

16TH ANNUAL  
**BIOGRAPHERS**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**CONFERENCE**  
MAY 28 & 29, 2026

Bio  
graphy  
THE LEON LEVY  
CENTER FOR

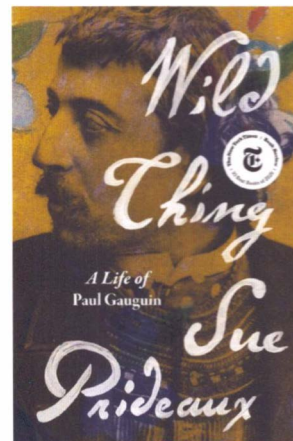
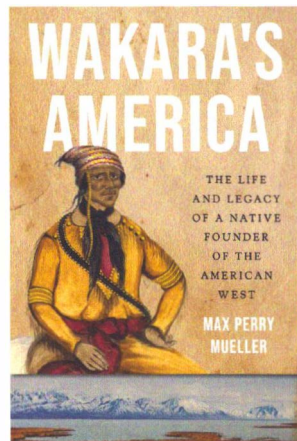
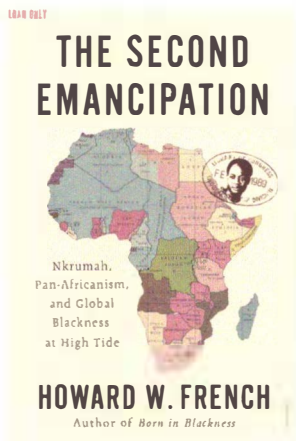
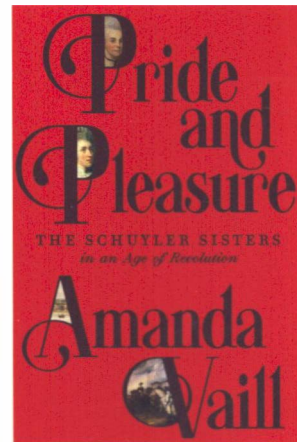
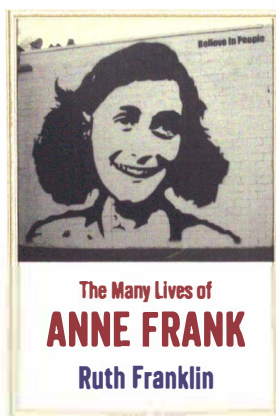
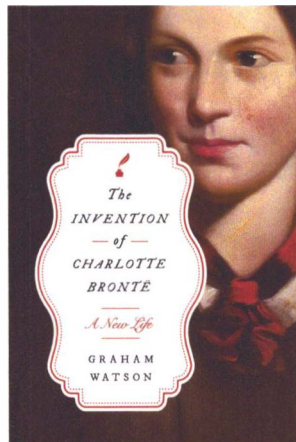
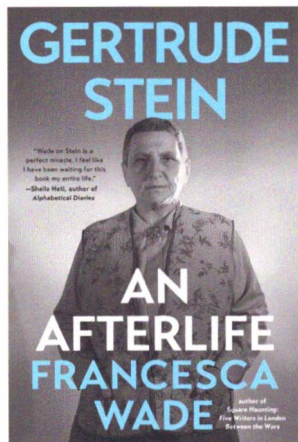
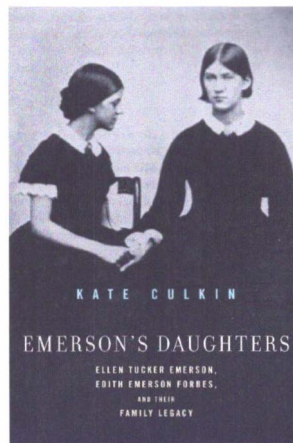
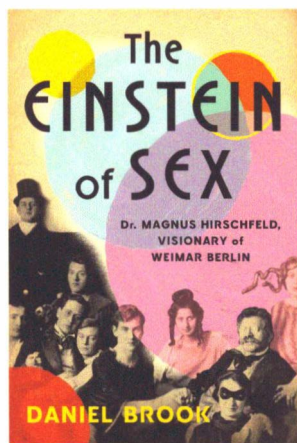
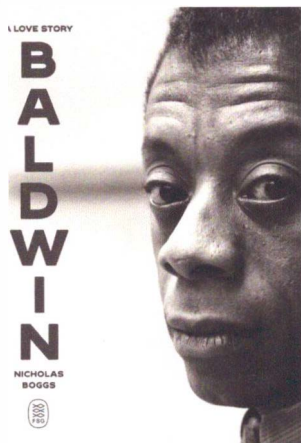
Bio  
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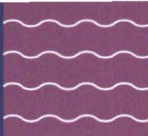
LEON LEVY CENTER FOR BIOGRAPHY • THE GRADUATE CENTER • CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



# THE 2026 PLUTARCH AWARD

Biographers International Organization is proud to present the Plutarch Award for the best biography of 2025. Congratulations to those on the longlist:

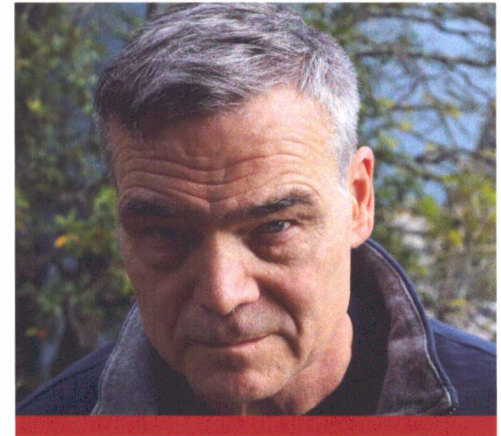




## THE 2026 BIO AWARD RECIPIENT

# T.J. Stiles

T.J. Stiles is the author, most recently, of *Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America*, which received the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for History, the Spur Award for Best Western Biography, and the William H. Seward Award for Excellence in Civil War Biography. He also wrote *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, honored with the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Biography and the 2009 National Book Award for Nonfiction, and *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War*, which received the 2003 Ambassador Book Award. A past Guggenheim Fellow, NEH Public Scholar, and Gilder Lehrman Fellow in American History at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers and the New York Public Library, he also practices and teaches traditional karate with the Japan Karate Association. A native of rural Minnesota, he now lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife and two children. He is currently working on a biography of Theodore Roosevelt. The BIO Award recognizes a colleague who has made distinguished contributions to the art and craft of biography.



ON OUR COVER: THE B. ALTMAN DEPARTMENT STORE BUILDING, CURRENT HOME OF THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER, CIRCA 1930s. (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS) THIS PAGE: © 2026 DILLON STILES

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# THURSDAY

**Registration Opens** 12:00 PM

**LOCATION:** CUNY GRADUATE CENTER (365 FIFTH AVENUE, CONCOURSE LEVEL)

## WORKSHOP

### How to Write Effective Book Proposals

**LOCATION:** ROOM C201-202

1:00–3:00 pm

**NOTE:** THIS WORKSHOP IS LIMITED TO THOSE WHO SIGNED UP IN ADVANCE.

A successful book proposal distills your project efficiently and eloquently for the agents and editors you pitch. Susan Leon’s workshop will cover the many aspects you need to consider in creating a saleable proposal.

**Susan Leon** is an independent editor with deep roots in the publishing industry. She worked in the literary department of the William Morris Agency and held editorial positions at Viking, Atheneum/Scribner, and William Morrow before opening her own editorial consulting business. With graduate degrees in American history, she specializes in history, biography, and memoir, but also edits general fiction. She has edited several *New York Times* bestsellers and award-winning nonfiction titles. Authors she has worked include Sir Martin

Gilbert, Diane Ackerman, Kay Redfield Jamison, Steve Coll, and Julian Zelizer. She has been a featured panelist at Book Expo America and served as a grant evaluator for the NEH Public Scholar’s Program/American history. In January 2025 she presented at BIO’s Biography Lab’s virtual conference on *The Art of Great Biography: Reflections From Across an Editor’s Desk*. Among the many proposals she edited that found homes is a forthcoming life of the businessman and philanthropist Nathan Strauss (Rutgers University Press).

