

## NEWSLETTER

Fourth Quarter 2011



**CENTER  
FOR THE BOOK**  
IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Center for the Book's networks of state centers and reading promotion partners extend the reach of the national center far beyond the programs it sponsors in the Washington area. The national center in the Library of Congress has established this newsletter to serve as a forum for all Center for the Book activities. We want to tell you what we are doing in Washington and around the country to support our mission of promoting books, reading, libraries and literacy.

And we want to hear about all the innovative ways you call attention to the importance of reading. Your updates can serve as year-round "idea exchanges" that augment our two in-person Idea Exchange meetings, held at the Library of Congress.

Please send your submissions to [glam@loc.gov](mailto:glam@loc.gov).

## 'Reading Is Not Optional'

### *Walter Dean Myers Becomes Third National Ambassador for Young People's Literature*

*By Mark Hartsell*

Walter Dean Myers knows from experience the effect reading can have on the life of a young person.

Standing at a podium in the Jefferson Building, the author related an encounter he once had with a young man – an inmate at a detention center – of similar background and interests.

How, Myers wondered, did I manage to avoid such a fate?

"Then it came to me: I could read since I was 5 years old, and I could read well," he said.

Myers, who on Jan. 10 was inaugurated as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, hopes to use his new role to pass on his love of reading and to give children the benefit of his life experiences.

Myers is the author of more than 100 books – National Book Award finalists "Monster," "Autobiography of My Dead Brother" and "Lockdown" among them – and the winner of five Coretta Scott King Awards and two Newbery Honors.

John Y. Cole, Center for the Book director, emceed the ceremony, noting that the Center co-sponsors the Ambassador program with the Children's Book Council. He welcomed all those in attendance, "and I also want to welcome our special guests from the Capitol Hill Day School and the Cesar Chavez Public Charter School. After all, this is a program about young people and the importance of reading, so we could not have such a program without their direct involvement."

Following his brief history of the 1897 Thomas Jefferson Building, where the event was held, Cole introduced Robin Adelson, executive director of the Children's Book Council. The CBC, and its foundation, Every Child a Reader, is one of more than 80 reading promotion partners of the Center for the Book. The CBC is the nonprofit trade association of publishers of young people's books.

Adelson remarked that when the program was first initiated, she wanted it to be called a "laureateship." She soon realized that "this is not a laureate but an ambassadorship." Why?

"Our ambassadors don't sit on their laurels. They work hard to spread their message, to share their platform and to raise awareness of the books available" to young people.



*Myers, whose platform is "Reading Is Not Optional," told the audience that "reading did things for me when I was troubled."*

All photos: Abby Brack/Library of Congress

*(Story continues on next page)*

*(Walter Dean Myers, from page 1*

Walter Dean Myers “is, in short, among today’s most-honored as well as most-read authors,” Librarian of Congress James H. Billington said in introducing the new ambassador. “Along with his many literary achievements, Walter brings a new perspective to the national ambassador program.”

Myers is the third author to hold the position: His predecessors, Jon Scieszka and Katherine Paterson, also took the podium to wish Myers well in his two-year term.

The ambassador program was founded and is sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, the Children’s Book Council and the council’s foundation, Every Child a Reader.

The program is designed to raise awareness of the importance of young readers’ literature to lifelong literacy, education and the betterment of the lives of young people.

At the Jefferson ceremony, Myers spoke of the importance of reading in his own life.

Myers’ mother died when he was a small child, and his father sent him from his West Virginia home to Harlem to live with foster parents.

The stepfather who reared him was illiterate, but his stepmother often read to him – frequently, Myers said, from romance novels or magazines.

By the age of 5, Myers had learned not only to read but to love it.

He suffered from a speech impediment and didn’t always do well in school. Reading – and writing poetry and short stories – became his refuge.

“Reading did things for me when I was troubled – and I often was,” Myers said. “When my stepmom became involved in alcohol and that was filling up my life and filling up my entire head, in my anxiety I could turn to books. I could move myself away.”

