

National Book Festival Goes Online

The first-ever all-virtual celebration of books and reading showcased American ingenuity.

BY WENDI A. MALONEY

The National Book Festival began a new chapter last weekend: In its 20th year, the festival went virtual. Although a sad and life-altering plot twist – a pandemic – forced the change, the online format offered some welcome benefits, most notably the ability to connect with book lovers across vast distances.

Up until now, the festival was mostly open only to those who could make their way to Washington, D.C. To be sure, fans have traveled many miles year after year to come. But this time, the festival welcomed everyone, everywhere.

“I’m proud to say that this year, we are truly national in our reach. We have visitors from every corner of this great country experiencing the magic of the National Book Festival in their homes and communities,” Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden told those signing into the festival.

The theme this year was “American Ingenuity.” Walter Isaacson – biographer of such paragons of ingenuity as Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs and, most recently, Leonardo da Vinci – encapsulated the theme in a festival address: “What matters,” he said, “is imagination, that ability to, as Steve Jobs said, think different.”

If that is the case, it could be said



Marie Arana, the Library’s literary director, interviewed acclaimed author Colson Whitehead, winner of the Library’s 2020 Prize for American Fiction.

that the festival theme applied not only to the writers, poets and illustrators – more than 120 of them – who presented from Sept. 25 to 27, but also to the setup of the Library’s first-ever completely online celebration of books and reading.

A specially crafted National Book Festival platform enabled festivalgoers to engage in live question-and-answer sessions with favorite authors each day. Audience members entered questions in a chat function and could vote on questions typed in by others by clicking on a thumbs-up icon, alerting moderators of popular topics.

Elsewhere, festivalgoers could take deep dives into Library collections, pose questions to Library staff and buy books and swag, including a uniquely 2020 item: book-festival-branded face masks.

Prerecorded author videos from

the festival, along with recordings of live sessions, will continue to be available on the Library’s website going forward – extending access to the festival even further.

A highlight of the festival this year was the awarding – virtually, of course – of the Library’s

NBF OVERVIEW, CONTINUED ON 11

INSIDE

Colson Whitehead, **page 3**

Madeleine Albright and Melinda Gates, **page 4**

Black Voices, **page 5**

John Grisham, Ann Druyan and James McBride, **page 6**

Children’s Lit, **page 7**

Family, Food & Field, **page 9**

Exploring the Library, **page 11**

NOTICES

DONATED TIME

The following employees have satisfied eligibility requirements to receive leave donations from other staff members. Contact Lisa Davis at (202) 707-0033.

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COVID-19 UPDATE

The Library's Health Services Division (HSD) continues to monitor Library staff members with symptoms, clinical diagnoses or positive test results for COVID-19. On Sept. 25, HSD announced that eight employees reported exposure to COVID-19 or symptoms associated with the virus last week. Most employees reporting symptoms of COVID-19 are not diagnosed to have it, but, out of caution, the Library is monitoring all reports of symptoms.

HSD is communicating with all staff members who become ill. In cases in which ill individuals were present in Library buildings, HSD is also notifying their close work contacts and cleaning and disinfecting the areas affected. The same process is followed when contractors in Library buildings become ill.

More information on the Library's pandemic response: <https://go.usa.gov/xdtV5> (intranet) or <https://go.usa.gov/xdtVQ> (public-facing staff web page)

GET YOUR FLU SHOT

The Health Services Division (HSD) is offering free flu shots by appointment to Library staff and volunteers and employees of the U.S. Capitol Police and the Architect of the Capitol. Because of the increased risk of respiratory illness now, it is especially important to get a flu shot this year.

Sign up: <https://bit.ly/3ccCDhm>

Locations:

Jefferson Carriage Entrance Circle
First Street and Independence
Avenue, S.E.
(drive through)
Sept. 28 and Oct. 2, 5, 9
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Mumford Room
Madison Building
Sept. 29, 30 and Oct. 1, 6, 7, 8
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Shots will also be offered soon at the Taylor Street annex and at the Packard Campus.

Questions? Contact HSD at hso@loc.gov.