**Member Readings** 3:30–4:15 PM

**LOCATION:** CUNY GRADUATE CENTER AUDITORIUM

**Awards Presentations** 4:15–5:00 PM

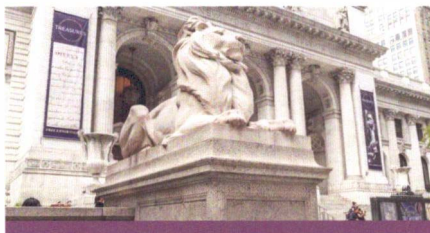
**LOCATION:** CUNY GRADUATE CENTER AUDITORIUM

The Robert and Ina Caro Research/Travel Fellowships, the Clio Fellowship, the Frances “Frank” Rollin Fellowships, the Hazel Rowley Prize, the Chip Bishop Fellowship, the Biblio Award, and the Ray A. Shepard Service Award.

**Welcome Reception** 5:30 –7:30 PM

**LOCATION:** THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION, 7 WEST 43RD STREET (NEAR FIFTH AVENUE), A SHORT WALK FROM THE GRADUATE CENTER

## TOURS\*



**New York Public Library**  
10:00 AM–11:30 AM



**New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**  
10:30 AM–12:00 PM



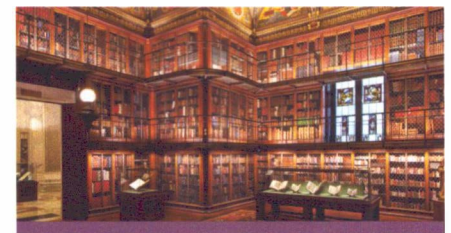
**Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**  
1:00 PM–2:30 PM



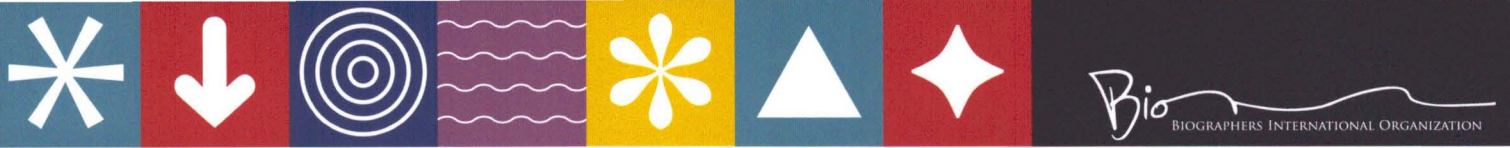
**Century Association Archives**  
10:00 AM–11:30 AM



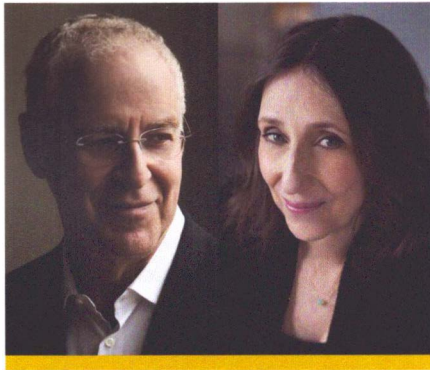
**New York Historical**  
11:00 AM–12:30 PM



**Morgan Library Special Collections**  
2:00 PM–3:15 PM



# FRIDAY



## THE JAMES ATLAS PLENARY

# Ron Chernow & Brenda Wineapple in Conversation moderated by Brian Kerrigan

LOCATION: AUDITORIUM • TIME: 9:00-10:00 AM

**Ron Chernow** is the prizewinning author of eight books and the recipient of the 2015 National Humanities Medal. His first book, *The House of Morgan*, won the National Book Award, *Washington: A Life* won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography, and *Alexander Hamilton*—the inspiration for the Broadway musical—won the George Washington Book Prize. He has twice been a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and is one of only three living biographers to have won the Gold Medal for Biography of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A past president of PEN America, Chernow has been the recipient of nine honorary doctorates. He received Biographers International Organization’s 2013 BIO Award for distinguished contributions to the art and craft of biography.

**Brenda Wineapple** is a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist whose most recent book is the national bestseller *Keeping the Faith: God, Democracy, and the Trial That Riveted*

*a Nation*—“history at its most delicious,” said *The New York Times Book Review* on its front cover. It was also named a Best Book of 2024 by *The New Yorker*, among other publications. Her other books include *The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation* and *Ecstatic Nation: Confidence, Crisis, and Compromise, 1848-1877*, both named best books of the year by *The New York Times*, and the award-winning *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson*. Her biography of Fiorello La Guardia will be published as part of the Yale University Press Jewish Lives Series next year.

### Moderator

**Brian Kerrigan** is a final-year student in the Biography and Memoir Program at the CUNY Graduate Center, currently working on a memoir about surviving the 9/11 World Trade Center attack.

## PANELS LOCATION: CONCOURSE LEVEL OF THE GRADUATE CENTER

### BASICS

## In the Right Hands: Biographers as Collectors

10:15 AM-11:15 AM

Biographers can support their research by collecting important related material often overlooked on the market or in storerooms and unavailable in any repository or online. This panel will explore what authors have purchased, inherited, or been given, whether books, manuscripts, periodicals, ephemera, artworks, textiles, or other objects, produced or owned by or pertaining to their biography subjects. The panelists will illustrate and illuminate the value of what they acquired, sometimes in the most unexpected places and at

the last minute, and will discuss how items shaped their biography narratives and shed light on pivotal moments in their subjects’ lives and careers. The session will also cover how those materials can be transferred to institutional collections for safekeeping.

### Moderator

**A’Lelia Bundles** is the author of *Joy Goddess: A’Lelia Walker and the Harlem Renaissance*, a biography of her great-grandmother, and *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*, a *New York Times* Notable Book about her entrepreneurial great-great-grandmother. Her books have benefited from the voluminous Walker Company documents that her family donated to the Indiana Historical Society in the early 1980s. To organize and preserve another

trove of materials inherited from her grandparents, she founded the Madam Walker Family Archives, the largest private collection of Walker ephemera, photographs, and correspondence. She serves on several nonprofit boards and was a producer and executive during her 30-year career in network television news.

### Panelists

**Eve M. Kahn**, an independent scholar and regular *New York Times* contributor, has written two biographies that have resulted in boxfuls of important primary source material tucked away in her home. She has thousands of pages of circa-1900 correspondence that inspired her 2019 book about the forgotten artist Mary Rogers Williams (1857-1907), as well as rare periodicals, inscribed books, photos, ephemera, and even restaurant cutlery related to her 2025 book about the writer, publisher, and social justice activist Zoe Anderson Norris (1860-1914).

**Richard Kopley**, Distinguished Professor emeritus of English at Penn State DuBois, is the author of *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life* (University of Virginia Press, 2025). The book is informed by Kopley's extraordinary archive of letters about Poe by Flora Lapham Mack, the stepdaughter of Poe's best friend, John H. Mackenzie. Kopley is also the author of *The Threads of "The Scarlet Letter": A Study of Hawthorne's Transformative Art* (University of Delaware Press, 2003), *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and *The Formal Center in Literature: Explorations from Poe to the Present* (Camden House, 2018). Former president of the Nathaniel Hawthorne Society and the Poe Studies Association, he is the first recipient of the PSA's Lifetime Achievement Award. Kopley served as a Fulbright Specialist and a Virginia Humanities

Fellow, and he recently became a member of the American Antiquarian Society.

**Jared Stearns** is the author of *Pure: The Sexual Revolutions of Marilyn Chambers* (Headpress, 2024). He has built the largest known collection of Chambers memorabilia, spanning personal papers, photographs, contracts, film, periodicals, ephemera, and even clothing. He has written about Chambers for publications such as *Cineaste*, *The Dark Side*, and *The San Franciscan*. His work has also appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and other publications. He is a graduate of Emerson College in Boston. He's working on his next biography.

### CRAFT

## Radical Biography for Teens

10:15 AM–11:15 AM

Writing biography for teens and their people has changed drastically in the past 15 years. More and more authors are breaking the mold in the way young adult and middle-grade biographies are written and who they are written about. No subject is off-limits for kids—if you know what you're doing. Writing for this age group also gives authors the chance to make a difference in the future. Come listen to a panel of award-winning biographers talk about why they write for teens, how they do it, and why biographers should consider this field. Among the topics panelists will discuss are: how writing for this age group gives authors the freedom to just tell the story they want to tell; how authors can handle complex and controversial topics; who reads YA biography (hint: not just kids) and why.

