

# **HURSTON/WRIGHT FOUNDATION 2019 ANNUAL REPORT**



**Discover • Mentor • Honor  
Black Writers**

## Mission

The mission of the  
**Zora Neale Hurston/  
Richard Wright Foundation**  
is to discover, mentor, and honor  
Black writers.



## Vision Statement

We envision the Hurston/Wright Foundation as an organization that provides unique, impactful and memorable experiences of Black literary life that live far beyond the moment. We will strive to offer participants and supporters distinctive programs that enrich, fortify, and uplift the Black literary community.

# PERSPECTIVE

Dear Friends,

In 1990, the Hurston/Wright Foundation started as a space to nurture Black writers, to encourage their voices and to develop their craft. A new generation of Black voices has emerged to speak on critical issues, including social justice for young Black men and women, gender identity, LGBTQ rights, sexual equality, and the “Me Too” movement against sexual harassment and assault. While much has changed, the need for a safe space still exists.

We began 2019 implementing our new three-year strategic plan, with a special focus on capacity building. We hired a new executive director and added two new board members who bring needed expertise in organizational development and archival research. We strengthened our fundraising capability by winning new grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Amazon Literary Partnership. We started implementation of a new communication plan to elevate our brand and tell our story.

While building capacity, we continued to focus on programming. We expanded our programs by adding an advanced fiction workshop and launching a new competition to honor probing, provocative, and original new voices in literary nonfiction. We

continued our free public programming by hosting three readings with local book sellers. We celebrated Richard Wright’s birthday by simulcasting on WPFW radio a program at the Richard Wright Public Charter School.

We ended 2019 in a stronger position, ready to use our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the launching pad to begin a campaign to secure financial sustainability. We hired a development consultant and an event planner to maximize the Legacy Awards and the anniversary year. Then, in January 2020, COVID-19 hit and the world went virtual, leaving us with uncertainty.

Today, we find ourselves at what could be a positive and seismic inflection point in racial literacy and justice around the world. The world has united in protesting against the enduring injustices withstood by the Black community. The need is greater than ever for strong voices to express our plight and build platforms that advocate for change. To all who have supported us this year, we thank you. We look forward to working in partnership to ensure that Hurston/Wright thrives.

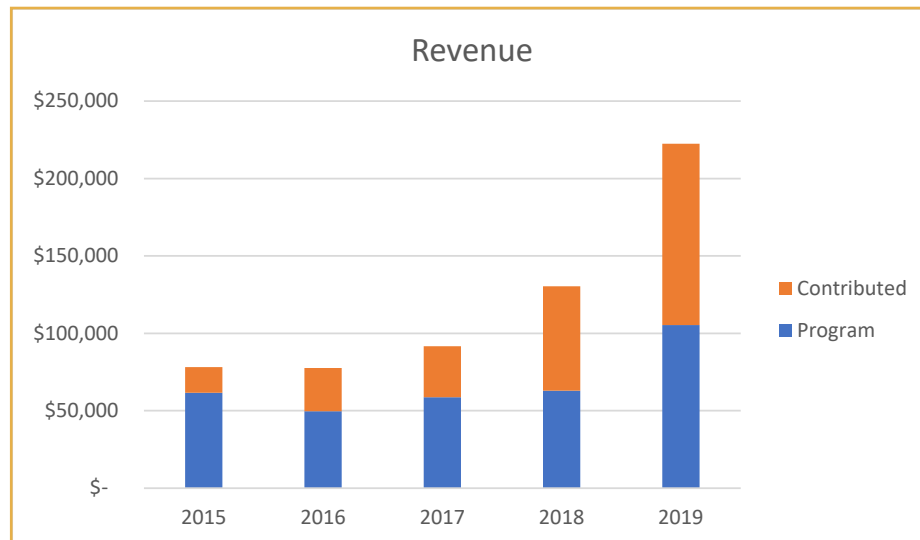
Audrey Hipkins  
Board Chair

Kesha Lee  
Executive Director

# GROWTH

We expanded learning opportunities to serve adults and youth from the District of Columbia, 30 states and China. We also launched a new writing award and secured grants and contributions from new funders.

