

**\*\*Download high-res images of finalist book covers and headshots here**

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**RECOGNIZING THE POWER OF LITERATURE TO PROMOTE PEACE AND  
RECONCILIATION, DAYTON LITERARY PEACE PRIZE  
ANNOUNCES 2021 FINALISTS IN FICTION & NONFICTION**

**Shortlist includes *The Night Watchman* by Louise Erdrich,  
*The Road from Raqqa* by Jordan Ritter, *Deacon King Kong* by James McBride**

**Dayton, OH (August 18, 2021)** – Recognizing the power of literature to promote peace and reconciliation, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize Foundation today announced the finalists for the 2021 Dayton Literary Peace Prize in fiction and nonfiction.

Inspired by the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in Bosnia, The Dayton Literary Peace Prize is the only international literary peace prize awarded in the United States. The Prize celebrates the power of literature to promote peace, social justice, and global understanding. Because last year's awards ceremony was canceled due to the pandemic, both this year's and last year's winners will be honored during a gala weekend in Dayton on November 13 and November 14.

[The list of finalists can be found below and at [www.daytonliterarypeaceprize.org](http://www.daytonliterarypeaceprize.org)]

“As we struggle through the second year of a politically divisive pandemic, the whole world feels fractured and on edge -- which makes it pleasantly surprising to see how many of this year's finalists tackle tough issues, from gun violence to economic struggle to racism, with compassion and wisdom but also, in several instances, a sense of wit,” said Sharon Rab, Chair of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize Foundation. “Compassion, wisdom, and gentle humor are ways for writers to invite readers into their fold and create a sense of shared experience, and they reinforce the underlying message in all of this year's books: that no matter how bad things get, we can make them better by enduring them as a community rather than alone.”

The 2021 Dayton Literary Peace Prize fiction finalists are

- [\*Deacon King Kong\*](#) by James McBride, Riverhead Books. In the highly anticipated follow-up to his National Book Award winner *The Good Lord Bird*, James McBride tells a funny, moving tale about the shooting of a drug dealer by a church deacon in 1960s South Brooklyn. Told with insight and wit, the novel explores the lives of everyone affected by the event, from the victim to local housing project residents to church members, along the way demonstrating that love and faith live in all of us.

- [\*Shuggie Bain\*](#) by Douglas Stuart, Grove Press. A masterful debut novel and winner of the 2020 Booker Prize, *Shuggie Bain* is the unforgettable story of young Hugh “Shuggie” Bain, a sweet and lonely boy who spends his 1980s childhood in rundown public housing in Glasgow, Scotland. A heartbreaking story of addiction, sexuality, and love, *Shuggie Bain* offers an epic portrayal of a working-class family that is rarely seen in fiction.
- [\*The Mountains Sing\*](#) by Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, Algonquin. Set against the backdrop of the Việt Nam war, *The Mountains Sing* tells an enveloping tale of the Trần family as seen through the eyes of the matriarch, Trần Diệu Lan, and her granddaughter, Hương. As Hương comes of age, Diệu Lan teaches her granddaughter lessons about what it takes to survive and live with compassion. Nguyễn brings to life the sweeping history and the human costs of this conflict from an underrepresented perspective while showing us the true power of hope.
- [\*The Night Watchman\*](#) by Louise Erdrich, HarperCollins. Louise Erdrich, recipient of the 2014 [Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award](#), draws on the extraordinary life of her own grandfather to tell the story of Thomas, a Chippewa night watchman at a rural plant in 1950s North Dakota. While Thomas tries to understand the consequences of a congressional bill threatening the rights of Native Americans, Patrice, a worker at the plant, journeys to find her runaway sister. Told with Erdrich’s characteristic lyricism and wit, the book illuminates the loves, lives, desires, and ambitions of its memorable characters with compassion and intelligence.
- [\*Valentine\*](#) by Elizabeth Wetmore, HarperCollins. A small town in 1970s Texas becomes bitterly divided after fourteen-year-old Gloria Ramírez barely survives an attack by a roughneck. The brutal act is tried first in Odessa’s churches and barrooms, and when justice proves elusive in the courts, the stage is set for a showdown with potentially devastating consequences. An exploration of the intersections of violence and race, class and region, *Valentine* plumbs the depths of darkness, yet offers a window into beauty and hope.
- [\*We Germans\*](#) by Alexander Starritt, Little Brown & Co. Decades after WWII, a former German soldier pens a letter to his grandson reckoning with the impossible decisions he faced during his time as a soldier and then as a Russian Gulag prisoner, his guilt as a Nazi participator, and the difficulty of post-war life. Wracked with shame—both for himself and for Germany—the grandfather explains his dark rationale, exults in the courage of others, and blurs the boundaries of right and wrong.