### Moderator

**Angela Carstensen** is the author of *The Reader's Advisory Guide to Teen Literature* (ALA Editions, 2018) and served as chair of the first YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults committee (2010) and the 2018 Michael L. Printz Award committee, as an active member of the American Library Association. She writes and reviews for *Booklist* and is a lecturer in young adult literature for the graduate program in library and information science at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is currently writing a narrative nonfiction, historical true crime biography for young adults. She attended the 2025 Community of Writers Nonfiction/Memoir Workshop as recipient of the Christina Meldrum Memorial Scholarship.

### Panelists

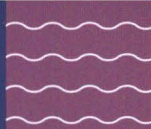
**Deborah Heiligman** has written 34 books for children and young adults, many of them biographies. Her latest, *Loudmouth: Emma Goldman vs. America (A Love Story)*, published last September, was called a "masterclass" by *Booklist*. It was

## THE 2026 BIBLIO AWARD RECIPIENT: CARLA HAYDEN

Carla Hayden, a senior fellow at the Mellon Foundation and former Librarian of Congress, is this year's recipient of BIO's Biblio Award,



presented annually to recognize a librarian or archivist who has made an exceptional contribution to the craft of biography. "By presenting this award to Dr. Carla Hayden, BIO expresses its appreciation of her work as a librarian and reaffirms its commitment, which it shares with her, of bringing life stories and history to the public," said Kathleen Stone, chair of BIO's Awards Committee.



named an Editors' Choice by booklist, a Chicago Public Library Best Book for Teens, and a New York Public Library Best Book of the Year, Top Ten Book for Teens. Other biographies include: *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*, a National Book Award finalist, Michael L. Printz Honor winner, and inaugural YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award winner, and *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers*, a Printz Honor, YALSA winner, and *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* winner. She is currently working on a biography of Margot Frank.

**Ray Anthony Shepard** is the author of three award-winning biographies for young readers: *Now or Never!: 54th Massachusetts Infantry's War to End Slavery*; *Runaway: The Daring Escape of Ona Judge*; and *A Long Time Coming: A Lyrical Biography of Race In America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama*. His fourth, *The Fall and Rise of Malcolm X*, will be published this October. After years of teaching eighth-grade American history and editing textbooks, Shepard launched an encore career telling stories of Black lives that were more authentic than those found in schoolbooks.

## BUSINESS

### What Do Editors Want?

10:15 AM–11:15 AM

What makes for a winning book proposal for a biography? These esteemed editors, whose portfolios include notable biographies, will discuss their own enthusiasms and how they see the evolving marketplace. They will speak to the publishing trends they see emerging, from creative approaches to familiar figures as well as appreciation of overlooked ones. In the fast-changing publishing world where the relationship between author and editor is shifting, how can authors discern whether the editor is the right fit for them, and their books?

#### Moderator

**Bill Goldstein** reviews books for NBC's *Weekend Today in New York*, and was the founding editor of *The New York Times* books website. A graduate of the University of Chicago, Goldstein received a Ph.D. in English from the City University of New York Graduate Center. He is writing a biography

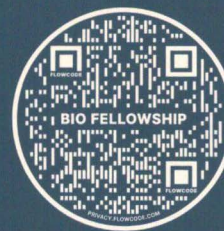
The Leon Levy Center for Biography invites applications for  
**4 Biography Fellowships and  
1 Leon Levy/Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship**  
in science biography



**\$72k stipend**

- + research assistance
- + writing space
- + library privileges

Fellows also participate in seminars and the intellectual life of the Graduate Center




**Apply June 1, 2026 – January 5, 2027**

[leonlevycenterforbiography.com](http://leonlevycenterforbiography.com)

**Announcing**

**The David Levering Lewis Fellowship  
in Lives of the African Diaspora**



of playwright and activist Larry Kramer, to be published by Crown. He was a recipient of BIO's Robert and Ina Caro Travel/Research Fellowship in 2022 and was awarded a 2024-25 Public Scholars grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities to support his work on the book. He is the author of *The World Broke in Two: Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, and the Year That Changed Literature* (2017).

### Panelists

**Thomas Gebremedhin** is vice president and executive editor at Doubleday, joining the imprint after a decade at *The Atlantic*. He recently became editorial director of Outsider Editions, a reissue series dedicated to elevating significant literary works overlooked by the traditional canon. At Doubleday, his first acquisition was Hua Hsu's *Stay True*, which won both the NBCC and the Pulitzer Prize. He works with biographers including Pulitzer Prize-winner Benjamin Moser (Susan Sontag) and National Book Critics Circle winner Julie Phillips (James Tiptree, Jr.), who is currently working on a biography of Ursula K. Le Guin. He also acquires memoir, history, criticism, essays, and literary fiction, and is drawn to writers who engage in cultural, sociological, intellectual, and personal questions. His other authors include Maaza Mengiste, Amanda Hess, Kyle Chayka, Tao Leigh Goffe, Vincent Bevins, Jen Percy, Aymann Ismail, Zach Williams, and Merritt Tierce. He believes the best books begin at the level of the sentence.

**John Glusman** is a vice president and executive editor of W. W. Norton & Company. His authors have included *New York Times* bestsellers Neil de Grasse Tyson, Frans de Waal, Ronan Farrow, Pulitzer Prize-winner Richard Powers, National Book Critics Circle winner Saidiya Hartman, and *L.A. Times* Book Prize winners Margaret Burnham and Dan Ephron. His award-winning biographies include John Lahr's *Tennessee Williams*, William Souder's *Mad at the World*, and Sue Prideaux's *Wild Thing*. He is the author of *Conduct Under Fire: Four American Doctors and Their Fight for Life as Prisoners of the Japanese*, winner of the Colby Award for best work of military nonfiction by a first-time author. A Distinguished Alumnus of Columbia University's Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, he founded the Westchester Book Festival in 2025.

**Jenna Johnson**, senior vice president and editor-in-chief at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, has published a range of award-winning and bestselling titles, including biographies *Sister, Sinner* by Claire Hoffman, *Starry and Restless* by Julia Cooke, and the forthcoming *The Formidable Mrs. Chao* by Jen Lin-Liu. Johnson publishes fiction and narrative nonfiction, with particular interest in original, inventive, and surprising voices, stories from around the world, religion, cultural and literary history, memoir and biography, the earth and its creatures, and food.

## ISSUES

### Life Writing and Difference: A Conversation on Race and Biography

10:15 AM–11:15 AM

Are there particular challenges facing the biographer who chooses to write about someone with a different racial identity? What does it take to navigate these challenges successfully? How do you know if you are the right person to tell the story of an individual whose background and life experiences look substantially different from your own? This panel presents a conversation between two prominent biographers who have written notably across racial lines. Emily Bernard and Nicholas Boggs will examine the rich but under-explored ingredients that constitute the sometimes mysterious and always durable connections between biographers and their subjects.

### Panelists

**Emily Bernard** is the author of *Black Is the Body: Stories From My Grandmother's Time, My Mother's Time, and Mine*, which received the 2020 *Los Angeles Times* Christopher Isherwood Prize; *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten*, a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year; and *Carl Van Vechten: A Portrait in Black and White*. Her work has appeared in: *Harper's*, *TLS*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *Image: Art, Faith, Mystery*, *Best American Essays*, *Best African American Essays*, and *Best of Creative Nonfiction*. A 2020 Andrew Carnegie Fellow, she was a 2024-2025 fellow at the Leon Levy Center.

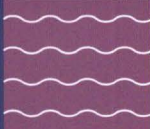
**Nicholas Boggs** is the author of the *New York Times* best-selling biography *Baldwin: A Love Story* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), and co-editor of Baldwin's collaboration with French artist Yoran Cazac, *Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood* (2018). He has been the recipient of the Robert and Ina Caro Travel and Research Fellowship from BIO, a Leon Levy Center for Biography Fellowship, and a Whiting Creative Nonfiction Grant.

## BASICS

### Using Genealogical Tools to Research Your Biographical Subject

11:30 AM–12:30 PM

In writing and researching biography, it's often necessary to take a genealogical expedition. From finding descendants of your subject (and their associates), to researching family history, using genealogical tools can lend an important dimension to your subject's story. Panelists will talk about their experiences and give tips on using everything from commercial



genealogical databases and newspapers, to obituaries, archival correspondence, and other resources (online and print). You never know where a genealogical trail will lead you: biographical treasures await.

