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Hooks Institute for Social Change Selects Two Winners for its National Book Award

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September 17, 2014 - The Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change has selected *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis* by Daniel Matlin and *How it Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement* by Ruth Feldstein as co-winners of its National Book Award for 2013. The award recognizes publications that best advance an understanding of the American civil rights movement and its legacy.

Matlin's *On the Corner* is a history of three black intellectuals who became prominent in the 1960s as indigenous interpreters of black urban life: Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, Amiri Baraka and Romare Bearden. Feldstein's *How it Feels to Be Free* is a cultural history. It examines the lives of six women entertainers, showing how performance strategies and activism overlapped for Lena Horne, Miriam Makeba, Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln, Diahann Carroll and Cicely Tyson.

On the Corner expresses the unique position of three intellectuals to interpret the reality of black urban life from distinct disciplinary perspectives and personal backgrounds. All wrestled with the dilemma of how to represent black urban life to their audiences, and none were completely at ease with the role of indigenous interpreter. Clark, whose research with black school children and his psychological testimony were central to *Brown v. Board of Education*, also influenced the War on Poverty and other government initiatives. His knowledge as a social scientist as well as his perspective as one who grew up in the Harlem "ghetto" informed his work and his disillusionment. Baraka, a poet, novelist and playwright, was a force in the Black Arts movement who challenged and interpreted black political life. The art of Bearden affirms black urban and rural life through collage.

In *How It Feels to Be Free*, Feldstein selects specific experiences in the professional lives of six prominent women entertainers to show not only how cultural production mattered to black activism, but also how gender mattered in terms of activism and popular culture. During the 1960s and '70s, these women helped define the black struggle through diverse presentations of self, styles of performance, and engagement with international audiences through film, television and nightclubs. Their experiences show how race, gender and sexuality converged in political choices and professional decisions.

The Hooks Institute received more than 20 nominations for the Book Award, primarily from university presses across the United States. In addition to *On the Corner* and *How it Feels to Be Free*, the other three finalists were Jakobi Williams' *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, Randall Kennedy's *For Discrimination: Race, Affirmative Action and the Law* and Jeanne Theoharis' *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*.

The five judges were Dr. Aram Goudsouzian, U of M professor and chair of history; Dr. Delphia Harris, professor of chemistry at LeMoyne-Owen College; Dr. Charles McKinney, associate professor of history at Rhodes College; Dr. Ladrice Menson-Furr, U of M associate professor of English; and Dr. Wanda Rushing, U of M professor of sociology.

Feldstein will deliver a talk on her book on Oct. 30 at 6 p.m. in the University Center River Room (room 300). Matlin will speak Feb. 12, 2015, at a lunch lecture (location to be determined) as part of the Graduate Association for African American History conference at the University of Memphis.

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Both events will take place on the U of M campus and are free and open to the public.

For consideration of the 2014 National Book Award, one copy of the book should be submitted, postmarked by Dec. 1, to National Book Award Nomination, The Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, 107 Scates Hall, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152-3530. For detailed submission instructions, visit <http://web0.memphis.edu/benhooks/bookaward.php>.

In 1996, University of Memphis officials received approval from the Tennessee Board of Regents to create the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change in the College of Arts and Sciences. The mission of the Institute is teaching, studying and promoting civil rights and social change. The Hooks Institute archives include Hooks’ personal papers, which are housed in the Mississippi Valley Collection in the University’s McWhorter Library.