REMINDER ABOUT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

With election season underway, the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) encourages you to review LCR 9-1780 (Political Activity), LCR 9-1730 (Outside Employment and Activities) and OGC's Political Activities FAQ (<https://go.usa.gov/xfScT>). Here's one Q&A:

May I serve as a poll watcher or election protector (as opposed to a nonpartisan election judge or poll worker)?

Maybe. Different jurisdictions have different roles and rules for such activities, which may be affiliated with a candidate, political party, civic organization or other group. Review of these activities is fact-specific.

Questions? Contact ethics@loc.gov.

GAZETTE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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The Library's central mission is to engage, inspire and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

ABOUT THE GAZETTE
An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at loc.gov/staff/gazette.

GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF
Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.—Ed.

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GAZETTE DEADLINES
The deadline for editorial copy for the Oct. 16 Gazette is Wednesday, Oct. 7.

Email editorial copy and letters to the editor to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

To promote events through the Library's online calendar (www.loc.gov/loc/events) and the Gazette Calendar, email event and contact information to calendar@loc.gov by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

Whitehead Receives Library's Prize for American Fiction

His subjects have ranged from zombies to slavery to coming-of-age in New York.

BY NEELY TUCKER

Colson Whitehead, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner, was officially awarded the Library's 2020 Prize for American Fiction during last weekend's National Book Festival, accepting the award for a lifetime of work – even though he's just 50.

The Manhattan native was featured at the festival in interviews with Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden and Marie Arana, the Library's literary director, as well as taking questions from viewers on the closing day of the all-online event. His nine books have covered a range of styles, eras and genres, ranging from zombies to slavery to a coming-of-age novel to a book of essays on New York.

Speaking from his home office, Whitehead said his teenage love of Stephen King novels, Marvel Comics and Twilight Zone episodes all influenced his style, as did the careers of filmmaker Stanley Kubrick and musician David Bowie.

"Kubrick would do his war movie, science fiction movie, horror movie," he explained to Arana, "and Bowie, you know, in the '70s and '80s, would always change his persona from record to record. And it seemed like maybe it was a rule I internalized about being an artist. If you do something once, why would you want to do it again the next time?"

Whitehead grew up in a well-to-do Manhattan household of four children – his parents owned an executive-recruiting firm. He went to Harvard, majored in English, took a job at the Village Voice in the arts section, then taught at several universities, from New York to Texas. His 1999 debut novel, "The Intuitionist," is a surreal story of rival groups of elevator inspectors – the



Intuitionists and the Empiricists. It's an allegory of race and culture and owes much to "Invisible Man," Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel.

Six more novels followed, along with two works of nonfiction and a slew of recognition. In addition to the Pulitzers (for "The Underground Railroad" in 2017 and "The Nickel Boys" in 2020), he's also won the National Book Award, a MacArthur Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He's also had the popular success of being a No. 1 New York Times bestseller.

Today, Whitehead lives in East Hampton with his wife, Julie Barer, a literary agent, and their two children. He plays video games in breaks between books and usually cooks the family dinner in the evenings.

"There are times when I'm reading Colson's work that I see myself reflected and I feel that someone is expressing my own experiences," Hayden said.

Arana says the hallmark of his career has been that he has no clearly identifiable style or subject. "He has been playful, he has been

dead serious, he has been hallucinatory and he has been dead on with the facts," she said. "So it's very hard to actually place Colson within himself, much less within a constellation of prizewinners who went before."

Whitehead's career was well established when he published "Railroad," but the novel took him to new heights. It is the story of Cora, an enslaved young woman deserted by her mother. She makes a terrifying journey to freedom on a mythical train that runs underground from place to place, each with a different set of horrors and possibilities. It was not unlike the "Twilight Zone" episodes he loved as a teen.

It's an extremely different book, in tone, scope and style, from the social realism of "Sag Harbor," which explores the lives of a Black teenager in a wealthy enclave of Long Island in the 1980s. It's also his most autobiographical.

"Without hope, you can't go on," Whitehead said in his conversation with Arana, of his approach to his work, "and without people standing up, nothing gets done." ■

Fearless Women Reflect on Changing the World

Two well-known figures recount their paths to making a difference.

BY MARK HARTSELL

The prospect of losing a job often prompts a natural, and clarifying, question: Now what?