### Moderator

**Bernice Lerner** is the author of *All the Horrors of War: A Jewish Girl, a British Doctor, and the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen*, and other writings on the Holocaust and on virtue ethics. She is the former dean of adult learning at Hebrew College and a senior scholar at Boston University's Center for Character and Social Responsibility.

### Panelists

**Nick Reynolds** has written two biographies and is working on a third. *Writer, Sailor, Soldier, Spy: Ernest Hemingway's Secret Adventures, 1935-1961* was a *New York Times* bestseller in 2017. He has served as a field historian for the Marine Corps and as the historian for the CIA Museum. He holds a Ph.D. in history from Oxford University.

**Sue Rubenstein DeMasi** is the author of *Henry Alsberg: The Driving Force of the New Deal Federal Writers' Project*. She's written and spoken widely about the New Deal and its figures, including Alsberg, Frances Perkins, and HUAC chair Martin Dies. She's currently working on a bio of John G. Winant,

the first chair of Social Security, ambassador to England (WWII), and the first U.S. director of the International Labour Organization. DeMasi has spoken at the Library of Congress, the University of California at Berkeley, and three Presidential Libraries on Alsberg, the New Deal, and John Winant.

**Cindy Schweich Handler** is the author of *A German Jew's Triumph: Fritz Oppenheimer and the Denazification of Germany*. A journalist and former editor and writer for The USA Today Network, her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *AARP: The Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Redbook* and a host of other national publications. She has written about subject matter contained in *A German Jew's Triumph* in *The Washington Post* and *NorthJersey.com*. Handler lives in Montclair, New Jersey, with her husband and fellow BIO member Harry Handler.

### CRAFT

## Dancing About Architecture: Writing Biographies of Musicians

11:30 AM–12:30 PM

There's an old truism about how challenging it is to write about music ("like dancing about architecture"). So how do

## ENJOY BIO'S FREE WEEKLY PODCAST SERIES

BIO's podcast series – available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and BIO's website – features insightful interviews with some of today's established as well as first-time biographers. Our podcast hosts are accomplished biographers and BIO members, including A'Lelia Bundles, Natalie Dykstra, John A. (Jack) Farrell, Brian Jay Jones, Kevin McGruder, Lisa Napoli, Tamara Payne, Simon Read, Jennifer Skoog, Eric K. Washington, and Sonja Williams. Recent podcast guests include:

- \* Ron Chernow, *Mark Twain*
- \* Ashley D. Farmer, *Queen Mother: Black Nationalism, Reparations, and the Untold Story of Audrey Moore*
- \* David Margolick, *When Caesar Was King: How Sid Caesar Reinvented American Comedy*
- \* Carla Kaplan, *Troublemaker: The Fierce, Unruly Life of Jessica Mitford*
- \* Andrew Curran, *Biography of a Dangerous Idea: A New History of Race from Louis XIV to Thomas Jefferson*
- \* Todd Goddard, *Jim Harrison, A Writer's Life*
- \* Amanda Vaill, *Pride and Pleasure: The Schuyler Sisters in an Age of Revolution*
- \* Marion Orr, *House of Diggs: The Rise and Fall of America's Most Consequential Black Congressman, Charles C. Diggs Jr.*
- \* Todd Purdum, *Desi Arnaz: The Man Who Invented Television*
- \* Francesca Wade, *Gertrude Stein: An Afterlife*
- \* Tim Greiving, *John Williams: A Composer's Life*
- \* Dana A. Williams, *Toni at Random: The Iconic Writer's Legendary Editorship*
- \* Peter Cozzens, *Deadwood: Gold, Guns, and Greed in the American West*
- \* Ethelene Whitmire, *The Remarkable Life of Reed Peggram: The Man Who Stared Down World War II in the Name of Love*
- \* Andrew Maraniss, *Strong Inside: Perry Wallace and the Collision of Race and Sports in the South*



biographers tackle writing the life of someone who composed music as their vocation? What are some of the most successful, surprising, and quirkily singular tools for conveying this abstract, invisible form of art? How do we balance technical detail with readable drama and also balance the life and the music? Four biographers of musicians will discuss how they translated pure sound and its creation into understandable, entertaining prose for general readers.

### Moderator

**Tim Greiving** is the author of *John Williams: A Composer's Life* (Oxford University Press), the first biography of the renowned film composer. Greiving is an arts journalist and historian in Los Angeles who specializes in film music. He regularly writes for the *Los Angeles Times* and has contributed stories and interviews to National Public Radio, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Criterion*, *Variety*, *The Ringer*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and *Vulture*. He has written program notes for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Royal Albert Hall, and liner notes for more than a hundred soundtrack albums.

### Panelists

**Steven C. Smith**, author of *Hitchcock & Herrmann: The Friendship & Film Scores That Changed Cinema* (Oxford University Press), is an Emmy-nominated documentary producer, author, and speaker who specializes in Hollywood history and profiles of contemporary filmmakers. A four-time Emmy nominee and 16-time Telly Award winner, Smith has produced and written more than 200 documentaries. He is also the author of *Music by Max Steiner: The Epic Life of Hollywood's Most Influential Composer* (Oxford), and *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (University of California Press).

**John T. Reddick** is the author of a forthcoming book on Harlem's Black and Jewish Music Culture 1890-1930. Reddick is an architectural preservationist, historian, and Harlem

resident. Currently, he serves as the director of community engagement projects for the Central Park Conservancy and serves on the board of the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. His knowledge of Harlem's culture and architecture has served to advance several public art and open space projects in that community, which include the Ralph Ellison Memorial, Harriet Tubman Square, and the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Circle, as well as New York's LGBT Memorial and Monument in Hudson River Park.

**Will Hermes** is the author of *Lou Reed: King of New York* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a *Kirkus Reviews* best nonfiction book of 2023. Hermes is also the author of *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five Years in New York That Changed Music Forever*, a 2011 *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice, and he writes the Substack newsletter *New Music + Old Music*. He's a contributing editor to *Rolling Stone* and a longtime contributor to *The New York Times* and National Public Radio, and his work also appears in *The Guardian*, *Pitchfork*, and *Uncut*.

## BUSINESS

### Beyond the Launch: Audience Outreach for the Long Term

11:30 AM–12:30 PM

After the initial buzz of the book launch dies down, how do you keep your subject(s) in the public eye and reach new audiences? Promotion is a long game—and it's not always just about selling books. Participants in this panel will discuss strategies they've found effective in expanding outreach and building connections through avenues such as newsletters, websites, and digital projects, specialty and virtual tours, exhibits, and institutional partnerships. Attendees will come away with creative ideas plus practical information on what it takes to adopt various approaches and sustain them over the long haul.

### Moderator

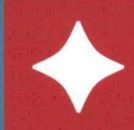
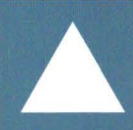
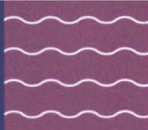
After a 30-year career as a journalist, editor, and science writer, **Diana Parsell** made her debut as a biographer in 2023 with the publication of *Eliza Scidmore: The Trailblazing Journalist Behind Washington's Cherry Trees* (Oxford University Press). She received BIO's 2017 Hazel Rowley Prize and a Mayborn Fellowship in Biography. She's worked on staff or as a contractor for a wide range of publications, including *National Geographic* and *The Washington Post*, and for several major science organizations in Washington and Southeast Asia. In an outgrowth of her book research, she's a docent for public tours at the Library of Congress.

### Panelists

**Marc Leepson** is a journalist and historian and the author of 11 books, including four biographies: *Lafayette: Idealist Gen-*

## THANKS TO OUR PRE-CONFERENCE ROUNDTABLE HOSTS

Once again, this year's BIO conference was preceded by a series of online roundtable gatherings, which are intended to foster conversation and fellowship among biographers working in specific areas. The idea was to connect online and continue talking in person at the conference. Thanks to these roundtable leaders for hosting this year's pre-conference discussions: Lauren Arrington, Emily Bernard, A'Lelia Bundles, Iris Dunkle, Natalie Dykstra, Louise "Lucy" Knight, Linda Leavell, Marc Leepson, Steve Paul, Jared Stearns, Kathleen Stone, Rachel Swarns, Pamela Toler, and Karen Torghele.



eral (2011, 2025), *What So Proudly We Hailed: Francis Scott Key, A Life* (2014), *Ballad of the Green Beret* (2017), and *The Unlikely War Hero* (2024), on Doug Hegdahl, the youngest and lowest-ranking POW held in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. A former staff writer for *Congressional Quarterly* in Washington, D.C., Leepson taught U.S. history at Laurel Ridge Community College in Warrenton, Virginia, from 2008 to 2015. First elected to BIO's board of directors in 2013, he just completed 11 years as treasurer.

