



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Librarian of Virginia

Dwayne Betts, Former Inmate, Now Author and Mentor, to Speak at the Library of Virginia on August 12

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For Immediate Release

The Library of Virginia is pleased to present a free talk and book signing by Dwayne Betts on August 12 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the Lecture Hall of the Library. Dwayne Betts will speak about *A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival and Coming of Age in Prison*. Cosponsoring this program are JustChildren, Families & Allies of Virginia's Youth, and the Black History Museum and Cultural Center.

Betts was a 16-year-old honors student and class treasurer at Suitland High School from a lower-middle-class family when he carjacked someone and was charged as an adult with carjacking, use of a firearm during a felony, and attempted robbery. A bright young kid, weighing only 126 pounds, he served his eight-year sentence as part of the adult population in some of the worst prisons in Virginia.

A Question of Freedom is a coming-of-age story, with the unique twist that it takes place in prison. Utterly alone—and with the growing realization that he really is not going home any time soon—Betts confronts profound questions about violence, freedom, crime, race, and the justice system. During his first two years in prison, he spent nearly a year in isolation for twice assaulting a guard. He turned to books for solace, reading whatever he could get his hands on. He started writing essays and poetry, taught himself Spanish, and earned his high school diploma.

Shortly after his release from prison he started work in a bookstore and established YoungMenRead, a book club for young adult males. He applied and was accepted to Prince George's Community College, where he made straight 'A's' and was accepted into the honors academy, guaranteeing automatic admission and partial scholarships to the University of Maryland and American University and a full scholarship to Howard University. He graduated from the University of Maryland, served as an intern at the Hurston/Wright Foundation, and has studied with Rita Dove. Currently he is graduate student at Warren Wilson College, where he has been awarded the Holden Fellowship.

The Library of Virginia is located at 800 East Broad Street in historic downtown Richmond. There is free parking for this talk in the Library's underground deck, which is accessible from either Eighth or Ninth

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streets. The Library of Virginia offers numerous, free programs that are open to the public. Please see our calendar on our Web site (www.lva.virginia.gov) for more information.

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About the Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia holds the world's most extensive collection of material about the Old Dominion and has been a steward of the commonwealth's documentary and printed heritage since 1823. The story of Virginia and Virginians has been told in many ways since 1607. At the Library of Virginia it is told through nearly 110 million manuscripts and more than 1.8 million books, serials, bound periodicals, microfilm reels, newspapers, and state and federal documents, each an individual tile in the vast and colorful mosaic of Virginia's experience.

About JustChildren

The Legal Aid Justice Center's JustChildren Program is Virginia's largest children's law program. The program relies on a range of strategies to make sure that Virginia's most vulnerable young people receive the services and support they need to lead successful lives in their communities. It provides free civil legal representation statewide to low-income children who have problems with the education, foster care, and juvenile justice systems. The JustChildren Program seeks local and statewide reforms to improve the systems on which children depend.

About Families & Allies of Virginia's Youth

Families & Allies of Virginia's Youth is a statewide, family-driven organization that engages youth and families regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status. Families & Allies of Virginia's Youth organizes, empowers, and supports families and young people who encounter the justice system, and advocates for reforms so that every young person in the system has a fair chance to change, heal, learn, and grow. The organization advocates for the use of more community-based responses to young people in trouble, with less reliance on incarceration.

The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia

The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia was founded in 1981 and seeks to become a permanent repository for visual, oral, and written records and artifacts commemorating the lives and accomplishments of blacks in Virginia. The museum's goal is to become a statewide resource on the many facets of black history through exhibitions, discussions, and celebrations. The museum collects documents, limited editions, prints, art, and photographs for use in its Black History Archives Program.