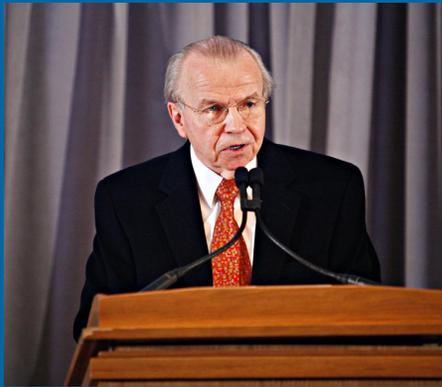
Myers dropped out of high school and at age 17 joined the Army, but, he said, reading helped him make the most of opportunities.

“I had the ability to take advantage of every opportunity that came my way. .... Whatever came my way, I could read well enough to do it,” he said.

As ambassador, he hopes to carry that message – as expressed in his platform, “Reading is not optional” – to schools, libraries, detention centers and wherever else he might go.

Myers cited two things he especially wants to accomplish: encourage adults to

*(Story continues on next page)*



*John Y. Cole, Center for the Book director, emceed the program, commenting that “this is a program about young people and the importance of reading.”*



*Walter Dean Myers accepts the medal as third National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature from Librarian of Congress James H. Billington.*

(Walter Dean Myers, from previous page)



read to children as early as possible and foster reading among boys, who, research shows, don't read as often as girls.

"This," Myers said, "has to be something that young people look at and say, 'I can do this. I can do it.'"

*Mark Hartsell is editor of the Library's staff newsletter, The Gazette.*

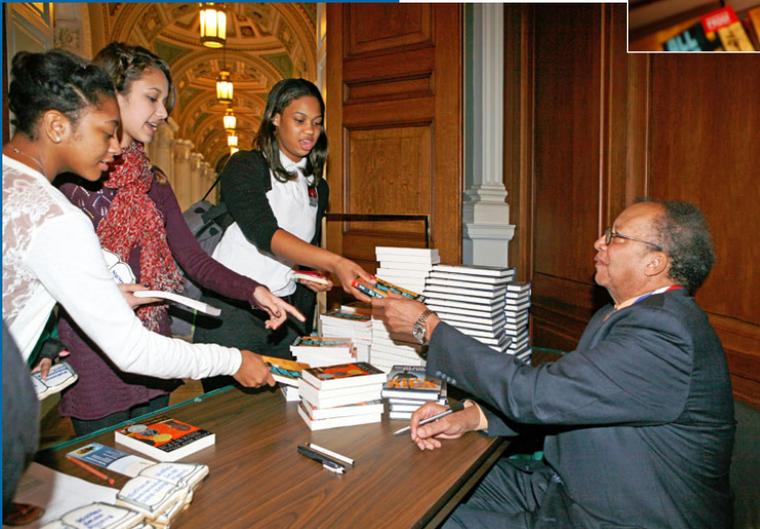
*Guy Lamolinara contributed to this article.*



*Ambassador times three: Katherine Paterson was National Ambassador in 2010-2011 and Jon Scieszka was the first ambassador, in 2008-2009. They congratulated Walter Dean Myers on his new position.*



*Above: Following the ceremony, Myers signed his books for the young people in attendance; Robin Adelson, executive director of the Children's Book Council, which co-sponsors the National Ambassador program, provided assistance, as Jane Gilchrist, coordinator of the Library's Young Readers Center, looked on. The Center for the Book, the other sponsor of the Ambassador program, oversees the YRC.*



*Left: The young people from Capitol Hill Day School and Cesar Chavez Public Charter School were eager to meet Myers and have their books signed.*

*Prior to beginning the ceremony, Dr. Billington shared a few words with Scieszka and Myers.*



## *Selected News Articles About Walter Dean Myers as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature*

- Robin's Roundup, January 3, 2012: "[All hail the new National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)"
- New York Times, January 3, 2012: "[Children's Book Envoy Defines His Mission](#)"
- Publishers Weekly, January 3, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers Named National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)"
- SLJ, January 3, 2012: "[SLJ Exclusive Interview: Walter Dean Myers, the New National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)"
- Shelf Awareness, January 3, 2012: "[Myers New National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)"
- GalleyCat, January 3, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers Crowned National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)"
- Christian Science Monitor, January 3, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers chosen as new YA literature ambassador](#)"
- JSONline, January 3, 2012: "[Street-smart Walter Dean Myers named national ambassador for children's literature](#)"
- Huffington Post, January 4, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers Appointed New National Ambassador for Young Readers](#)"
- SLJ, January 5, 2012: "[Get To Know Walter Dean Myers, A List of Resources](#)"
- NPR, January 10, 2012: "[To Do Well in Life, You Have to Read Well](#)"
- Scripps News, January 12, 2012: "[Corner-Bonus: Meet the new kid-lit ambassador, Walter Dean Myers](#)"
- Shelf Awareness, January 12, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers Sworn in at the Library of Congress](#)"
- The Washington Post.com, January 16, 2012: "[Walter Dean Myers, the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, on raising readers](#)"
- Rock Center with Brian Williams, January 19, 2012: "[Library of Congress names National Ambassador to Young People's Literature, Walter Dean Myers](#)"
- The Washington Post.com, January 20, 2012: Walter Dean Myers: "[Bad Boy Makes Good](#)"
- The Root.com, January 21, 2012: "[Literacy Leader: Reading is Not Optional](#)"