**Heath Lee** is an award-winning historian, biographer, and curator. Her narrative nonfiction book *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took on the U.S. Government to Bring Their Husbands Home from Vietnam* (St. Martin's Press, 2019) is currently being developed as a television series. Lee's new book, *The Mysterious Mrs. Nixon: Washington's Most Private First Lady*, is the first commercial biography of First Lady Pat Nixon in almost 40 years. She currently serves on the boards of FLARE, the First Ladies Association for Research and Education, and of BIO.

Armed with a Ph.D. in history, a well-thumbed deck of library cards, and a large bump of curiosity, **Pamela D. Toler**, a member of the BIO board, is the author of 10 works of historical nonfiction for adults and children, including her most recent, *The Dragon From Chicago: The Untold Story of an American Reporter in Nazi Germany*. She has written a twice-weekly blog, "History in the Margins," for almost 15 years and a bimonthly newsletter for nine years—and says she still has no idea what she's doing.

Author of *Fair Labor Lawyer: The Remarkable Life of New Deal Attorney and Supreme Court Advocate Bessie Margolin* and *Most Fortunate Unfortunates: The Jewish Orphans' Home of New Orleans* (both LSU Press), **Marlene Trestman** builds promotion around her website, [www.marlenetrestman.com](http://www.marlenetrestman.com), which includes research databases and nearly 200 illustrated profiles. Through institutional collaborations and publications, she has become an authority on women advocates at the U.S. Supreme Court and on American Jewish orphanages. She has curated a museum exhibition on the Jewish orphanage in New Orleans and obtained a coveted "Overlooked" obituary for Bessie Margolin in *The New York Times*.

## ISSUES

### Troublemakers

11:30 AM–12:30 PM

Visionaries who advocate for extreme social changes pose unique challenges for biographers delving into the personal and public lives of their subjects. Often, the most success-

## GET INVOLVED IN BIO!

Aside from four part-time paid staffers, our organization runs on volunteers. The board of directors, officers, and committees would welcome your help. Members who would like to join a committee—planning conferences and events, evaluating fellowship and prize applications, and the like—should send a letter of interest to [president@biographersinternational.org](mailto:president@biographersinternational.org).

We also want to plant a seed for expanding BIO's reach. You may recall that we held a conference a year ago in Montgomery, Alabama, on the theme of Black biography. We saw that highly successful event as serving as a template for similar conferences in the future. But it takes work—much of it volunteer work.

The BIO board has discussed ways to proceed, but, taking a cue from other conferences in our circles, we think that a satellite or regional conference would depend on having an active local committee. Members in a proposed location would help develop a theme and would also line up facilities, event support, potential co-sponsorships, and details such as catering, book sales, and video production. The local committee would work with BIO leadership to develop a conference proposal.


The board welcomes detailed proposals for this kind of focused conference in the coming years.

Please send your thoughts to the president (address above) and [execdirector@biographersinternational.org](mailto:execdirector@biographersinternational.org).

ful activists are working toward a version of themselves that they aspire to become; leaving evidence counter to that construction may not have been in their interests. The myth that follows them may be incomplete or inaccurate. Inevitably, such figures have ruffled feathers, made enemies, and upset their antagonists. This panel, on writing biographies of troublemakers in their full historical contexts, considers the challenges—and opportunities, especially at this moment—of telling stories of those who set themselves against the norms of their day.

### Moderator

**Kate Clifford Larson** is the bestselling author of several biographies, including *Walk With Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer* (2021), *Rosemary: The Hidden Kennedy Daughter* (2015), *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (2004), and *The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln* (2008). An award-winning consultant, Larson has worked on feature films—including Focus Features' *Harriet* and Robert Redford's *The Conspirator*—documentaries, museum exhibits, historical parks interpretation, heritage tourism products, and curriculum guides. She holds two degrees from



Simmons, an MBA from Northeastern, and a Ph.D. from the University of New Hampshire. Her next book, *Ethel and Bobby: Inside the Marriage That Shaped a Nation*, is due out from Little, Brown & Company in 2027.

### Panelists

**Ashley Farmer's** *Queen Mother: Black Nationalism, Reparations, and the Untold Story of Audley Moore* (Pantheon, 2025), tells the story of Black Nationalism's leading progenitor, a founder of the reparations movement, and a mentor to many. It also unravels a larger history of Black radicalism and the popular myths and misunderstandings surrounding it, including how women's contributions to the Black Freedom Movement have been minimized. Farmer teaches history and African and African Diaspora studies at the University of Texas, Austin, and she is the author of the previously acclaimed *Re-making Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, among other works. *Queen Mother* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Awards.

**Caleb Gayle's** *Black Moses: A Saga of Ambition and the Fight for a Black State* (Riverhead, 2025) tells the story of Edward P. McCabe's struggle to make Oklahoma the country's first Black state shortly after emancipation. McCabe, known as the "Black Moses," led the exodusters, as Black colonizers of the West became known, on a quixotic journey that tells a story of race, hope, and the nation, which illuminates as much in the failures of McCabe's bold ambitions as it does in the short-lived, spectacular effects of McCabe's call for Black freedom. Gayle teaches journalism at Northeastern University and has published widely in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Daily Beast*, and elsewhere. *Black Moses* was widely reviewed and long-listed for the National Book Award.

**Carla Kaplan's** *Troublemaker: The Fierce, Unruly Life of Jessica Mitford* (Harper, 2025. Winner, Goldsmith Prize; finalist, NBCC & PEN America Bograd Weld biography prizes) tells the unlikely story of Jessica Mitford's escape from the British aristocracy, her rejection of its privileges and comforts, and her life as an American Communist, civil rights activist, and wildly successful muckraking writer, known for works

## FEELING STUCK? BIO OFFERS COACHING

Whatever state your biography's in—vague idea, proposal, well underway—BIO's experienced biographers can help. BIO offers a one-hour coaching session via phone or email for the member discounted rate of \$60. (Coaches may charge more for subsequent hours.) Learn more about the program online in the Members Area of the BIO website.

such as her 1963 blockbuster *The American Way of Death*. Decca, as she was known, was a remarkably successful ally in civil rights, antiwar, consumer rights, and prison abolition movements, cannily wielding the privileged background she rejected to stand out among other leftists and making brilliant use of her irrepressible wit. Kaplan teaches English, women's studies, and African American studies, and has published seven previous books, including *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* and *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance*, both *New York Times* Notable Books. She is the Davis Distinguished Professor of American Literature at Northeastern University.

**Randal Maurice Jelks** is the author of five books, a professor, and a documentary film producer. His most recently published book is *My America: Langston Hughes on Democracy* (Broadleaf Books).

### LUNCH AND AWARDS PRESENTATION

#### Lunch

12:30 to 1:30 in the Concourse.

#### Presentation of the BIO Award, the Keynote Address, and presentation of the Plutarch Award

1:30 to 2:30 in the Auditorium.

### BASICS

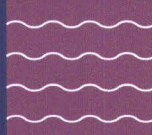
#### The Agents' View

2:45–3:45 PM

What's the publishing market like right now for biographers? Three agents who have represented BIO members and other bestselling nonfiction authors share their perspectives on questions that are on the minds of many authors. What kinds of "voices" are attracting publishers now? What's the overall publishing market like now? What makes an effective proposal? Do authors always benefit by having an agent sell their books? How can authors protect their works in the burgeoning world of Artificial Intelligence? Bring your own questions for this panel of experienced publishing professionals to address.

#### Moderator

**Sara Fitzgerald** is the author of *The Silenced Muse: Emily Hale, T. S. Eliot, and the Role of a Lifetime*, which was recognized by *The Washington Post* as one of its 50 Top Non-Fiction Books of 2024, and *Elly Peterson: Mother of the Moderates*, chosen as a Notable Book of 2012 by the Library



of Michigan. She has also published fiction and narrative non-fiction and is a member of the BIO board of directors.

### Panelists

**Amelia Atlas**, based in the New York office of Creative Artists Agency, represents both fiction and nonfiction. She has a particular interest in narrative nonfiction in the areas of history, current affairs, science, investigative journalism, and cultural criticism. Her authors have been short- or long-listed for the National Book Award, the International Booker Prize, and the National Book Critics Circle Awards, among others.

