



“Is it possible to write a story without being political?”

New York City, NY
November 28, 2018

We hope you enjoy our NYC Big Question event video “Is it possible to write a story without being political?” with Writer in Residence and Associate Professor of English Marlon James. After viewing the video, we encourage you to dig deeper and consider the following questions as a jump start to a great conversation--ideally with a group of friends or fellow alumni!

Let us know about your gatherings and thoughts by posting to social media using #heymac or emailing the Alumni Engagement office at alumnioffice@macalester.edu.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) James states that in the act of reading, you can be "liberated without permission," adding that novels have "life-saving" propensities. Given changes in the way people consume information, should we worry that future generations might not be saved by reading, or have avenues open for liberation? Are there other similarly productive avenues for liberation available outside of novels?
- 2) James says "...if nobody is looking for a book as a weapon, nobody is going to know you're arming yourself with one." What books have been influential in your life, and what message did they teach you? Is there particular book you think should be required reading for high school or college students and why?
- 3) President Rosenberg asks "are there certain subjects that novelists writing today in some ways cannot escape by including or not including them in their books?" What subjects do you see addressed (or not addressed), but still present in novels that you've read?
- 4) With the increasing polarization of political thought, how can Americans find common ground and conversations with each other? How might literature play a role in these conversations?
- 5) In our present world of instant communication and gratification, how might an art form like the novel—which is decidedly less instant in its rewards—continue to exist? Is the novel dead? Or, conversely, can social media resuscitate interest in all forms of literary engagement?
- 6) An underlying theme of this conversation is the idea of what the "political" is in the context of writing. How would you define the term "political" in terms of writing and stories? In what ways does your idea of the political change in different contexts?

Meet Our Speaker:



Marlon James was born in Jamaica in 1970. His novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, won the 2015 Man Booker Prize, making James the first Jamaican author to take home the U.K.'s most prestigious literary award. The novel also won the American Book award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Minnesota Book Award. It was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a New York Times Notable Book. Professor James is also the author of *The Book of Night Women*, which won the 2010 Dayton Literary Peace Prize and John Crow's Devil. His next novel, *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* will be published in February 2019.

Professor James graduated from the University of the West Indies in 1991 with a degree in Language and Literature and from Wilkes University in 2006 with a Master's Degree in creative writing. His short fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Esquire*, *Harpers*, *The New York Times*, *Granta*, *GQ*, and the *Caribbean Review of Books*. At Macalester College James focuses on Contemporary Fiction, Narrative Nonfiction, and introductory poetry.

Additional Resources:

Looking to dig deeper? Check out the following works written by Professor James!

Fiction (Novel)

Black Leopard, Red Wolf (coming out February 2019!)

A Brief History of Seven Killings (Riverhead 2018)

The Book of Night Women (Riverhead 2009)

John Crow's Devil (Akashic Books 2005)

Fiction (Short Story)

"How To Be A Man" (*Esquire Magazine* 2013)

"Immaculate" (*Kingston Noir*) (Akashic Books 2012)

Nonfiction

"Why I'm Done Talking About Diversity," [Lit Hub, Fall 2016]

"Blacker the Berry—On Kendrick Lamar" [*The New York Times Magazine*, March 2016]

"From Jamaica, To Minnesota, to Myself" [*The New York Times Magazine*, March 2015]

Bring the intellectual rigor of Macalester into your office, living room, or wherever you have a screen! We are excited to launch our Big Questions event series as part of the Macalester Moment campaign. These intellectually stimulating events will connect you with faculty and President Rosenberg, while digging into the world-changing issues that Macalester is addressing in and out of the classroom.