# The Early Career of J. Edgar Hoover

*Historian Discusses 'Young J. Edgar' and His Work at the Library of Congress*

by Guy Lamolinara

“What’s real and what’s not” was the overall theme of a Jan. 18 talk by Kenneth Ackerman, author of “Young J. Edgar: Hoover, the Red Scare and the Assault on Civil Liberties” (Carroll and Graf Publishers).

What Ackerman was discussing in his Books & Beyond program was the career of J. Edgar Hoover – a career that has attracted renewed attention, thanks to director Clint Eastwood’s recent biopic, “J. Edgar.” Many of those in the standing-room-only audience were Library employees who were of course interested in Hoover’s career during the years 1913-1917, when he was a cataloger here.

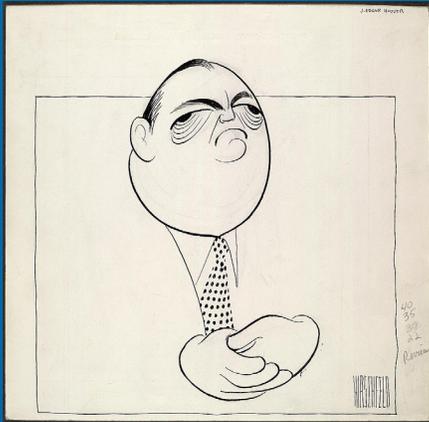
When Washington, D.C., native Hoover came to the Library he was just 18, a graduate of Central High, the magnet school “where all the smartest kids went,” said Ackerman. He enrolled in the night school program at George Washington University law school directly out of high school. At that time, a bachelor’s degree was not required before attendance at law school.

Hoover grew up on Capitol Hill and started at the Library as a \$30-a-month clerk, which according to Ackerman, is about \$900 today. He was a clerk who created catalog cards. “But Hoover did not actually invent [the Library’s card system], as they suggested in the movie. He learned it very well,” however.

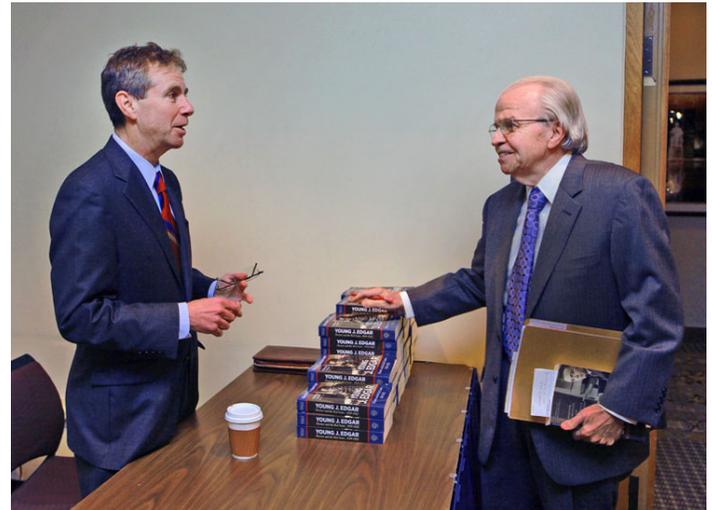
So well, in fact, that he was promoted several times. By the time Hoover left, he had doubled his salary. As the movie indicated, “it is true” that while at the Library, Hoover “had his epiphany, that you could use this card system to track things other than books. And a few years later, when he started at the Justice Department and had his big break in 1919 when he headed up the Radicals Division, one of the first things he did was to set up a card catalog system for the files. Every name of every subversive or radical or radical organization or radical journal ... he put together a card on and through that he revitalized the FBI files. Within a few months he had 60,000 cards.” Two years later, he had amassed an extraordinary 450,000 cards.