The 2021 Dayton Literary Peace Prize nonfiction finalists are

- [\*Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land\*](#) by Toni Jenson, Ballantine. As a Métis woman, Toni Jensen is no stranger to the violence enacted on the bodies of Indigenous women, on Indigenous land, and the ways it is hidden, ignored, forgotten. In prose at

once forensic and deeply emotional, Toni Jensen shows herself to be a brave new voice and a fearless witness to her own difficult history—as well as to the violent cultural landscape in which she finds her coordinates. *Carry* is a powerful, poetic memoir about what it means to exist as an Indigenous woman in America, told in snapshots of the author's encounters with gun violence.

- [\*Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents\*](#) by Isabel Wilkerson, Random House. In this masterful exploration of the unseen forces of division in our country at a time of existential crisis, Wilkerson demonstrates, through deeply researched history and a multilayered narrative, how America has been shaped by an unspoken system of human ranking that has riven us for centuries. Documenting intersections with India and Nazi Germany, *Caste* is a crucial reexamination of American life, an unforgettable portrait of a society bearing the weight of inherited hierarchy. Wilkerson's seminal Great Migration history *The Warmth of Other Suns* was a [2011 Dayton Literary Peace Prize nonfiction finalist](#).
- [\*See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love\*](#) by Valarie Kaur, One World. Valarie Kaur's *See No Stranger* is a practical guide to changing the world, a synthesis of wisdom, a chronicle of personal and communal history—all joined together by a story of awakening. In this debut, the renowned Sikh activist, filmmaker, and civil rights lawyer describes revolutionary love as the call of our time, a radical, joyful practice that just might be our best chance for our collective future.
- [\*The Beauty in Breaking: A Memoir\*](#) by Michele Harper, Riverhead Books. An emergency room physician explores how a life of service to others taught her how to heal herself. Michele Harper is a female African American emergency room physician in a profession that is overwhelmingly male and white. In this hopeful, moving, and beautiful book, she passes along the precious, necessary lessons that she has learned as a daughter, a woman, and a physician.
- [\*The Road from Raqqa: A Story of Brotherhood, Borders, and Belonging\*](#) by Jordan Ritter, Ballantine. Crossing years and continents, *The Road from Raqqa* is the harrowing story of the road to reunion for two Syrian brothers who—despite a homeland at war and an ocean between them—hold fast to the bonds of family. The book brings readers into the lives of two brothers bound by their love for each other and for the war-ravaged city they call home.
- [\*When Time Stopped: A Memoir of My Father's War and What Remains\*](#) by Ariana Neumann, Scribner. Ariana Neumann's father was one of the few members of his family to survive the Holocaust, and when he died he left her a box of letters, diary entries, and other memorabilia detailing the experiences he couldn't bring himself to talk about when he was alive. In *When Time Stopped*, Neumann dives into the secrets of his past, creating an unputdownable detective story and epic memoir of a family finding love and meaning while trying to survive amid the worst that can be imagined.

A winner and runner-up in fiction and nonfiction will be announced on September 22, 2021. Winners receive a \$10,000 honorarium and runners-up receive \$5,000. Finalists will be reviewed by a [judging panel](#) of prominent writers including [2009 Fiction Winner](#) Richard Bausch (*Peace*), Diane Roberts (*Tribal: College Football and the Secret Heart of America*), essayist Garnette Cadogan (“Walking While Black”), and Anne Fadiman (*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*).

Margaret Atwood, whose critically acclaimed fiction, poetry, and nonfiction have offered prescient warnings about the political consequences of individual complacency, was awarded the 2020 [Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award](#), named in honor of the noted U.S. diplomat who helped negotiate the Dayton Peace Accords. Atwood will accept the award at this year’s ceremony.

The 2020 winners being honored at this year’s gala are Alice Hoffman, 2020 Fiction Winner, *The World That We Knew*; Christy Lefteri, 2020 Fiction Runner-up, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*; Chanel Miller, 2020 Nonfiction Winner, *Know My Name*; Jennifer Eberhardt, 2020 Nonfiction Runner-up, *Biased*.

To be eligible for the 2021 awards, English-language books had to be published or translated into English in 2020 and address the theme of peace on a variety of levels, such as between individuals, among families and communities, or between nations, religions, or ethnic groups.

### ***About the Dayton Literary Peace Prize***

The Dayton Literary Peace Prize honors writers whose work uses the power of literature to foster peace, social justice, and global understanding. Launched in 2006, it is recognized as one of the world’s most prestigious literary honors, and is the only international literary peace prize awarded in the United States. Inspired by the Dayton Peace Accords, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize awards a \$10,000 cash prize each year to one fiction and one nonfiction author whose work advances peace as a solution to conflict, and leads readers to a better understanding of other cultures, peoples, religions, and political points of view. Additionally, the Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award is bestowed upon a writer whose body of work reflects the Prize’s mission; previous honorees include Margaret Atwood, Wendell Berry, Taylor Branch, Geraldine Brooks, Louise Erdrich, John Irving, Barbara Kingsolver, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, N. Scott Momaday, Tim O’Brien, Marilynne Robinson, Gloria Steinem, Studs Terkel, Colm Tóibín, and Elie Wiesel. For more information visit [www.daytonliterarypeaceprize.org](http://www.daytonliterarypeaceprize.org).

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