For former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the question raised a slew of possibilities when she left her post in 2001 – teach, advise, lecture, write, carry on in statecraft, devote herself to being a grandmother?

With an abundance of energy and a determination to lead life to the fullest, Albright chose all of the above, and then some.

“I had this mantra that whatever I was doing next had to be more interesting than what I’d just finished – hard to do if you’ve been secretary of state,” Albright said in an interview at the National Book Festival with festival Chairman David M. Rubenstein.

Albright chronicled this most recent chapter of her long, distinguished career in a new book, “Hell and Other Destinations: A 21st-Century Memoir.”

Since leaving the State Department, Albright has authored seven books; founded an institute at Wellesley College to train young women for global leadership; chaired a consulting firm that helps corporations better navigate global events; taught a diplomacy class at Georgetown University; chaired the National Democratic



MADELEINE ALBRIGHT



MELINDA GATES

Institute, which promotes democracy abroad; developed an acting career (“Parks and Recreation,” “Madame Secretary”) and even learned to drive again – though, unlike most students, she learned at a counterterrorism driving school.

Albright also is preparing her voluminous papers for their eventual permanent home: the Library of Congress.

“I can’t quite express,” she said, “what it’s like to be even a footnote in American history. ... I had done an awful lot of research in the Library of Congress for my dissertation, so nothing makes me happier than to be able to have my papers with the Library.”

Like Albright, philanthropist Melinda Gates found her own way to make a difference in the world, via the

foundation she launched with her husband, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, in 2000.

She chronicles their experiences at the foundation in “The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World,” a new book she discussed with Rubenstein at the festival.

Gates described her own work at Microsoft (“I knew we were changing the world”), her first date with Bill (he asked her out in the company parking lot on a Saturday afternoon) and how the impoverished women she encountered in her foundation work inspired the book (“Their stories ring in my head”).

The inequities Gates saw between men and women in developing countries were so stark that she began asking how she could help. The foundation, she said, helps empower women around the world – and that makes a huge difference in communities and individual lives.

“I hear from the leaders how once the women got empowered it changed so much in the family and the community and how they viewed things,” Gates said. “We know from data that once women are empowered, they bring forward different issues, they push for different policies that help everybody. I realized this is something that needs to be done across the world.”

There is much still to do. Gates recalled an impoverished woman in India asking her – without knowing that Gates was one of the world’s wealthiest and most influential women – to take her baby, to give the child a better life.

“We have to open our hearts to those moments of heartbreak and not push them away,” Gates said. “But let them in, let our heart break and say what if that was me, what if I was that woman, what length would I go? And that’s when you start to answer the questions about what is it that we should be doing for these women so they can begin to lift themselves up and lift their families and their kids up.” ■

A promotional banner for the National Book Festival. On the left, it features the '20 YEARS' logo and the text 'LIBRARY OF CONGRESS NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL'. In the center, it says 'ONLINE ACCESS & STREAMING PBS TV SPECIAL' with the PBS logo. On the right, a speech bubble contains the text 'THE FESTIVAL CONTINUES!' and below it, the website 'loc.gov/bookfest' with the note 'Available for a limited time'.

‘Black Voices’ Express a Multiplicity of Experiences

A thematic thread tied together more than a dozen books across genres.

BY GUY LAMOLINARA

The National Book Festival is well known for attracting a diverse slate of many of the nation’s most accomplished writers, who address myriad issues, both historical and current. This year was certainly no exception.

Several “threads” emerged on three topics in particular: women and their struggles for equality, democracy and its contemporary state and the work of Black authors. Many of these writers addressed racism and its corrosive effects, both now and throughout history. But for others, race was more of a leitmotif.

Such was the case with 5-year-old Parker Curry, whose book with her mother, Jessica, recounted the day Parker visited the National Portrait Gallery and gazed up at the enormous portrait of Michelle Obama. Parker said she froze when she saw it. The moment was captured in a photograph that went viral around the world. Said Parker, in her festival video for the children’s stage: “The thing that inspired me was that this girl had a beautiful gown and skin that looked like me.”