The cards are now in the National Archives. Ackerman said they bear a strong resemblance to the Library’s catalog cards. “They have a code at the top that tells

*(Story continues on next page)*



*J. Edgar Hoover, by caricaturist Al Hirschfeld. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.*



*Center for the Book Director John Y. Cole and Hoover biographer Kenneth Ackerman briefly discussed Hoover’s career at the Library just prior to Ackerman’s presentation.*

Abby Brack/Library of Congress

(J. Edgar Hoover, from previous page)

you where you can locate the files.” But, said Ackerman, the location of some files was known only to Hoover. Files on certain people were hidden within other files. For example, the file on [Supreme Court Justice] Felix Frankfurter was embedded in an organizational file. “Hoover happened to know which file to look for.”

The legend of J. Edgar Hoover is so large and so “deliberately built both by friends and enemies that it’s very hard to cut away” fact from fiction, said Ackerman.

Hoover was director of the FBI (under its various names) for 48 years -- “a remarkable feat of sheer longevity,” from 1924 to 1972, under nine presidents, from Calvin Coolidge to Richard Nixon. He made his mark during the Great Depression when he and his team brought in a generation of gangsters “back when gangsters had cool names like Pretty Boy Floyd and Machine Gun Kelly and Baby Face Nelson. He brought scientific law enforcement to the bureau. . . . He created the image of the G-man as a clean-cut, effective, law enforcement professional; people

who always get their man.”

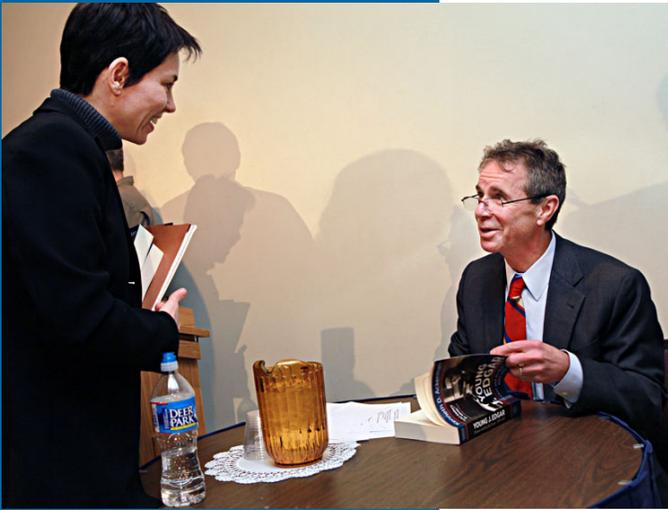
The full truth about Hoover came out after he died in 1972. “It turned out that much of this image was a veneer, that Mr. Hoover had a very pronounced dark side. It came out that the FBI kept hundreds of thousands of files. Sex files; secret files on movie stars; on presidents; and on senators that were used for blackmail and sometimes for personal amusement.”

According to one estimate, as of 1960, the FBI had 432,000 files simply for the category ‘subversive.’ “Starting in the 1950s... he instituted the use of ... secret wiretaps, dirty tricks, sabotage aimed at pretty much anyone he considered subversive. In the 1960s that became primarily civil rights groups. Martin Luther King was the headliner, as well as antiwar protesters from the Vietnam era. He seemed to be obsessed with two things: communism and his remaining in office.

... By the time I started doing research on him ... it was extremely hard to find anyone who would support him in a conversation” about his career. He came across as a possibly gay man who harassed gay people, a man with probably an African-American ancestor who harassed African-Americans and a law enforcement person who placed himself above the law.”

How does someone become a J. Edgar Hoover?

(Continued on next page)



Ackerman signs a book for a fan.



