

Best Selling Author Talks About Her Book, Race in America, and Celebrates Inspired Art at Annual NEA Big Read

—NEWS RELEASE—

(April 24, 2018 — Hartford, CT) — Bestselling author Claudia Rankine led a discussion of her prize-winning book *Citizen: An American Lyric*, as she addressed the crowd celebrating this year's Big Read at the Hartford Public Library on Thursday, April 26. Her book is about race relations in the United States and focuses on contemporary issues, including an essay on tennis player Serena Williams, a tribute to Trayvon Martin, and a meditation on Hurricane Katrina.

Claudia Rankine is the author of five collections of poetry, two plays, as well as numerous video collaborations. She is also the editor of several anthologies and co-founded The Racial Imaginary Institute (TRII) in 2016. Among her numerous awards and honors, Rankine is the recipient of the Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, the Poets & Writers' Jackson Poetry Prize, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Lannan Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, United States Artists, and the National Endowment of the Arts. For *Citizen*, Rankine won the Forward Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, the Los Angeles Times Book Award, the PEN Open Book Award, and the NAACP Image Award. *Citizen* also holds the distinction of being the only poetry book to be a New York Times bestseller in the nonfiction category. Rankine is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and teaches at Yale University as the Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry.

The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest. Hartford Public Library's Big Read author event took place at the main branch's Center for Contemporary Culture in Downtown Hartford. Refreshments were available at 5:00 p.m. with a *Citizen*-inspired dance performance at 5:30 p.m. Claudia Rankine, the keynote speaker, spoke at 6:30 p.m.

"The idea of the Big Read is to help restore reading as a mainstay in our lives," said Bridget Quinn-Carey, CEO, Hartford Public Library. "This is one of our most popular events each year and the selection of Ms. Rankine's book this year was especially inspirational as so many people rallied behind the book with their artistic expressions."

The event featured some of those creative expressions — the results of workshops leading up to Ms. Rankine's keynote address — including a *Citizen*-inspired dance by Tnmot Aztro Performance Art and Dance Installation LLC, led by Arien Wilkerson, in collaboration with artists Ricky Silverspoon and David Borawski. Winners of the citywide *Citizen* Youth Slam Poetry Contest, supported by YOUmedia Hartford, were also showcased. Other programs created to celebrate the NEA Big Read included painting workshops, as well as several book discussions and salons throughout the community. [Type equation here.](#)

Ms. Rankine is the Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry at Yale University, the winner of numerous national poetry competitions, and a finalist for the T. S. Eliot Prize.

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