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2020 LA Times Festival of Books: Week 1 Review

Posted on [October 26, 2020](#) by [Casey Lewis](#)



Happy Monday Beat Fam. We hope you had a great time last week participating in the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. Let us know your thoughts on your event(s) in the comments below!

Keep an eye out later today for a preview of Week 2. Don't forget to register for events [HERE](#).

Festival of Books Kickoff

The kickoff event with Pat Morrison, Dr. Carol Folt (USC) and Chris Argintieri (*LA Times*) provided a thorough introduction to the festival's mission as well as how the partnership between the *Times* and USC has improved the festival's programming and community engagement. The *Times* compiled a poignant reel of clips of notable speakers from years past including Ray Bradbury, Charlton Heston, and Samantha Power, among others. The *Times* and USC are proud to present the opportunity to promote literacy on a large scale and highlight writers like the general public likes to highlight actors, musicians and athletes.

Co-Authors Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver Reading from "Lights, Camera, Danger!" with Host Michael Ordonez

Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver gave us an in-depth look into their creative process and how their careers outside of Children's Literature have an impact on their writing. It was charming to see the relationship they were describing play out right in front of us, particularly when they read a passage from their latest book, "Lights, Camera, Danger: Alien Superstar". Henry and Lin have opposing personalities and working styles, but over the years they have developed a very symbiotic and collaborative writing relationship. The underlying mission behind their collection of works is to show children that to be human is to carry a great responsibility to both themselves and others. Their biggest challenge is to convince children that the "science part" in their science fiction is believable!

Young Adult Fiction: Love, Struggles, and What Lies in Between

There were many themes on the table in the Young Adult Fiction Panel. Brandy Colbert, Jennifer De Leon and Shaun Hutchinson more than opened up – they threw the roofs off their metaphorical houses. The authors led us into a deep exploration of their works that tackle struggles faced by oppressed communities in the U.S. and how those struggles fit into the lives of their young, unique protagonists. Politics is a thick thread that runs through all three featured novels and it was fascinating to hear how each author approached their respective political issues. Moderator Zan Romanoff also deserves a

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- Luxuria Music
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- There's Something Hard in There

shoutout for creating a comfortable vibe while simultaneously offering thoughtful and poignant conversation starters.

Ayad Akhtar, Author of "Homeland Elegies," in Conversation with Reza Aslan

Reza Aslan's conversation with Ayad Akhtar was by far the most fascinating of Week One. Ayad's novel is, as he deemed it, a "memoir of alternative facts." Essentially, it is a fictional plot based on a true story – Ayad's true story. We learned about his experience as a Brown and Muslim American, his tumultuous relationship with his late father, and how his work as a playwright affects his creative process and output when constructing a novel. Reza did not hold back with hard-hitting and personal questions, and it was both refreshing and humbling to listen to Ayad lean far into those questions and open his soul to the audience.

People Have the Power? Electoral Politics and Democracy, Presented by USC

Unsurprisingly, the most dramatic conversation took place during Tuesday's federal politics panel. The event was moderated by career Democratic political strategist Bob Shrum, and the panel included political scholars Paul Adler, Jane Junn and John Matusaka. It quickly became clear that Paul and Jane's ideologies leaned progressive-liberal while John's ideology sat in a much more centrist position (to note: the panel did not include any conservative leaning scholars). The primary debate centered on how political power is distributed in the U.S. and what the best strategy is to begin to level that playing field for a broader and more diverse range of American citizens. There were plenty of heated moments but it was impressive to see all of the panelists maintain their composure and mutual respect throughout the discussion.

The Honorable Jerry Brown and Jim Newton, Author of "Man of Tomorrow"

One of the funniest facts to learn in Week One was that former governor Jerry Brown did not read Jim Newton's biography of him until after it was published. He trusted Jim to package his story in a respectful and intellectual manner, and was happy with the result. Since there are already many biographies of Brown in existence, Jim explained that he focused directly on telling the story of California's political history from 1950 through the present by using Brown's story as the rug that ties that history together to give it a real narrative. Gustavo Arellano was particularly energetic and led the conversation in fascinating and sometimes unexpected directions.

Roberto Lovato in conversation with Esmerelda Bermudez

Of all of the authors featured in Week One, Roberto Lovato's personal story was the most intriguing and eye-opening. With Esmerelda Bermudez's energetic guidance, Roberto provided the audience with a raw narrative of his development from youth through the present as an American child of Salvadoran immigrants. We learned about how the dichotomy between the two strongest aspects of his personality – a dedicated bookworm and a political revolutionary – both literally and figuratively drew the path his life has followed to where he is today.

Crime Fiction: The Dark Side

The final panel conversation of Week One focused on crime fiction. James Queally hosted crime novelists Rachel Howzell Hall, Attica Locke and Ivy Pochoda to discuss their most recent works. They discussed issues of craft, process and inspiration, but one constant theme wove in and out of the entire conversation: how writing about crime has changed in the past several years in light of the BLM movement, incidents of police brutality across the country, gun violence and other crime related politics. Each author had very different approaches to addressing these issues but all approaches were thoughtful, respectful and taken very seriously. We also learned how each writer does or does not utilize music in their creative process, which was a fun and unexpected tidbit of information to take away from the panel.

Memorable Quotes

"Children can smell when you're making it up just to make it up." Henry Winkler

"Go out the door you came in." Lin Oliver

"I'm still recovering from English teachers with the red pen." Jennifer De Leon

"Being alive in the world is research." Shaun David Hutchinson

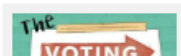
"Sometimes it's not about inspiration, it's just about, you know, showing up at the right time, everyday so the muse knows where to find you. Whether she'll come or not." Ayad Akhtar

"So much of the scenery of our electoral system is just so decrepit." Paul Adler

"You could argue there are terrible candidates." Jane Junn

"Live in the inquiry." The Honorable Jerry Brown

Week 1 Featured Books





"Lights, Camera, Danger: Alien Superstar" // Image courtesy of Amazon



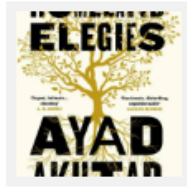
"The Voting Booth" // Image courtesy of Amazon



"Don't Ask Me Where I'm From" // Image courtesy of Goodreads



"The State of Us" // Image courtesy of Author Website



"Homeland Elegies" // Image courtesy of Hachette Australia



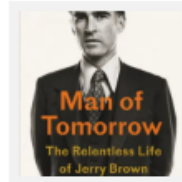
"No Excuses: Concessions of a Serial Campaigner" // Image courtesy of Amazon



"The 99 Percent Economy: How Democratic Socialism Can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism" // Image courtesy of Amazon



"Let the People Rule: How Direct Democracy Can Meet the Populist Challenge" // Image courtesy of Princeton University Press



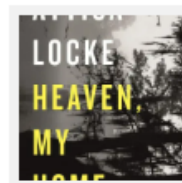
"Man of Tomorrow: The Relentless Life of Jerry Brown" // Image courtesy of Little, Brown and Co.



"Unforgetting: A Memoir of Family, Migration, Gangs, and Revolution in the Americas" // Image courtesy of Amazon



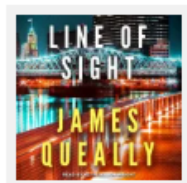
"And Now She's Gone" // Image courtesy of Goodreads



"Heaven, My Home" // Image courtesy of Amazon



"These Women" // Image courtesy of Amazon



"Line of Sight" // Image courtesy of Amazon

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