Hoover (far right) confers with President John Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, on Feb. 24, 1961. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

(J. Edgar Hoover, from previous page)

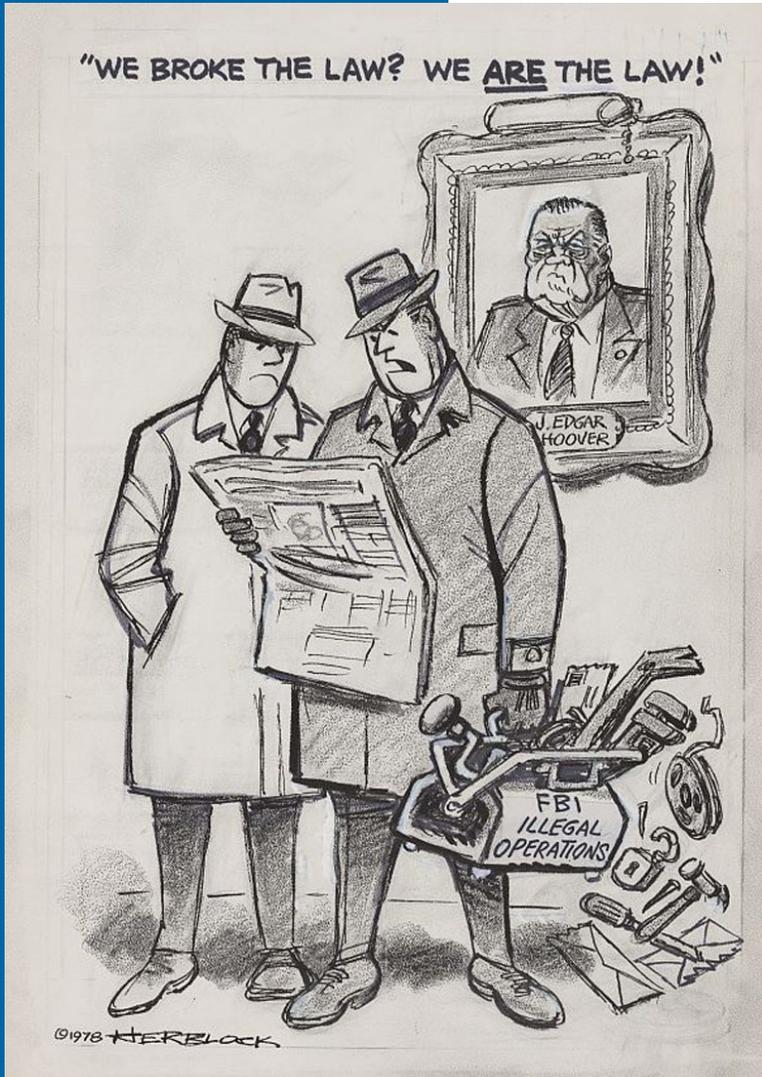
Ackerman provided his theory: Hoover's upbringing was "shockingly normal." The year 1919, however, had a profound effect on the young Hoover. "It was very similar to the period in this country after the 9/11 attacks – a period of fear, of paranoia, of crackdown, of vigilance. ... From mid-1919 to mid-1920, it was the mainstream view in this country among rational well-informed, well-intentioned people that we stood on the verge of a Russian-style, worker-led Bolshevik revolution right here in the USA." It was just after World War I, when 16 million people worldwide were killed – 116,000 of them Americans. "The world entered a period of turmoil mostly headlined by Bolshevism."

Within America there was a rising tide of upheaval. "Race riots, shootings, political clashes. The economy was in turmoil. Three million people went on strike that year [1918] for better wages ... This state of affairs peaked in 1919 with a series of bombs across the country." On June 2, nine bombs went off in different cities, all at about 11 o'clock at night. Two people were killed. One of the bombs exploded at the home of the U.S. attorney general, Mitchell Palmer. During the investigation, a stack of handbills from a group called the Anarchist Fighters was found on the lawn.

Immediately, Palmer announced a crackdown. Not knowing who they were, Palmer turned to Hoover to help him round up any immigrant with ties to anarchism. "With Palmer's leadership and Hoover's management, off they went on the famous Palmer raids." Between November 1919 and January 1920, under Hoover's management of the Radicals Division of the Justice Department, a group he was assigned to lead, the government launched a series of raids in 30 cities and dozens of small towns nationwide. As many as 10,000 people were rounded up, sometimes violently. Most of the people were held for months without access to their families. They eventually were released but not charged with any crime.

The raids destroyed Palmer politically. Hoover, however, survived and went on to serve under the new administration of Calvin Coolidge. "It was a masterpiece of bureaucratic dexterity," says Ackerman. In May 1924, Harlan Fisk Stone, the attorney general, asked Hoover to be the director of what was then called the Bureau of Investigation. The irony is that Stone had opposed the raids, accusing Palmer of an abuse of power.