Women of all colors often get little recognition for their achievements in science. For Black women, this deficiency is even more acute. Tonya Bolden’s “Changing the Equation: 50+ US Black Women in STEM” reminds us of the many contributions that Black women have made in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Her book tells us that “so much is possible,” she said, adding that “to quote Martin Luther King, ‘We are made by history.’ You can’t understand race relations,” for example, “without knowing about slavery – all of it.”



Parker Curry and her mother, Jessica, spoke about Parker’s wonder upon viewing the enormous portrait of Michelle Obama in the National Portrait Gallery.

The literary lion Colson Whitehead, whom Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden (virtually) awarded the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction during the festival, discussed his recent Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, “The Nickel Boys,” a fictional account of the horrific events at a reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida.

He also took a look back at his distinguished career. Yet, as Whitehead told Marie Arana, the Library’s literary director, in his video, the start of his occupation was anything but auspicious. Publishers rejected his first novel, which turned out to be fortuitous. As he said, “I became a writer by being rejected. I had no choice but to keep going.”

Sometimes, the issue of race is best addressed in memoirs. Sarah Broom’s “The Yellow House” is remarkable not only for its extraordinary look at Hurricane Katrina and its devastation of New Orleans, but also for the fact that the book is her first.

She said she wrote about the house where she lived to answer “a basic but also existential question about who belongs, whose story gets to be told.” She wrote to demonstrate “how our lives mat-

tered ... [how they] deserved to be on the American map.”

The first African American poet laureate was Rita Dove, and she returned to the festival to talk with her lifelong friend and current poet laureate, Joy Harjo. From her “Collected Poems,” Dove read “All Souls,” which she said she chose because it speaks “to where we are today.”

It is always an enlightening experience to hear a poet read her work, and Dove’s rendition was no exception:

Of course the world had changed for good. As it would from now on every day, with every twitch and blink. Now that change was de rigueur, man would discover desire, then yearn for what he would learn to call distraction. This was the true loss.

The “Hearing Black Voices” thread comprised 25 programs with 29 writers, offering readers of any age the opportunity to explore race and what it means – and has meant – in American history, from racism’s harsh realities and science fiction’s fantastical scenarios to lyrical poetry and searing memoir. ■



Ann Druyan

What can the world become, Ann Druyan asked, if we are resolute in valuing and sustaining the Earth as it sustains us? If we tear down the walls between us and the sciences? On the science stage, the award-winning writer, producer and director enthusiastically made the case for lifelong analytic and intellectual curiosity.

Druyan appeared in relation to her latest work, “Cosmos: Possible Worlds,” the third installment in the popular book and television series first hosted in 1980 by Carl Sagan, her late husband and frequent collaborator. While the original “Cosmos,” and its 2014 sequel “Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey,” aimed to identify our current place in space and time, this iteration represents a search for a more realistic sense of the future. And that future is one Druyan is increasingly optimistic about.

Although it is “not for any one generation to see the whole picture of space-time,” watching the seasons change from her home in Ithaca, New York, has reminded her that “nature’s genius dwarfs any fantasy, any stories we can ever make up.” Along with that, Druyan was quick to note that the “rigorous skepticism” of science is not incompatible with a “soaring imagination.” For her, both are needed for the “generation-binding enterprise” of understanding the universe, our world and our place in both. ■

—Bailey Cahall



John Grisham

John Grisham’s first book was “a complete flop,” he told festivalgoers. He wrote “A Time to Kill” while working as a criminal attorney in Mississippi. After its lack of success, he gave himself one more chance. If the next book didn’t do well, he said, “I was going to forget that little secret hobby” and continue on as a lawyer or potentially a judge.

But that second book, “The Firm,” sold millions of copies and became a bestseller, launching a literary career that continues with his latest works, “The Guardians” and “Camino Winds.”

Asked for advice for aspiring writers, Grisham said they shouldn’t write the first scene of a book before knowing what happens in the last. Once he has a story in mind, he writes a paragraph describing what happens in each chapter of the book. Only afterward does he begin writing in earnest.

Grisham also discussed the relevance of his work to activism around racism and criminal justice in the U.S. His upcoming book, “A Time for Mercy,” brings back Jack Brigance, the protagonist of “A Time to Kill,” who defends a teenager accused of killing a police officer.

