

The Oracle Set Book Club and Foundation 2024 Annual Book and Author Luncheon

Sunday, April 21, 2024



Martin's Crosswinds
7400 Greenway Center Drive
Beltsville, MD 20770

A Message From the Oracle Set Foundation President, Rosalyn Coates...

The Board of Directors of the Oracle Set Foundation and the members of the Oracle Set Book Club are honored and delighted to welcome you to our 54th Book/Author Luncheon. We are in a different venue, but it still feels like we



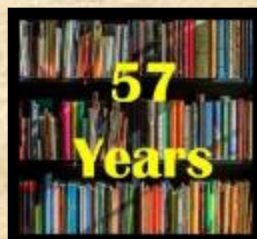
are welcoming our extended family "back home" after a multi-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of you have attended our luncheons for over 20 years. Many are new guests and extended family members. Although we have not held an in-person luncheon since 2019, we held a very successful and fun online Book/Author event in November 2021, featuring Dawnie Walton and her book, *The Final Revival of Opal and Nev*. We are very proud to share that the Foundation awarded

two scholarships in 2023 to deserving high school graduates in the District of Columbia.

As we celebrate the return of our premiere fundraiser in support of the Foundation's Claudette Franklin Ford Scholarship, we solemnly honor her husband, Mr. Louis A. Ford who made his transition on June 6, 2020. Louis was a steadfast supporter of the Oracle Set Foundation and served as board director and/or as its treasurer for nearly 10 years. We are particularly grateful for his generous bequest that will enable the Foundation to continue to support DC graduates seeking to pursue post-high school educational opportunities.



Again, thank you for your support. The Foundation directors and Oracle Set Book Club members take seriously our responsibility to help shape the next generation of leaders in our communities and beyond.



A Message From The Luncheon Committee Chair and Oracle Set Book Club President, Donna Harell...

Greetings to our guests,

On behalf of the Oracle Set Book Club founded in 1966, I welcome you to our long awaited in person luncheon. This is our 54th book club luncheon and the first in person luncheon since the pandemic. You have been missed, and



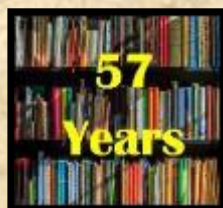
it is wonderful to meet in person again. Today we gather not only to indulge in culinary delights but also to celebrate literature and philanthropy. Esteemed and best-selling author ReShonda Tate is gracing us with her presence to discuss her amazing historical fiction work, “The Queen of Sugar Hill: A Novel of Hattie McDaniel.” The novel immerses us in the life of Hattie McDaniel, the first African American woman to win an Oscar.

This luncheon serves two purposes: (1) fostering literary discussions and (2) supporting a noble cause, the Claudette Franklin Ford Scholarship. This scholarship, created in memory of the book club’s founding member, benefits high school graduates from Washington, DC.

The Oracle Set Book Club extends our deepest gratitude to all our guests for their unwavering support in furthering the mission of our Book Club and Foundation while empowering the next generation of scholars and authors.

Cheers to a delightful afternoon filled with enriching conversations and shared camaraderie...

Donna G Harrell
President
Oracle Set Book Club



Luncheon Programme

Welcome and Acknowledgements.....Donna Harrell
Luncheon Committee Chair

Invocation Marzeloraine Barnes

— LUNCHEON —

The Oracle Set Book Club Donna Harrell
Oracle Set Book Club President

Oracle Set Foundation Rosalyn Coates
Oracle Set Foundation President

Claudette Franklin Ford Scholarship Dolores Greene
Scholarship Committee Chair

Scholarship Winner Andrew Ratcliff

Introduction of Guest Author Bernadette Derr

Guest Author Presentation ReShonda Tate

Book Discussion and Questions Author and Guests

Closing Remarks Rosalyn Coates



ReShonda Tate

As the national bestselling author of more than 53 books, ReShonda Tate has the credentials, and the passion, to bring stories to life.

ReShonda writes both adult and teen fiction, as well as nonfiction. Her sophomore novel, *Let the Church Say Amen*, was made into a film directed by actress Regina King, and produced by TD Jakes and Queen Latifah.

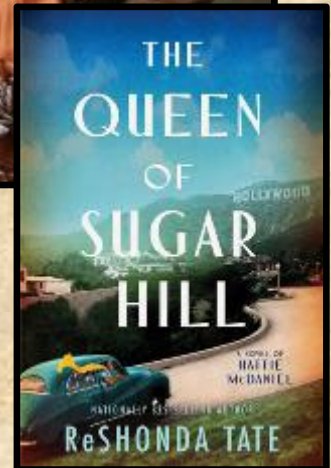
ReShonda made her on-screen movie debut in the film, which was one of BET's highest-rated programs. Her book, *The Secret She Kept*, was also made into a movie and aired on TV One. ReShonda made a cameo in that movie as well.