While in office, Hoover continued his own abuses of power; Stone had thought Hoover would reform the bureau.



The Washington Post's Herbert Block, better known as Herblock, lampooned what he saw as the FBI's illegal operations. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.





*Reading Is Fundamental*, one of the Center for the Book's more than 80 reading promotion partners, celebrated its 45th anniversary in the Young Readers Center, which is administered by the Center for the Book. Lisa Strzepek (from left), curriculum specialist with the District of Columbia Public Schools; joins John Cole, director of the Center for the Book; Ernestine Benedict, vice president of marketing and communications for RIF; and Margaret McNamara Pastor of the RIF board of directors.

The Adventure Theater read and performed the beloved children's book "Lily's Purple Plastic Purse" by Kevin Henkes.



## Calendar of Events

**FEBRUARY 7 (Tuesday), noon, Mumford Room, Madison Building**  
Books & Beyond program. Elizabeth Dowling Taylor will discuss and sign her new book, "A Slave in the White House: Paul Jennings and the Madisons" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Co-sponsored with the Manuscript Division.

**FEBRUARY 14 (Tuesday), noon, Mumford Room, Madison Building**  
Michael David-Fox: will discuss and sign his new book, "Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941" (Oxford University Press, 2011). Co-sponsored with the European Division.

**FEBRUARY 29 (Wednesday), noon, Pickford Theater, Madison Building**  
Books & Beyond program. Simine Short will discuss and sign her new book, "Locomotive to Aeromotive: Octave Chanute and the Transportation Revolution" (University of Illinois Press, 2011). Co-sponsored with the Manuscript Division.

(Continued on next page)

*(Calendar of Events, from previous page)*

**MARCH 2 (Friday), 3-5 p.m., LJ 119, Whittall Pavilion, Thomas Jefferson Building**

Books & Beyond program. Sarah Wadsworth and Wayne Wiegand will discuss and sign their new book, "Right Here I See My Own Books: The Woman's Building Library at the World's Columbian Exposition" (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Co-sponsored with the Washington Area Group for Print Culture Studies and the National Women's History Museum.

**MARCH 15 (Thursday), noon, Mumford Room, Madison Building**

Books & Beyond program. Amanda Hood Smith will discuss and sign her book "Newspaper Titan: The Infamous Life and Monumental Times of Cissy Patterson" (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011). Co-sponsored with the Serial and Government Publications Division.

**APRIL 13 (Friday) noon, West Dining Room, Madison Building**

Books & Beyond program. Sam Watters will discuss and sign his new book, "Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895-1935, Photographs by Frances Benjamin Johnston" (Acanthus, in association with the Library of Congress, 2012). Co-sponsored with the Prints & Photographs Division.

**APRIL 25 (Wednesday) 10 am –noon, LJ 119, Thomas Jefferson Building**

River of Words awards ceremony for winners and finalists of the 2010-2011 environmental poetry and art contest for young people. Hosted by Robert Hass, former U.S. Poet Laureate.

**APRIL 26 (Thursday) noon, Mumford Room, Madison Building**

Books & Beyond program. Francisco Aragon, director of Letras Latinas, will moderate a program featuring poet Blas Falconer and writer Lorraine Lopez, co-editors of the recent anthology "The Other Latin@: Writing Against a Singular Identity" (University of Arizona Press, 2011). They will discuss the contemporary state of Latino literature and a book signing will follow. Co-sponsored with the Poetry and Literature Center and the Hispanic Division and presented in partnership with Letras Latinas and the University of Arizona Press.

**APRIL 26 (Thursday) 6:30 p.m., Mumford Room, Madison Building**

Poet Blas Falconer and writer Lorraine Lopez, co-editors of the recent anthology "The Other Latin@: Writing Against a Singular Identity" (University of Arizona Press, 2011) will read selections from their works. Co-sponsored with the Poetry and Literature Center and the Hispanic Division and presented in partnership with Letras Latinas and the University of Arizona Press.

**MAY 11 (Friday), 11 a.m., Coolidge Auditorium, Thomas Jefferson Building**

The Jonah S. Eskin Memorial Lecture, a celebration during Children's Book Week, will be delivered by Walter Dean Myers.



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