

**MAINE  
HUMANITIES  
COUNCIL**

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Center for the Book

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# JOIN THE DISCUSSION



Photo: Stacey Tran

# Letter from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MHC Executive Director Samaa Abdurraqib speaks with attendees at 2022 Poetry Express event. Photo: Stacey Tran



It's been a couple of months since I assumed the Executive Director position at Maine Humanities Council, and I wanted to take pause for a moment to introduce myself to you and share a bit about why I'm so thrilled to find myself in this leadership role at MHC. Before I share more about myself, I want to thank you for your continued support in helping us accomplish all that we're able to do in this state. Witnessing Mainers from all walks of life enthusiastically engaging with the humanities makes me feel so proud to be leading this organization.

My lifelong love of humanities and literature has carried me through my young life, my PhD pursuits, my college teaching career, and, eventually, into a long and meaningful relationship with Maine Humanities. I was first introduced to MHC in 2015, when I was invited to facilitate a "Muslim Journeys" book discussion group at the Southwest Harbor Library. A year and a half prior, I had transitioned out of a visiting faculty position at Bowdoin College and into the non-profit world, and I was craving humanities-based conversations. Facilitating the group in Southwest Harbor had a lasting impact on me—it combined my love of literature, reading, and discussion with my love of community conversations in a way that was invigorating and full of possibility. That one experience with MHC led to me deepening my relationship with MHC and recommitting to this organization again and again for seven years—from 2015 until here and now in 2022. In my time with MHC, I have served as a facilitator for numerous programs, as a contracted scholar and advisor, as the Associate Director, and now as the Executive Director. I have thoroughly enjoyed the fullness of my journey with MHC.

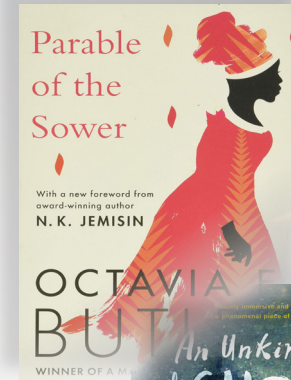
As I look toward the year ahead and our upcoming programming, I am already anticipating the long arc of impact this work will have. Our current collaboration with Bowdoin College and Indigo Arts Alliance is one example, which brings me great joy. Together, we'll be sharing award-winning composer/singer-songwriter Toshi Reagon and her opera adaptation of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* with communities throughout Maine. This opera will be staged in April 2023 at Portland Ovations. Prior to that, though, Ms. Reagon will be meeting with Mainers from across the state as a Bowdoin Joseph Mckeen Visiting Fellow—and MHC will be working with Maine communities to develop humanities-based projects and discussions related to the themes present in the Butler's *Parable*. Ms. Reagon calls this the "Parable Path" and we have dubbed this collaboration "Parable Path Maine." Parable Path Maine's public kick-off event—a night of music and discussion hosted at Bowdoin College—was attended by a crowd of over 400 people. I was honored to join Toshi on stage with three other panelists to respond to questions inspired by the themes Toshi raised in her music.

Thank you for allowing me a moment to introduce myself. I look forward to getting to know you as I settle into my new role here at Maine Humanities. In the months and years to come, I hope to have wonderful conversations with you about our programming and about your love for the humanities. And thank you too for your continued support through your attention, your gifts, and your enthusiasm.

Samaa Abdurraqib  
Executive Director

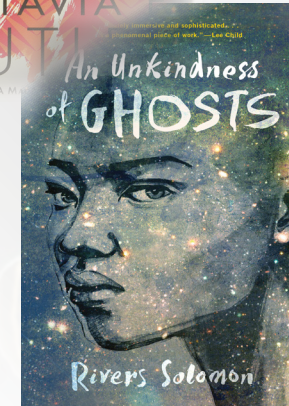
# FEATURED READS IN 2023

Thanks to a \$250,000 competitive grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), we will continue to explore Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism across our programming in the coming year, using the genres as a model for how to imagine futures, reimagine histories, and challenge assumptions of what is and is not possible. One way we're doing this is through the books we're featuring across our Discussion Projects and other programs in 2023—books like Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts*.



## Parable of the Sower

Set in the early 2020s, Octavia E. Butler's landmark 1993 novel wrestles with global climate change, economic crisis, and community. It's a novel that inspires people—authors, artists, social justice visionaries—and that people want to share with others. Read the novel. Or the graphic novel adaptation by Damian Duffy and John Jennings. Or see Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon's opera—which we are helping bring to Maine along with Toshi Reagon's Parable Path Maine project, in partnership with Bowdoin College and Indigo Arts Alliance.



## An Unkindness of Ghosts

Rivers Solomon's gripping sci-fi novel gives us a vivid microcosm of our moment's pressing political and social inequities. Aster, born into slavery on the brutally segregated spaceship Matilda, seeks answers, escape, and a way to make change. This extraordinary novel is the featured book for MHC's 2023 Readers Retreat.

## As Deep as the Sea and as Wide as the Sky

"...I'm drawn to books that are able to teach you something, spur your imagination, and that are also able to show you something beautiful about the world...those are also the types of things that bring people together—that people like to share about themselves."

- Illustrator Daniel Minter

As Maine's affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book, MHC has represented Maine at the annual National Book Festival in Washington, DC almost since its inception. While we're there we get to share a book with a strong connection to Maine with thousands of people from all over the country—as well as using it to spark discussion in Maine communities.

At this year's Festival, the first to be held in-person since 2019, we were excited to feature a book illustrated by Daniel Minter, who lives and works here in Maine: *Blue: A History of the Color as Deep as the Sea and as Wide as the Sky*, written by Nana Ekuia Brew-Hammond.



So many people stopped by to look at this exquisite book, which offers a cultural history of a beautiful color—including the less beautiful parts of that history. **Visit our website to watch our interview** with Daniel Minter and learn more about all our Featured Reads sparking discussions across the state.