“Race is a huge factor at every stage of the criminal justice system,” Grisham said, “from profiling, to arrest, to posting bail, to sentencing, to trial, guilt, innocence and, especially, wrongful convictions.” ■

— Andrew Breiner



James McBride

From the comfort of his living room, James McBride spoke to festival attendees about the importance of church, community and the ability to laugh and find joy in the “coping.” The award-winning author and musician was highlighting his most recent work, “Deacon King Kong,” although the theme of finding light in darkness is present in much of his fiction.

His first novel since “The Good Lord Bird” (soon to be a television miniseries), “Deacon King Kong” is a love letter to the Red Hook housing project in Brooklyn, New York, where McBride grew up. The story, which begins with the titular deacon shooting and wounding a drug dealer, reveals the community behind common stereotypes and shows that many of the project’s residents want the same things, they just choose different ways to get them.

McBride was born to deeply spiritual parents, and there is a spiritualism that weaves itself throughout his writing. It is no more present than when he talks about music, “the language of the universe.”

Stating that, “culturally, American ingenuity is deeply rooted in African American music,” McBride cleverly demonstrated with his piano that creating characters is much like playing an instrument — you need to understand the technical skills involved before you can add in the melodies and harmonies that take your listeners, or readers, on “a joyful ride.” ■

— Bailey Cahall

Our Superpower Is Our Stories: Children's, Teen Stages

A full day of the festival highlighted young people's literature.

BY SASHA DOWDY AND MONICA VALENTINE

Student groups, children and teens at home tuned into a special day of programming at this year's virtual National Book Festival, where they were treated to Q&As, writing advice ("Read, write and eavesdrop," Nic Stone says), honest conversation and, of course, pure silliness and fun.

Kwame Mbalia, author of the middle-grade fantasy "Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky" from the "Hearing Black Voices" thread, was a favorite with students. Third graders inquired about his favorite superhero (answer: Green Lantern), and Mbalia shared that he even developed his own superhero in third grade and named him Emawk.

When asked for advice for aspiring Black writers, Mbalia responded: "You have to get out there and tell your story, whether or not someone else understands it. ... Tell the story that you believe in, and make other people believe in it as much as you do."

Jon Scieszka and Steven Weinberg, co-conspirators behind the AstroNuts series, offered a wicked balance of off-the-wall silliness – they arrived "onstage" without any gravity to hold them down – and a call to action. They came with a poignant message to children: Our Earth is struggling, but we can help by trusting science and talking about the problems we face.

The AstroNuts series was one of many graphic novels featured at this year's festival. Authors spoke about the validity of this medium that captivates and represents all kinds of kids.

Former National Ambassador for Young People's Literature Gene Luen Yang continued to encourage



BTQ youth are at higher risk for self-harm and homelessness

In his graphic novel "Flamer," Mike Curato writes of a boy confronting bullies and racism while navigating his sexual identity.

kids to write stories based on their own lives – like his new nonfiction graphic novel, "Dragon Hoops."

In a moment of raw honesty, Mike Curato, author of the semiautobiographical "Flamer," shared why he writes: "to empower youth to be able to make that decision to stay in this world and ... find out who they are. I'm glad I stayed. I'm glad I gave myself a chance."

Jerry Craft, winner of the Newbery Award for "New Kid," summarized his view simply: "Any book a kid wants to read is an important book" – and therein lies the triumph of a graphic novel, a picture book or any other book.

Books and stories help us find a place to belong. Sabaa Tahir, the bestselling author of the Ember in the Ashes series, shared the struggle with her identity as an immigrant: "So many don't ... believe that I love this country ... and that can create a schism between me and the country that I love." Tahir has shared her life with her readers – she credits books in helping her feel less alone – and their admiration was obvious in the

questions they asked, regarding her representation of "brown kids" in every book, complexity of characters and meticulous research.

Stories are powerful, in both fiction and nonfiction. Picture book biographer Barb Rosenstock is a frequent researcher at the Library. Her book "Leave it to Abigail!: The Revolutionary Life of Abigail Adams" was featured in the "Fearless Women" thread. Rosenstock became interested in Adams after visiting the home that Abigail's husband John Adams grew up in, as well the house next door where she set up housekeeping. Rosenstock noted that she wants her readers to gain "a sense of the importance of their own history" from her work.