**Tanya McKinnon** is the principal of New York-based Tanya McKinnon Literary. She represents serious nonfiction, literary fiction, children's books, and graphic novels. Her clients have included recipients of the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, the Lambda Literary Award, the *L.A. Times* Book Prize, and the Frederick Douglass Book Prize, among other awards. After growing up in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the United States, she now finds her home in books that "confront the chaos of reality and distill it into narratives that leave us wiser and more human for having read them."

**Rita Rosenkranz**, principal in the New York-based Rita Rosenkranz Literary Agency, represents adult nonfiction titles almost exclusively. Her wide-ranging list includes health, history, parenting, music, how-to, popular science, business, biography, sports, popular reference, cooking, writing, memoir, spirituality, illustrated books, and general interest titles. Her authors have been recognized by the Military Writers Society of America, the Association of Science Editors, and regional literary organizations, among others.

## CRAFT

### Experimenting With Biographical Form

2:45–3:45 PM

This panel will explore the process of writing experimental biographies, which take the biographical form in new, often unexpected, and sometimes risky directions, incorporating (among other things) visual elements, objects, and borrowings from the techniques of memoir, travel writing, the detective story, or even the quest narrative.

### Moderator

**Janice P. Nimura's** most recent biography, *The Doctors Blackwell* (Norton, 2021), was a finalist for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize and a *New York Times* bestseller, as well as a recipient of a Public Scholar Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Her previous book, *Daughters of the Samurai* (Norton, 2015), was a *New York Times* Notable Book. Her current project, *Knowing Her Place: Rachel Carson and the*

## KITTY KELLEY DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP IN BIOGRAPHY

Biographers International Organization (BIO) invites applications for the Kitty Kelley Dissertation Fellowship in Biography. The fellowship provides \$25,000 to a doctoral student in any department who is writing a dissertation in English focused upon the life of another person or upon the lives of two or more individuals. It cannot be fictionalized nor should the focus be primarily autobiographical. It need not cover the entire life of its subject or subjects. The fellowship is endowed by Kitty Kelley, a founding member of BIO, the author of seven bestselling biographies, and a long-time advocate for biography and biographers. The application period begins on September 1 and closes on February 15. More information is available on BIO's website under the Awards tab.

*Women Who Came Before Her*, is under contract to Random House and has been supported by residencies at the Bogliasco Center, Yale's Beinecke Library, and Yaddo. In 2023-24 Nimura was a fellow at Wesleyan University's College of the Environment, where she created an ongoing writing seminar on women and nature.

### Panelists

**Nina Ellis** is the first biographer of the American short story writer Lucia Berlin (forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2027) and an assistant professor of English and comparative literature at The American University in Cairo. She holds a Ph.D. in American literature from the University of Cambridge, and she also writes short stories, for which she received a Pushcart Prize Special Mention in 2025. She won a Work-in-Progress Award from the Robert B. Silvers Foundation in 2024, and she was BIO's Chip Bishop Fellow in 2023.

**Howard Fishman** is an author, musician, composer, theater-maker, and cultural essayist based in Brooklyn. He is a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*, and his writing has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Telegraph*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Boston Globe*, *ArtForum*, *The Village Voice*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. His book debut, *To Anyone Who Ever Asks: The Life, Music, and Mystery of Connie Converse*, is out now from Dutton.

**Deborah Lutz** is the Kelly Professor in Nineteenth-Century English and American Literature at Penn State University. Her sixth book, a biography of Emily Brontë called *This Dark Night*, was funded by a Guggenheim foundation fellowship, an NEH Public Scholar grant, and a Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers fellowship. Her book *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* was shortlisted for the PEN/Weld Award for Biography.

**Francesca Wade** is the author of *Square Haunting: Five Women, Freedom and London Between the Wars* (2020) and *Gertrude Stein: an Afterlife* (2025). She has held fellowships at the Leon Levy Center for Biography, the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, and the Harvard Radcliffe Institute. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *London Review of Books*, *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, and other places.

## BUSINESS

### University Presses Make the Grade

2:45–3:45 PM

University presses have long had a reputation for publishing deadly academic tomes, but they seem to have become our most prolific and reliable publishers of general interest biography. This panel will focus on the changing fortunes and strategies of university presses, on what they are looking for in a biography, and on whether you will make any money going in that direction.

#### Moderator

**Diane Kiesel**, a former newspaper reporter, switched gears early on to become a lawyer. After a decade as a New York City prosecutor, she was appointed to the bench, where for nearly 25 years she served in the criminal term of the New York Supreme Court. She never strayed far from her journalistic roots, however, writing three books as a judge: *Domestic Violence: Law, Policy and Practice*, *She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer*, and *When Charlie Met Joan: The Tragedy of the Chaplin Trials and the Failings of American Law*. All three were published by academic presses.

## JOIN (OR START) AN ONGOING ROUNDTABLE

BIO now has more than a dozen roundtables—small groups of members who meet monthly online to discuss common concerns. The Online Events Committee wants to help BIO members join roundtables that are willing to accept new members or to start new roundtables if there is enough interest. (Perhaps you'll come across someone at the conference you'll want to meet with regularly.)

If you are interested in starting or joining a roundtable, please complete the short survey that is located at [tinyurl.com/2mm7xxpu](https://tinyurl.com/2mm7xxpu) or use the QR code. Later this summer, the committee will follow up in response.



#### Panelists

**Carl Rollyson**, professor emeritus of journalism at Baruch College, CUNY, has published 18 biographies and several books about biography. His subjects include Marilyn Monroe, Lillian Hellman, Martha Gellhorn, Norman Mailer, Rebecca West, Susan Sontag, Jill Craigie, Michael Foot, Sylvia Plath, Amy Lowell, Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, Thurgood Marshall, Emily Dickinson, William Faulkner, Dana Andrews, Walter Brennan, and Ronald Colman. His forthcoming books are on presidential biography, Eve Arden, Sappho, and Herman Melville. He reviews biographies twice a week for *The New York Sun*.

**Eric Brandt** is a publishing executive with a Ph.D. from Columbia University and over 30 years of experience in acquisitions and marketing at major trade publishers such as HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Basic Books, as well as at university presses including Columbia, Yale, and Stanford. In leadership positions, he has published *New York Times* best-selling books, created publicity campaigns for internationally renowned authors, secured grants for digital publishing initiatives, and worked to make existing books open access. Currently, he serves as the director of the University of Virginia Press.

**Elizabeth Sherburn Demers** is the director of Michigan State University Press. She has a Ph.D. in colonial American history from Michigan State University. She has had a long career with university and independent presses, including the University of Nebraska Press, Johns Hopkins, University of Michigan Press, Quarto Publishing Group, and Potomac Books. Demers co-authored and co-edited the biographical reference work *Icons of American Cooking* with Victor Geraci, and the *Encyclopedia of American Populism* with Alexandra Kindell, both published by ABC-CLIO. A champion of biography, she has published works by several BIO members. She splits her time between Detroit and Chicago.

## ISSUES

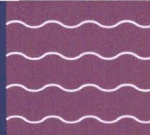
### The Sixties, Revisited

2:45–3:45 PM

The 1960s were an era of profound social upheaval. With civil rights now under assault, with Robert F. Kennedy's son spearheading a war on science, and with right-wing podcasters promoting the use of psychedelics, how have our perspectives changed on the period historians designate “the long Sixties” (1955-1973)?

#### Moderator

**Jude Webre** is a political and intellectual historian with a particular interest in the intersection between creative expression



and radical movements. He has taught at NYU and Columbia and served as a research assistant and consulting historian to Robert Caro.

### Panelists

**Susannah Cahalan** is a journalist and the author of *The Acid Queen: The Psychedelic Life and Counterculture Rebellion of Rosemary Woodruff Leary* (Viking). She is also the author of the memoir *Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness* (Free Press, 2012) and *The Great Pretender: The Undercover Mission That Changed Our Understanding of Madness* (Grand Central, 2019).

**Ru Marshall** is a visual artist, novelist, and the author of *American Trickster: The Hidden Lives of Carlos Castaneda*. Their novel, *A Separate Reality*, was nominated for a Lambda Award for debut fiction. The recipient of the 2016 Hazel Rowley Prize from BIO, their writing has appeared in *Salon*, *N + 1*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Evergreen Review*.

