



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Nikki Giovanni to Receive 2016 Literary Lifetime Achievement Award from the Library of Virginia

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For Immediate Release

Each year the Library of Virginia grants a Literary Lifetime Achievement Award to recognize outstanding and long-lasting contributions to literature. This year, the Library will honor renowned poet Nikki Giovanni with the award.

Giovanni grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Knoxville, Tennessee. By the time she received her undergraduate degree in history from Fisk University in 1967, she was an outspoken activist for civil rights and equality issues, organizing Cincinnati's first Black Arts Festival that year. In 1968, when Giovanni was only 24, she published her first books of verse, *Black Feeling*, *Black Talk* and *Black Judgement*. After brief teaching stints at Rutgers University, Queens College, and Ohio State University, she joined the English faculty at Virginia Tech in 1987 and became a full professor in 1989.

Called the "Princess of Black Poetry" by the *New York Times*, Giovanni uses bold language to address social issues based on her experiences as an African American woman. Since 1968, she has published more than two dozen volumes of poetry, essays, and edited anthologies, as well as 11 illustrated children's books, including the award-winning *Rosa*, about Rosa Parks. Her autobiography, *Gemini*, was a finalist for the 1973 National Book Award. In 2004, her album *The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection* was a Grammy finalist for the Best Spoken Word Album. Giovanni has received numerous awards, including the inaugural Rosa L. Parks Woman of Courage Award (2002), the Virginia Governor's Award for the Arts (2000), and *Ebony Magazine's* Woman of the Year (1970), although the most unusual honor may be a South American bat species named for her: *Micronycteris giovanniae*. She is also a seven-time recipient of an NAACP Image Award. A devoted teacher, Giovanni has been a visiting professor and poet-in-residence at numerous colleges, and she encourages students of all ages to express themselves creatively through writing.

Giovanni earned an enduring place in the Hokie Nation with a poem she wrote on April 16, 2007, the day mass shootings at Virginia Tech claimed 33 lives, including that of the shooter, and injured 27 others. The poem, which she read at a college memorial service the day after the shootings, began with the words "We are Virginia Tech" and ended with "We will prevail, We will prevail, We will prevail, We are Virginia Tech." Her poem helped Virginia Tech students and faculty recover from the tragedy.

Giovanni will receive her award on Saturday, October 15, 2016, at the 19th Annual Library of Virginia Literary Awards Celebration. For ticket information, please contact Dana Brown with the Library of Virginia Foundation at 804-692-3900 or e-mail Dana.Brown@lva.virginia.gov.

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