"I want every child to realize that history ... is what you're doing right now," she said. "It is kind of like a giant river, and we're all a drop of water and there is no such thing ... as important people and nonimportant people. Things in history are moved along by all kinds of people known and unknown." ■

Bush Hager Explores Life Gifts from Her Grandparents

BY NICOLE LAMBERSON

The world knew them as the 41st president of the United States, George H.W. Bush, and first lady Barbara Bush, but to Jenna Bush Hager, they were gampy and gummy.

“My grandparents were public personas, and people saw them as the way they saw them, whether that had to do with politics or personal stories they had of them,” Hager reflected, underscoring that her relationship to them was very different.

In Hager’s new book, “Everything Beautiful in Its Time: Seasons of Love and Loss,” the bestselling author and co-anchor of the “Today” show pens a love letter to her famous grandparents and her maternal grandmother, Jenna Welch, who all died within

13 months of one another. What started as a way to process her feelings of grief became an exploration of who they were and how they helped shape the woman she’s become.

“I’m so interested in generational stories and the stories of those who come before us and how they shape us – and the good and the bad and the beautiful and the tragic,” Hager said. By delving into the memories and stories of her grandparents, she memorializes their impact on her life and the lessons she carries with her every day.

“My grandmother always said, ‘Don’t believe everything you read.’ ... I think so often we are compartmentalized into a headline or ‘the daughter of.’ All of us are not always explored as our full being,” she said, crediting the former



first lady with encouraging her to be her own person, even if that meant living a different life from those who came before her.

“No matter who our parents are, we have to explore who we are on our own – what we believe, what we stand for, how we will use our voice.” ■

DiCamillo and Patchett Discuss Writing, Friendship

BY SAHAR KAZMI

A clever turn of phrase can pinpoint something true about the most transcendent secrets of life. In the same way, a good friend can make even the ordinary feel alive with enchantment.

In conversation at the festival, novelists and friends Kate DiCamillo and Ann Patchett shared how valuable their relationship has been in adding wonder to their lives and work.

A longtime admirer of Patchett’s novels, DiCamillo, who recently published “Stella Endicott and the Anything-Is-Possible Poem,” described her fear at sharing her writing with her friend for the first time. “I can’t tell you because my teeth will fall out,” she recalls saying.

Luckily Patchett, author of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize finalist “The

Dutch House,” ascribes to a particularly liberating view of a writer’s efforts: No one is watching.

“I think that so many people feel like ‘I can’t [write] because I’m going to be judged,’” Patchett said. “And what I have found more than anything throughout the course of working in my life is that it really doesn’t matter!”

That childlike freedom and creativity is a running theme across DiCamillo and Patchett’s experiences as authors, especially in the face of the global pandemic.

DiCamillo explained how her 10-year-old self is constantly alive within her, whether in writing, reading to an audience or emailing her friend about her daily breakfast.

Patchett shared feeling much the same, saying, “I’m just myself at home now, and I feel much closer to myself as a child.”



And as with friendship, storytelling benefits from sharing. “If we all tell our stories, and if we all listen to each other’s stories, we can find a way through this together,” said DiCamillo. ■

New Stage Delivers Cornucopia of Fun

BY NATE SMITH

The inaugural Family, Food & Field stage at the National Book Festival was envisioned as a place to find issues you deal with at home in a family, from childrearing to recreation. It didn't disappoint.

In "Sunny Days: The Children's Television Revolution That Changed America," author David Kamp laid out the importance of public educational programming for young people. Shows like "Sesame Street," which focused on learning fundamentals such as numbers and the alphabet, and "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," which was geared to grow emotional intelligence in its young audience, were absolutely crucial in how an entire generation of Americans formed their views of the world.

In their joint session, Judith Warner and Esther Wojcicki discussed the relationship between parents and their children, which can often be fraught with friction. Warner, author of "And Then They Stopped Talking to Me: Making Sense Of Middle School," talked about how parents are confronted with the limits of their control as children develop and how they need to recognize their children as individuals.