A highly sought-after motivational speaker and award-winning poet,

ReShonda is the recipient of the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literature for her book, *Say Amen, Again*, and was also nominated for her books *Mama's Boy* and *The Secret She Kept*. She has received a plethora of distinguished awards and honors for her journalism, fiction, and poetry writing skills, including an induction into the Arkansas Black

Hall of Fame and a Texas Top Author honor. Considered one of the top African American authors in the country, her books remain a staple on Bestseller's lists and have been featured in USA Today, The Washington Post, Jet, People, Essence, and Ebony Magazines. A graduate of The University of Texas at Austin, ReShonda is a member of the Missouri City – Sugar Land Chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated and Jack & Jill of America, Incorporated.

She is married to Jeffrey Caradine and is the mother of three children, Mya, Morgan and Myles and the bonus mother to Jabari and Jordun Caradine



The Oracle Set Book Club

On August 28, 1966, the late Claudette Franklin Ford met with a group of women friends to present the idea of organizing a book club. Its purpose would be to “read and review books, plays and



other literary forms.” Fifteen of these women were receptive to the idea, and the Oracle Set Book Club was born. The founding members were Alice

Hawkins,



Barnett, Barbara Brown, LaVon Bundy, Bernadette Derr, Carole Jordan Harris, Brin Charlotte Williams Henderson, Norlisha

Jackson, Tyrese Lloyd, Wanda Oates, Etheline Matthews, Lorita Powell, Glordia Runyon, Carol Smith Watts and Maggalean W. Weston. Two of the founding members, Bernadette Derr and Maggalean W. Weston, remain active with the Book Club and/or the Foundation.

While wishing to remain informal, the group recognized the need to establish a few rules, among the most important of which was the limitation of the membership to 17 women (now 18), both to encourage meaningful discussion and to allow monthly meetings to be comfortably held in members' homes, most of whom were students of Howard University. The group also agreed to take a summer break and periodically have social activities to which family and friends would be invited.

The Man, by Irving Wallace was the first book read and discussed by the Club. It was a fictionalized account of the first African American President. Subsequent book club selections have included a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books, plays and poetry. Of particular interest have been books about African Americans, especially those with topics of interest to Black women.

In 1967, we held the first of what would become our Annual Book and Author Luncheon. The Club invited Ted Shine, an instructor at Howard University's College of Fine Arts, to discuss his play, *Sho is Hot in the Cotton Patch*. Club members viewed the event as a forum for African American writers to reach a larger



audience, and an opportunity to share with a wider group of friends the stimulating exchange of ideas that occurred at meetings.



Over the years, luncheon speakers have been emerging writers, as well as established authors. At the first anniversary of the Book and Author Luncheon, seven members of the Reviewers' Book Club of Baltimore, MD were present. The group had provided Claudette Franklin Ford with the inspiration for founding the Oracle Set Book Club. The following year Oracle Set members attended the Reviewers' Book and Author Luncheon featuring acclaimed author, Toni Morrison. This began a rich tradition of mutual support of book clubs and their luncheons, which has continued over the years.



The format of the Club's luncheons has been as varied as the guest authors and their literary works. Some featured a single author; others featured multiple authors and speakers. Included in that list were local personalities as well as authors of national reputation, including Eliot Liebow, Dorothy Gilliam, Roger Wilkins, Marita Golden, Juan Williams, John Lewis, Walter Mosley, and Gwen Ifill. A three-person panel, led by author Sharon Mathis, presented on the topic, "Children's Literature and Theatre Arts for Blacks" in 1973. In 1982, the luncheon focused on black business and included panelists George Trower-Subria, author of *Black Folk's Guide to Making Big Money in America*, realtor Patricia Press,



and bank manager Yolanda Queen. One of the most unique presenters at the luncheon was Dr. Lillian Anthony-Welsh, an expert on Black memorabilia. She narrated a fascinating “show and tell” of items from her unique collection of cultural icons. *Cooking for the Club*, a cookbook containing recipes of the favorite dishes served at the Club’s monthly meetings, was celebrated at the 20th Annual Book and Author Luncheon.