**Tamara Payne** is the co-author, with her father Les Payne, of *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* (Liveright), which received the Pulitzer Prize in biography, the National Book Award for Nonfiction, the Andrew Carnegie Award for Excellence in Nonfiction, and was selected as a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year.

**Sam Tanenhaus** is an historian and journalist and the author of *Buckley: The Life and the Revolution That Changed America* (Random House), *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* (Modern Library), and *Louis Armstrong: Musician* (Chelsea House). He has served as the editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and as a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*. He currently writes for *Prospect*.

## BASICS

### Attention Must Be Paid: Writing About Forgotten Lives

4:00–5:00 PM

This panel will look at the challenges and rewards of writing biographies of ordinary people, those remarkable though often obscure men and women who aspired to develop their creative abilities, express their deepest selves, and earn their livings doing so. All biographers of common people—persons unknown to us but whose lives typify their time and place—rely on limited sources, sparse and uneven records, fragments of information, and unusual evidence. They also highlight elements of familiar documents that have been overlooked by other historians. These materials do not always add up to a traditional biography—one based on personal papers and records—but the biographies they do form have something new to tell us.

### Moderator

**April F. Masten**, a professor of American history at Stony Brook University, specializes in the labor history of the arts. She is the author of *Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York* (Penn Press, 2008), which recovers the experiences and aspirations of the thousands of young women who managed to study the visual arts and become professional artists in an emerging industrial society that extolled masculine genius and exploited women's labor. She has also published essays on the Jacksonian-era genre painter Lilly Martin Spencer and on why we need to write biographies of artists' models. Her recently published dual biography *Diamond and Juba: The Raucous World of 19th-Century Challenge Dancing* (University of Illinois Press, 2025), tells the story of Irish American John Diamond and African American William Henry Lane, better known as Juba, who achieved international fame in the mid-19th century as rival champions in the art and sport of challenge dancing.

### Panelists

**Vincent DiGirolamo** is associate professor of history at Baruch College and author of *Crying the News: A History of America's Newsboys* (Oxford University Press, 2019), winner of the Turner, Taft, Mott, Palmegiano, and DeSantis prizes in history. His work has appeared in *Time* magazine, *The Times of London*, and the *San Francisco Examiner-Chronicle*. His latest essay, "Slaves in the Salon: The Underside of Julius LeBlanc Stewart's Belle Epoque," examines the American-born artist's centuries-long family involvement in Cuban sugar slavery. It was published in *The Sweet Life: Julius LeBlanc Stewart and Painting the Belle Epoque* (Giles, 2024). DiGirolamo is currently writing a biography of Gilded Age radical journalist John Swinton.

**Eric K. Washington**, a BIO board member, is an independent scholar. He wrote his debut biography, *Boss of the Grips: The Life of James H. Williams and the Red Caps of Grand Central Terminal* (Liveright, 2019), with support from the Leon Levy Center for Biography. The book won Columbia University's Herbert H. Lehman Prize, the Guides Association of New York City's Apple Award, and special recognition from the Municipal Art Society's Brendan Gill Prize committee. He chairs BIO's annual Frances "Frank" Rollin Fellowship, awarded for a biography-in-progress on an African American figure. He is now working on a biography of Harlem Renaissance-era actor Richard Huey and a group biography centered around the 19th-century Colored School No. 4, a recently city-designated landmark.

**Richard Carlin** is the author of more than a dozen books, including biographies of jazz nightclub owner and record producer Morris Levy and composer-performer Eubie Blake, coauthored with Ken Bloom, as well as several histories of

country music. He has produced 10 albums of traditional music, now part of the Smithsonian/Folkways archives, and written many articles on popular music of the 20th century. In addition, he has been an acquisitions editor for music and arts books for over four decades. His latest research is on the life and times of Lottie Gee, the actress who starred in the groundbreaking black musical *Shuffle Along* (1921).

## CRAFT

### Queering Biography

4:00–5:00 PM

Whether chronicling the life of an LGBTQ person or writing as an LGBTQ author, queerness is a central theme for many biographers. Topics include the nitty-gritty of handling pronouns and name changes, overarching questions about describing historical figures' lives with care, and how a queer POV can enrich biography.

#### Moderator

**Julie Kliegman** is a writer and editor with work in outlets including *The New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, *Bookforum*, *The Ringer*, *Defector*, *Texas Monthly*, *Vulture*, *BuzzFeed News*, and *The Verge*. Their forthcoming biography, *Finding Renée Richards*, chronicles the life and legacy of the transgender tennis player who successfully sued for her right to compete in the 1977 U.S. Open women's draw. Kliegman's first book was *Mind Game: An Inside Look at the Mental Health Playbook of Elite Athletes*. They live in Queens, New York.

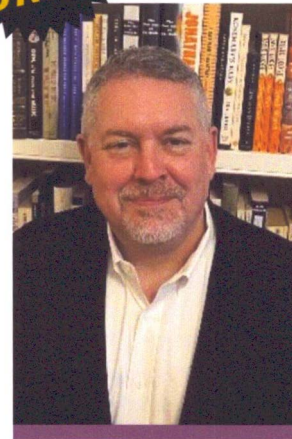
#### Panelists

**Cynthia Carr** is the author, most recently, of *Candy Darling: Dreamer, Icon, Superstar*, winner of the 2024 National Book Critics Circle Award for biography and BIO's 2025 Plutarch Award. Her previous biography, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*, won a Lambda Literary Award in 2013. Carr chronicled the work of contemporary artists as a *Village Voice* staff writer in the 1980s and 1990s (under the byline C.Carr). She was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 2007 and was a fellow at the Leon Levy Center for Biography (2016-17).

**Brad Gooch** is a poet, novelist, and biographer whose latest book, *Radiant: The Life and Line of Keith Haring* (Harper, 2024), was awarded the 2025 Lambda Literary Award in Gay Memoir/Biography and is being developed as a TV series written and directed by Andrew Haigh. Forthcoming in June is his new memoir, *Good Morning Moon: A Snapshot of an American Family*. His previous books include *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*, and the memoir *Smash Cut*. He is the recipient of

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OCTOBER 6, 2026



BIO will honor William J. Thomas, publisher and editor-in-chief of Doubleday, with its Editorial Excellence Award, presented annually to an outstanding editor, from nominations submitted by BIO members. The event will be held in the Skylight Room at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Thomas joined Doubleday as editor in 1993, became editor-in-chief in 1998, and publisher and editor-in-chief in 2008. During his tenure Doubleday has published

hundreds of *New York Times* bestsellers, nine Pulitzer Prize winners, three National Book Award winners, five National Book Critics Circle Award winners, several finalists for these prizes, more than 125 *New York Times Book Review* Notable Books of the Year, several of which were Top Ten choices, many dozens of B&N Discover picks, Amazon Best Books of the Year, and Indie Next Picks. In addition to his managerial duties, he also edits a select number of titles, including biographies.

National Endowment for the Humanities and Guggenheim fellowships.

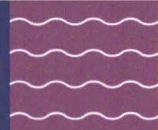
**Evelyn C. White** is the author of *Alice Walker: A Life* (2004). A graduate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, she wrote for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and is widely published in the U.S. and Canada. She lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

## BUSINESS

### Life-Writing for Hire

4:00–5:00 PM

Take a gander at any nonfiction bestseller list today. Chances are good that the celebrity or prominent politician whose name graces the cover employed the assistance of a ghost-writer. This practice extends to the growing phenomenon of self-publishing: Would-be authors not likely to land a traditional book deal (if they even wish to seek such a thing) needing expert research, writing, and/or editing assistance to make order from the chaos of their personal papers. The kind of archival research and writing we do as biographers is, in other words, valuable to others. In this panel, we'll discuss the business and practice of life-writing for hire and how to monetize your skills.



### Moderator

**Lisa Napoli** is a former journalist for *The New York Times*, MSNBC, and public radio's Marketplace, as well as the author of four books—three biographies and one memoir. She recently completed her graduate degree in biography and memoir at the CUNY Graduate Center. In recent years, she's taken to ghostwriting and editing and enjoys leading memoir-writing workshops. Napoli is hoping the film version of her book about Ted Turner and the making of 24-hour news sells more books.

### Panelists

**Kate Buford** is a founder, along with Abby Santamaria, of Biography by Design, LLC, a company they created in 2016 to use their skills as published biographers to assist families, individuals, nonprofits, and corporations with biography projects and to create a revenue stream for themselves. Buford's *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe* (Knopf/Bison Books) was a 2010 Editors' Choice of *The New York Times*, and her *Burt Lancaster: An American Life* (Knopf/Da Capo/Aurum UK) was named one of the best books of 2000 by the *Times* and other publications. She has also been a commentator on NPR's Morning Edition and APM's Marketplace.