Wojcicki, author of "How to Raise Successful People," talked about her "TRICK" method of interacting with young people: "You want to Trust your kids. Respect their ideas. Give them some Independence. Collaborate with them on decisions, don't just dictate. Treat them with Kindness all of the time, especially if they make a mistake."

In a lively discussion, Bill Buford, author of "Dirt: Adventures in Lyon as a Chef in Training, Father, and Sleuth Looking for the Secret of French Cooking," talked about the influence of the Renaissance on French cooking, the differences between raising children in France and the U.S. and how there are "few things more directly satisfying than making food for members



Lee Ann Potter, director of educational outreach, interviewed authors Judith Warner and Esther Wojcicki.

of your family."

Jesse Dougherty, author of "Buzz Saw," discussed the differences between writing a 90,000-word book versus a 900-word column for the Washington Post and how "improbable it was" that the Washington Nationals won the 2019 World Series, which he said "makes it a richer story."

In response to a question about the solitary nature of the writing process, author and columnist Gail Collins said, "I miss going to the office," and in response to a question about his writing process, David Kamp said, "Everyone love your librarians, they are there to help you" – two sentiments I think we can all get behind. ■

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Exploring the Library of Congress

BY WENDI A. MALONEY

A lot of sweat and patience and more than a few sleepless nights by staff were required to pull off the 2020 National Book Festival – the Library’s first-ever all-virtual celebration of books and reading. The result of all this work, however, was expanded access not only to books and authors, but to the Library itself.

“The festival allowed us to connect with all Americans coast to coast and share this beloved Washington tradition with the rest of the nation,” Hayden said in an email to staff following the festival.

Typically, a big part of that tradition has been the grand Library of Congress pavilion on the expo floor of the Washington, D.C., convention center. This year, staff from around the Library labored many hours to translate the experience into a virtual format.

In the “Exploring the Library of Congress” area of the online festival platform, visitors could choose from among 23 links to find out about Library collections, programs and services and chat with Library staff.

Collections on Africa and the Middle East, maps, manuscripts, music, comics, photographs, science and more were featured, as were the Veterans History Project, the American Folklife Center, the Copyright Office, the Law Library and the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. Visitors also could learn about cutting-edge techniques to safeguard collections or explore opportunities to work or volunteer at the Library.

Jennifer Harbster of the Science, Technology and Business Division staffed her division’s virtual booth on Sept. 26. A “steady stream of folks” visited throughout the day,



On the platform created for the National Book Festival, an array of Library collections and services were a click away.

she said, and she and her colleagues directed them to materials such as research guides for starting a small business, references on science and poetry and primary sources addressing Black agricultural history.

The staff also posted lighthearted polls asking, for example, about the year in which the term “artificial intelligence” was first used (1957) and the difference between a sweet potato and a yam – they’re from different botanical families, and what we often call yams in the U.S. are actually sweet potatoes.

The Law Library’s booth ran polls, too, albeit on a less whimsical topic: the Supreme Court. Visitors were asked about how many justices have served on the court (114), how many women have served (4) and who the first woman to be considered for appointment reportedly was (Florence Allen).

Staffed by senior legal reference librarians Emily Carr and Ann Hemmens, the booth offered videos highlighting the Law Library’s rare book collection, including one about the trial of Aaron Burr (for

treason) and another about the trial of Captain Kidd (for piracy).

Activities for kids and families are always a big draw at the festival. This year, a link on “Exploring the Library of Congress” consolidated things for kids to do and learn. On offer were drawing demonstrations by beloved children’s author and illustrator Dav Pilkey, coloring pages based on prints and photographs collections and puzzles from historical newspapers.

Also available were deep dives into Library collections and exhibitions related to the festival’s three thematic threads – “Democracy in the 21st Century,” “Fearless Women” and “Hearing Black Voices.”

“You have certainly demonstrated what ‘ingenuity’ really means,” Hayden wrote to staff in reference to the festival’s theme, “American Ingenuity.”

Without doubt, reimagining how to bring the magic of the Library and its treasures to festivalgoers in a virtual world was among the accomplishments she had in mind. ■

NBF OVERVIEW, CONTINUED FROM 1

2020 Prize for American Fiction to acclaimed author Colson Whitehead. Among Whitehead's many awards, his most recent novel, "The Nickel Boys," won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction this year, as did his 2016 book, "The Underground Railroad."

