

**The National Book Awards** is one of the nation's most prestigious literary prizes and has a stellar record of identifying and rewarding quality writing. In 1950, William Carlos Williams was the first Winner in Poetry, the following year William Faulkner was honored in Fiction, and so on through the years. Many previous Winners of the National Book Award are now firmly established in the canon of American literature, including Ralph Ellison, Louise Erdrich, Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Flannery O'Connor, Adrienne Rich, and Jesmyn Ward.