From its inception, the Oracle Set Book Club made a commitment to initiate and support programs that encourage youth literacy. Our



community outreach activities have included planning youth excursions to DC Black Repertory Theatre Workshops, hosting youth invited to annual luncheons, demonstrating a book club discussion at a local high school, and making annual donations to D. C. Reading is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF) for 17 years. The creation of the Claudette Franklin Ford Scholarship essay competition in 1997 marked a noteworthy expansion of our outreach program. The enthusiastic response to this scholarship project prompted the establishment of the non-profit Oracle Set Foundation (OSF). Book Club members continue to play a key role in implementing OSF projects.

A series of meetings in 1978, which included guest speaker Dr. Michael Winston, then director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, began a conversation which would ultimately cement the Club’s legacy in the annals of history. Dr. Winston stressed the uniqueness of the group and encouraged its members to submit Club records and information on its members for inclusion in Moorland-Spingarn’s archives, In 1997, this was accomplished. Evelyn McReynolds, Chair of the Archives Committee, received the letter of confirmation, signed by Curator, Joellen EL Bashir, stating that the



Club's archives would be accepted.

While the Oracle Set has steadfastly adhered to its original mission, the reading and discussion of books and other literary works, its mission has evolved to include support of various local and national literary related community activities. The group has made financial contributions to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the Schomburg Collection in NY and Nethula Enterprises' Nethula Journal, a publication for local black writers. The Club also donated children's books and magazines to local hospitals and institutions for children.

Between book club meetings and book/author luncheons, the group periodically took time out for fun. In the early years, annual picnics, parties, ski trips, and theater junkets were held. As the years progressed, busy professional demands limited the number of social events that could be held.



To the best of our knowledge, The Oracle Set Book Club is the only African American women's book club in the Washington DC area to be in continuous operation for more than 50 years. Members represent a variety of professions, personal interests, hobbies, and ages. Diversity fosters a wide range of opinions and encourages spirited discussions. While most of the names on the Club's roster have changed over the years, in the words of its founder, Claudette Franklin Ford, "the spirit and character of the Club remain unchanged... always interesting, ever-questioning, a unique, creative, close, but not closed group experience."



2023/2024
Oracle Set Book Club Members

Officers

- *Donna Harrell, *President*
Ivy Holsey, *Vice President*
*Alice Hayes, *Secretary*
*Marzeloraine Barnes, *Secretary*
*Deneice Fields, *Treasurer*
+Dolores Greene, *Scholarship Chair*
Beverly Gray, *Amenities Secretary*

Members

- C. Anita Byrd
*Belinda J. Gantt
*Elaine B. Murrell
Rosalyn Coates
Linda Harris
*Bettie Waddy-Smith
*#Bernadette Derr
*Phyllis Jones
*Sharon Dunmore
Lydia Mosher
Virginia View

*Luncheon Committee Member
#Founding Book Club Member

The Claudette Franklin Ford Memorial Scholarship

The scholarship for graduating seniors of D.C. public and public charter high schools was established in 1997 in memory of Claudette Franklin Ford, founder of the Oracle Set Book Club. Claudette was passionate about improving educational opportunities for Washington's youth, and this scholarship is a tribute to her efforts on their behalf. The Ford Scholarship began as an Oracle Set Book Club project, and in 1999 the administration of the Scholarship was transferred to the newly established Oracle Set Foundation – a 501(c)(3) organization. The awards provide financial support to students who have been accepted to college and demonstrate an interest in writing, journalism, and other areas of mass communication. Winners are selected on the basis of an annual essay competition that also considers scholastic achievement and co-curricular activities. The first-place essay is published in our luncheon program and, along with other winning essays, becomes a part of the Oracle Set archives.

In 2023, the Oracle Set selected the following first-place winner of the Claudette Franklin Ford Scholarship:

Andrew Ratcliff
Coolidge Senior High School
Morehouse College

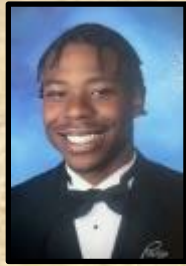


Excerpts from the First Place Essay:

“What Is the Most Important Issue Facing Young Adults in Washington, DC?”

By Andrew Ratcliff

My home, Washington, DC, is a city that almost never dies. On a visit to New York, a comparison of the District to New York came to mind. The District is like a younger relative to The Big Apple, because while it is not as chaotic, it can sure get hectic at times. On the outside looking in, the Nation’s Capital may seem very appealing to individuals who have not lived in the City for an extended period. The District is full of many tourist attractions for visitors to traverse. These include the annual cherry blossoms, famous monuments, upscale luxury restaurants, and unique historical landmarks... The City of DC is one that I have been proud to call home my whole life, and that is



something that will never change. However, as I grow and mature, I realize that there are numerous problems that young residents of Washington, DC face, that, if solved, will improve the lives of many.