"Colson has an extraordinary ability to write about historical events and transform them into metaphors fraught with meaning and relevance for today," Hayden said. "He is that rare writer of literary fiction whose works are also best-sellers, a testament to his talent for communicating to everyone who cares to listen."

Colson's appearance at the festival was linked to a "Hearing Black Voices" lineup, one of three thematic threads that connected dozens of books each across topics of great interest today. The other threads were "Fearless Women" and "Democracy in the 21st Century." Each thread highlighted books for readers of all ages and across genres – history, biography, sci-fi, poetry, memoir, children's lit.

To follow a thread, festivalgoers could click on a link leading to a compilation of presentations, both live and prerecorded. Links in the "Explore the Library of Congress" section of the festival platform took them to related Library content and collections.

National Ambassador for Young People's Literature Jason Reynolds – whose talk was linked to both "Hearing Black Voices" and "Democracy in the 21st Century" – spoke about "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You," the young reader's version of "Stamped from the Beginning" by race scholar Ibram X. Kendi that Reynolds co-wrote with Kendi.

Reynolds said he wanted to make Kendi's work accessible to readers of all ages "so that we can arm ourselves with information, create new vocabulary and hopefully begin to actually push the line and move the needle as it pertains to

the conversation around race in America."

The "Fearless Women" thread coincided with the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote across the U.S. Lucinda Robb and Rebecca Boggs Roberts took the subject on directly in their book, "The Suffragist Playbook: Your Guide to Changing the World," a suffrage history for young readers. "The tactics that they used to make sure that women were enfranchised when they were are things any activist can use at any time," Roberts said.

In the same thread, Chelsea Clinton spoke about "She Persisted in Sports: American Olympians Who Changed the Game," her most recent book with illustrator Alexandra Boiger. Children's books, Clinton said, "are often the first way to say to kids, here's what's possible or here's what isn't, or here's where we see you or here's where we don't."

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright offered some advice to women festivalgoers aspiring to leadership: "Always be prepared to interrupt." She spoke about her new memoir, "Hell and Other Destinations."

"Democracy in the 21st Century" looked at the state of democracies around the world today and in history. In "The Road to Populism," a panel moderated by NPR correspondent Eric Deggans, authors Christopher Caldwell and Thomas Frank spoke of populism as a predictable response when people feel they are losing control over their lives to complex political and economic systems dominated by the powerful.

In "Big Brother Is Watching," authors Barton Gellman and Thomas Rid touched on the dangers of technological surveillance and disinformation to democracy. Washington Post reporter David Ignatius – who separately presented his new spy novel about a CIA officer struggling to sort out what is and isn't true – moderated the panel.

"I'm optimistic, ultimately," Rid said

about the efforts of an emerging community of intelligence officers, investigative journalists and scholars to educate the public to judge the veracity, or otherwise, of information.

Another inclusion in the thread, "If You Come to Earth" by two-time Caldecott Award winner Sophie Blackall, playfully suggests what you might send to someone in outer space to explain life on this planet. Blackall said she hopes her book will remind readers that the "world is wide and diverse and wonderful and that it belongs to all of us."

The festival itself was diverse, as it always is, in terms of striving to introduce readers to new worlds and new ways of looking at things.

Examples include the experiences of a young boy confronting bullies and racism while navigating his sexual identity ("Flamer" by Mike Curato); a Mexican American girl finding her voice as an environmental advocate ("Stella Díaz Never Gives Up" by Angela Dominguez); and a pioneering woman who shows how disabled people can spur innovation ("Haben: The Deafblind Girl Who Conquered Harvard Law"). That's not to mention titles about topics as varied as the generic drug boom, the insect world, cooking, aging and sports.

The three-day extravaganza concluded on Sunday evening with a national broadcast on PBS stations hosted by Hoda Kotb of NBC News. Featured were some of festival's most renowned authors and literary voices: Sandra Cisneros, John Grisham, Joy Harjo, James McBride, Jon Meacham, Salman Rushdie, Amy Tan, Gene Luen Yang and more.

View the festival: www.loc.gov/bookfest ■

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