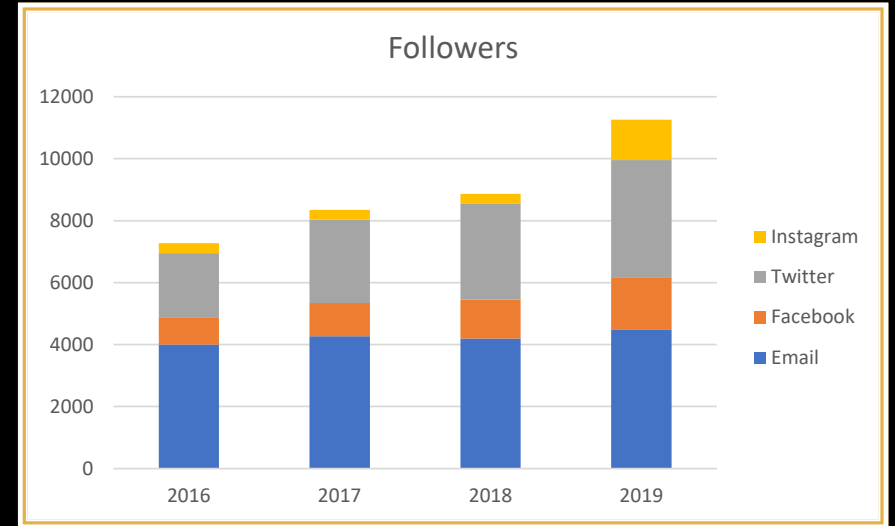
- An advanced fiction class was added to the regular fiction, poetry and nonfiction week long workshops. Together with our weekend workshops, we hosted seven classes for adults, compared to three just two years ago.
- Author MK Asante gave a presentation, simulcast on WPFW radio, for 25 young students at Richard Wright Public Charter School.
- The Crossover Award, sponsored by ESPN's The Undefeated, debuted to honor original voices in literary nonfiction.
- Between the College Awards writing competition, sponsored by Amistad/HarperCollins, and the Legacy Awards books competition, submissions were up 16% over the preceding year.
- The National Endowment for the Arts and the Amazon Literary Partnership made awards to Hurston/Wright, joining the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities. We also secured new donors after being accepted into the Combined Federal Campaign (#38743).





**We implemented new strategic plans and a new communications strategy that helped us increase our programmatic capacity, audiences and partnerships.**

- New executive director Kesha Lee joined us in May, bringing expertise in strategic planning after 15 years leading domestic and global projects in education, culturally responsive book access and literacy attainment.
- Targeted campaigns through social media and a newsletter increased our subscribers and followers on email, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- Programs with MahoganyBooks in Southeast Washington, Politics & Prose at Union Market in Northeast, and Politics & Prose on the Wharf in Southwest all drew enthusiastic audiences to conversations with Black authors.
- Participation in the DC Library's Author Festival at the Library of Congress allowed us to expand our network of writers, editors and publishers.



# CAPACITY







“Whenever my environment had failed to **support** or **nourish** me, I had clutched at **books**.”

— RICHARD WRIGHT, *BLACK BOY*



The foundation's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in August 2020 allows us to look back and see the impact of our work.

- Workshops and classes taught by award-winning authors serve emerging and midcareer adult writers. More than a thousand Black writers have taken our classes since the first one in 1996, increasing diversity in the cultural community as they have gone on to create books and careers as professors.
- Our first program, the Hurston/Wright Awards for College Writers, has honored 92 students, 30 of whom subsequently published books. Among them are Tayari Jones (*An American Marriage*), Natalie Baszile (*Queen Sugar*), and Nate Marshall (*Wild Hundreds*).
- The Legacy Awards has honored 318 books since 2002. The annual program was the brainchild of novelist E. Lynn Harris, who recognized that work by Black authors deserved more attention.
- Free public readings since 2014 have afforded thousands of readers in Washington, D.C., the opportunity to engage with 64 talented Black authors.



# COMMUNITY



“It’s a real **pleasure** just to be in this room with all of this magnificent, creative and **artistic energy**. ... It renews my hope that the **written word** will prevail.”

— RITA DOVE, 2019 NORTH STAR AWARD RECIPIENT



“You can **learn things** about writing in other places, but the kinds of conversations that we need to have and the kinds of things that we’re trying to write about, we **need each other** in order to say what we need to say.”

— JAMEL BRINKLEY, 2019 LEGACY AWARD FICTION FINALIST



“The Hurston Wright Foundation enabled us to have a **phenomenal** kick off of our school year with students, highlighting our school theme of this year, ‘**Imagine That**’.”

— MICHELLE SANTOS, CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, RICHARD WRIGHT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL FOR JOURNALISM AND MEDIA ARTS



“For me to receive this award, it’s a **validation** for the work that I did for six years to write this book, for all of the **energy** that it took to continue on **despite** how difficult it was at times, despite the doubt that I had to **fight** the whole way through.”

— KW/OYA FAGIN MAPLES, 2019 LEGACY AWARD POETRY FINALIST





# SUPPORTERS

## SPONSORS

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities  
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Penguin Random House  
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Howard University Department of English  
Conrad and Constance Hipkins  
Audrey Hipkins

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# LEADERSHIP

*(L to R: Melanie Hatter, Deborah Heard, Audrey Hipkins, Brittany Buckner, McIntosh Ewell, Kesha Lee, Dionne Peart, David Whettstone, Andre Perry)*

Kesha Lee – Executive Director  
Marita Golden – President Emeritus

## The Board of Directors

Audrey Hipkins – Board Chair  
McIntosh K. Ewell – Treasurer  
Dionne Peart – Secretary  
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Brittany Buckner

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Andre Perry  
Charles Lucious Perry  
David Whettstone



The Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation, founded in 1990, is a literary nonprofit whose mission is to discover, mentor, and honor Black writers. The foundation conducts workshops, master classes, public readings, competitions and an awards ceremony. Through these programs, the foundation helps writers produce high-quality literature, preserves the voices of Black writers, creates a supportive community for writers, provides financial support to college writers, and celebrates artistic excellence.

Founders: Marita Golden and Clyde McElvene

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The Hurston/Wright Foundation is a 501(c)3

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