The first, and, arguably, biggest problem that plagues Washington, DC youth is the crime epidemic. In this Post-Covid pandemic period, the number of carjackings, shootings, robberies, and overall violence has increased, compared to previous years. These crimes involve primarily the youth in our City, either as perpetrators or victims. In my opinion, unless resources are invested to ease contributing factors, this crime wave will continue to have a dramatic impact on the life of our city...

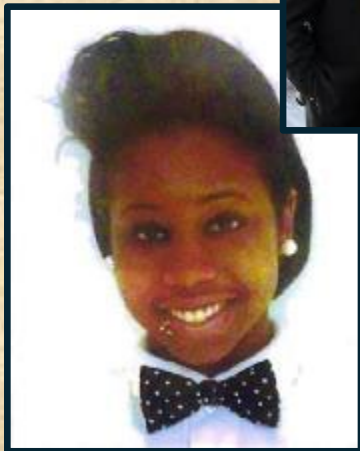
A second glaring problem Washington, DC Youth face is the underfunded District of Columbia Public School system. DCPS is a large entity that is responsible for the education of thousands of students.... There are many areas of public education that could be improved in order to help set our young adults up for a better future. The teenage school years are important for the development of the brain and social skills. Education is extremely valuable, and while a handful of schools do receive adequate opportunities for their students to reach their full potential, the majority do not...

A third problem plaguing the world, and specifically wounding young adults in Washington, DC is extreme food insecurity. This problem impacts, primarily, young African American citizens living on the south side of the District... Personally, if young adults are not getting the proper nutrition they need when they go to school

and work, their performance will be impacted. Furthermore, the lack of a nutritious diet in our youth while not manifesting immediately, may impact overall health later in life...

Overall, the District of Columbia is one of the most productive cities in the world and many young adults travel in flocks to reside here... The City is also troubled with deep-rooted systemic problems that primarily affect our young citizens. While on the surface these may seem like difficult conversations to have, they are necessary if we want our young adults to grow and be happy citizens.

A Gallery of Previous Scholarship Awardees



The Oracle Set Foundation

The Oracle Set Foundation was established in 1999 to support literacy projects that encourage, support, and reward the reading and writing achievements of children and youth in the District of Columbia. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization and administers the philanthropic activities started by the Oracle Set Book Club. These activities include managing the Claudette Franklin Ford Memorial Scholarship essay competition.

The Foundation has awarded the Claudette Franklin Ford Memorial Scholarship to over 50 graduates of D.C. public and charter high schools. Our scholarship recipients are extraordinary students and outstanding citizens, and many have overcome enormous hardships. Their essays and interviews testify to the challenges they face every day – neighborhood violence, homelessness, poverty, and absent parents. Despite such challenges, they have graduated from or are enrolled in colleges and universities across the Nation and abroad in institutions such as Concordia, Howard, Syracuse, North Carolina A&T, Yale, The University of North Carolina, The University of Oklahoma, and others.

Throughout the years, the Foundation has awarded grants and made donations to neighborhood-based youth literacy projects. The objectives of these programs are to teach pre-school and elementary children to read and develop skills to succeed in school and life. The programs have provided mentoring and tutoring, after-school and summer enrichment activities and introduced a variety of cultural experiences to children in under-resourced areas of Washington, D.C.

The sponsorship of student guests at the Annual Book and Author Luncheon was started by the Oracle Set Book Club. There are sometimes five to fifteen young people in attendance, who are afforded the opportunity to participate in the discussion, meet the author, and receive an autographed copy of the featured book.

Oracle Set Foundation Board of Directors

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**#Bernadette Derr • *Sharon Dunmore • *Dolores Greene • Tommia Hayes • Marteal Pitts*

**Bettie Waddy-Smith • #Maggalean W. Weston*

** Luncheon Committee Member*

Founding Member

*The Oracle Set Book Club and Foundation Say,
“Thanks” to:*

ReShonda Tate

For agreeing to serve as our guest author on short notice...

Families, Friends, and Donors

For their continued support of the Annual Book and Author Luncheon and Claudette Franklin Ford Memorial Scholarship

Our Volunteer Hostesses

Donna Levy, Dakota Levy, Ryan Starks, and Madison Scott

Book Vendor

Sankofa Books

Music

Kenji Yokote

Georgetown Day School

Official Photographer Phaedra Byrd

Program Design Floyd A. Lewis

Bookmark Favors Bettie Waddy-Smith, Marzeloraine Barnes

Thank You!



The Oracle Set Foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization. Please support our work with a donation made via the following:

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- **Via Zelle payment to OracleSetFoundation1@gmail.com**
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