For the last 25 years, **Madeleine Morel** and 2M Communications have exclusively represented ghostwriters, matchmaking them with "authors." She only works with writers who have been published by the major houses. Eighty percent of her business comes from literary agents and the rest from the publishers themselves. 2M has helped to steer over 75 books, in all nonfiction categories, onto the *New York Times* bestseller list. She describes herself as the Tinder of book publishing.

### ISSUES

## How 1776 Speaks to Us Today

4:00–5:00 PM

The story of American history is constantly evolving as the work of biography uncovers long-overlooked lives and long-hidden documents and prompts important reconsiderations of so-called conventional wisdom. The roles of women, domestic lives, African Americans, and indigenous people have long been ignored in the telling of that history, for example. Two hundred and fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we know that the founding document was not frozen in time, and how it has been tested and reaffirmed over the centuries is an ongoing and vital part of its story as the backbone of all Americans' freedom. This panel brings together three prominent biographers and historians to illustrate their experience as researchers, discoverers, and spirited, open-minded storytellers.

### Moderator

**Steve Paul**, BIO president, is a career journalist turned biographer of literary lives. His third biography, about the American poet William Stafford, is planned for publication in 2027 by Oregon State University Press.

### Panelists

**Stacy Schiff** is the author of *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize; *Saint-Exupéry*, a Pulitzer Prize finalist; and *A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America*, winner of the George Washington Book Prize. Published to ecstatic reviews, her *Cleopatra: A Life* was a

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 DONORS!

BIO is extremely grateful for contributions made to the organization by our members and friends in 2025. As membership dues and conference fees don't cover all our expenses, we depend on the generosity of people like you to continue to produce the stimulating and informative programs for which BIO is known. For donations that ranged from \$25 to \$200,000, we thank each and every one of the persons listed below.

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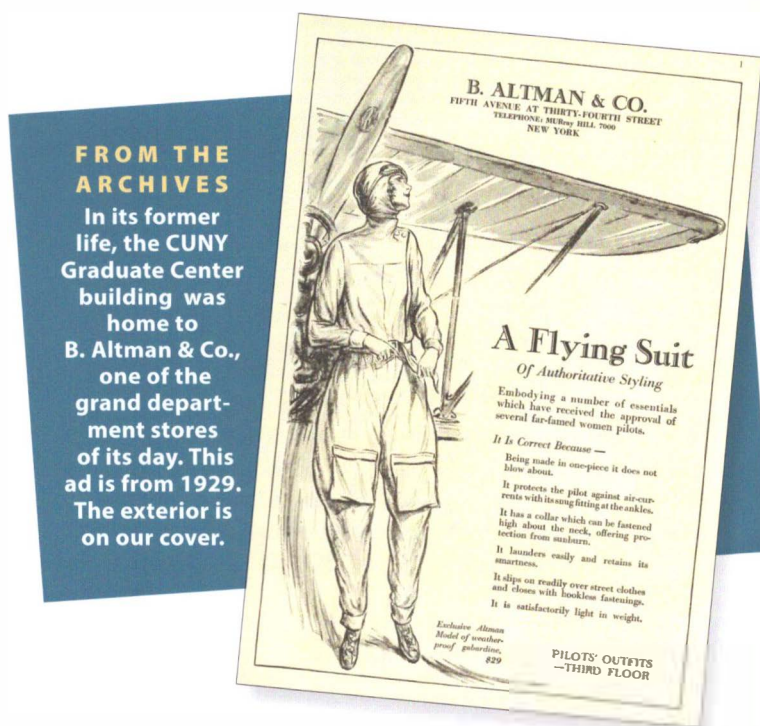
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No. 1 bestseller. Named one of *The New York Times's* Top Ten Books of 2010, it has been translated into 35 languages and won the PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. David McCullough greeted Schiff's 2015 book, *The Witches*, also a No. 1 bestseller, as "brilliant from start to finish." Schiff's most recent book, *The Revolutionary: Samuel Adams*, was a *Wall Street Journal* Top Ten Book of 2022 and figured as well on President Obama's list of Favorite Books of 2022. *The Wall Street Journal* has called Schiff "perhaps the most seductive writer of nonfiction prose in America in our time."

**Amanda Vaill** is the author of *Pride and Pleasure*, winner of the 2026 Pulitzer Prize for Biography, as well as *Hotel Florida*, *Somewhere*, and the bestselling *Everybody Was So Young*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is an Emmy-nominated screenwriter, and her journalism and criticism have appeared in many publications, including *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Washington Post*, *Town & Country*, and *New York*. A past fellow of the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts, and the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, Vaill lives in New York City.

**Ted Widmer** is the editor or author of eight books, including, most recently, *The Living Declaration: A Biography of America's Founding Text*. He has taught at CUNY, Brown, and Harvard, and directed research centers at Brown, Washington Col-

lege, and the Library of Congress. A work he published in 2020, *Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days to Washington* (Simon & Schuster), won several prizes.



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**CUNY** GRADUATE CENTER



**THURSDAY MAY 28**

10:00 AM– 3:15 PM	<b>Tours</b> (For those who signed up in advance)
12:00 PM	<b>Registration Opens</b> CUNY GRADUATE CENTER, CONCOURSE LEVEL
1:00– 3:00 PM	<b>Workshop</b> How to Write Effective Book Proposals (For those who signed up in advance) ROOM C201-202
3:30– 5:00 PM	<b>Member Readings and Awards Presentations</b> CUNY GRADUATE CENTER PROSHANSKY AUDITORIUM
5:30– 7:00 PM	<b>Welcome Reception</b> THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION, 7 WEST 43RD STREET

**FRIDAY MAY 29**

8:00– 8:40 AM	<b>Breakfast and Registration</b> CONCOURSE LEVEL			
8:40– 9:00 AM	<b>Welcome</b> BIO President Steve Paul and Leon Levy Center Executive Director Kai Bird PROSHANSKY AUDITORIUM			
9:00– 10:00 AM	<b>James Atlas Plenary</b> Ron Chernow and Brenda Wineapple in Conversation, Moderated by Brian Kerrigan PROSHANSKY AUDITORIUM			
10:15– 11:15 AM	In the Right Hands: Biographers as Collectors <b>(B)</b> ROOM C201-202	Radical Biography for Teens <b>(C)</b> ROOM C204	What Do Editors Want? <b>(BZ)</b> AUDITORIUM	Life Writing and Difference: A Conversation on Race and Biography <b>(I)</b> ROOM C205
11:30 AM– 12:30 PM	Using Genealogical Tools to Research Your Biographical Subject <b>(B)</b> ROOM C204	Dancing About Architec- ture: Writing Biographies of Musicians <b>(C)</b> ROOM C205	Beyond the Launch: Audience Outreach for the Long Term <b>(BZ)</b> AUDITORIUM	Troublemakers <b>(I)</b> ROOM C201-202
12:30– 1:30 PM	<b>Lunch</b> CONCOURSE LOBBY			
1:30– 2:30 PM	<b>Presentation of the BIO Award With Keynote by 2026 Honoree T.J. Stiles, and Presentation of the Plutarch Award</b> PROSHANSKY AUDITORIUM			
2:45– 3:45 PM	The Agents'View <b>(B)</b> Room C201-202	Experimenting With Biographical Form <b>(C)</b> AUDITORIUM	University Presses Make the Grade <b>(BZ)</b> ROOM C204	The Sixties, Revisited <b>(I)</b> ROOM C205
4:00– 5:00 PM	Attention Must Be Paid: Writing About Forgotten Lives <b>(B)</b> AUDITORIUM	Queering Biography <b>(C)</b> ROOM C204	Life-Writing for Hire <b>(BZ)</b> ROOM C205	How 1776 Speaks to Us Today <b>(I)</b> ROOM C201-202
5:00– 7:00 PM	<b>Closing Reception</b> CONCOURSE LOBBY			

**TRACKS: (B) Basics (C) Craft (BZ) Business (I) Issues in Biography**

Keep up the conversations after the conference! Connect with fellow BIO members via BIO's Member Database. Visit the Members Area of [biographersinternational.org](http://biographersinternational.org) for more information.