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**THE MLA'S WILLIAM SANDERS SCARBOROUGH PRIZE TO BE AWARDED TO
AUTUMN WOMACK FOR *THE MATTER OF BLACK LIVING*; HONORABLE
MENTIONS GO TO IRVIN HUNT AND TO BETTINA A. JUDD**

New York, NY – 6 December 2023 – The Modern Language Association of America today announced it is awarding its twenty-second annual William Sanders Scarborough Prize to Autumn Womack, associate professor of African American studies and English at Princeton University, for her book *The Matter of Black Living: The Aesthetic Experiment of Racial Data, 1880–1930*, published by the University of Chicago Press. An honorable mention will be awarded to Irvin Hunt, Helen Corley Petit Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, for *Dreaming the Present: Time, Aesthetics, and the Black Cooperative Movement*, published by the University of North Carolina Press, and to Bettina A. Judd, associate professor in the Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, for *Feelin: Creative Practice, Pleasure, and Black Feminist Thought*, published by Northwestern University Press. The prize is awarded for an outstanding scholarly study of African American literature or culture.

The William Sanders Scarborough Prize is one of twenty-two awards that will be presented on 5 January 2024 during the association's annual convention, to be held in Philadelphia. The members of the selection committee were John Drabinski (Univ. of Maryland, College Park); Meta DuEwa Jones (Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), chair; and Eve Dunbar (Vassar Coll.). The committee's citation for Womack's book reads:

Autumn Womack's *The Matter of Black Living: The Aesthetic Experiment of Racial Data, 1880–1930* is captivating. Womack engages the historical, sociological, anthropological, photographic, cinematic, and, significantly, the literary to weave a complex narrative regarding the rhythms, processes and expressive archival and contemporary materials of Black life, placing the work of canonical Black writers in a robust conversation with technologies that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Under Womack's critical and exacting scholarly care, a detailed portrait of the Black experimentation develops alongside, counter to, and through the racial violence of documentation. Womack instructs us not just how to read data for its weaponization against Black people but also how to see more clearly and appreciate Black innovation and life.

The committee's citation for Hunt's book reads:

Dreaming the Present: Time, Aesthetics, and the Black Cooperative Movement is a remarkable book. Theorizing the meaning of time in the Black cooperative movement, both in terms of its literary and political actors and its historical predecessors, Irvin Hunt finds new ways of talking about familiar scholarly figures in W. E. B. Du Bois and

George Schuyler, then reckons with the activist lives and thought of Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer. Linking each to projects of mutual aid and essential community functions, Hunt describes how political work in this register changes the meaning of time. *Dreaming the Present* describes the world-making power of Black time of the present: a world made by Black people, for Black people, on Black people's own terms. Black temporality is elucidated through cogent engagement with aesthetics as philosophy and beautiful writing as practice.

The committee's citation for Judd's book reads:

Bettina A. Judd's *Feelin: Creative Practice, Pleasure, and Black Feminist Thought* captures and illuminates the epistemic value of emotion and sensation. Judd includes her original poetry, visual art, and a curated playlist alongside discussions of Black women and nonbinary writers, vocalists, and visual artists to provide a map toward better understanding Black feminist creations as generative, spirit-filled, and skilled processes of creative power. *Feelin* shows that emotions—not only joy but also grief, anger, shame, and ecstasy—are essential guides to liberatory *be-ing* and identification with human, and interspecies, world making. Deeply researched and widely ranging through the archive, the studio, and what Judd indexes as contemporary “black feminist oceanographics,” her elegant engagements with other scholars and creators offer much to feel and to think about, for our present and our future.

The Modern Language Association of America and its over 20,000 members in 100 countries work to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literature. Founded in 1883, the MLA provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. The MLA sustains one of the finest publication programs in the humanities, producing a variety of publications for language and literature professionals and for the general public. The association publishes the *MLA International Bibliography*, the only comprehensive bibliography in language and literature, available online. The MLA Annual Convention features 750 scholarly and professional development sessions. More information on MLA programs is available at www.mla.org.

The William Sanders Scarborough Prize was established in 2001 and named for the first African American member of the MLA. It is awarded under the auspices of the Committee on Honors and Awards. Other awards sponsored by the committee are the William Riley Parker Prize; the James Russell Lowell Prize; the MLA Prize for a First Book; the Howard R. Marraro Prize; the Kenneth W. Mildener Prize; the Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize; the MLA Prize for Independent Scholars; the Katherine Singer Kovacs Prize; the Morton N. Cohen Award; the MLA Prizes for a Scholarly Edition and for Bibliographical or Archival Scholarship; the Lois Roth Award; the Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize in Yiddish Studies; the MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies; the MLA Prize for Studies in Native American Literatures, Cultures, and Languages; the Matei Calinescu Prize; the MLA Prize for an Edited Collection; the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prizes for Comparative Literary Studies, for French and Francophone Studies, for Italian Studies, for Studies in Germanic Languages and Literatures, for Studies in Slavic Languages and Literatures, for a Translation of a Literary Work, for a Translation of a Scholarly Study of Literature, for African Studies, for East Asian Studies, for Middle Eastern Studies and for South Asian Studies; and the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Publication Award for a Manuscript in Italian Literary Studies. A complete list of current and previous winners can be found on the [MLA website](#).

William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926), brought up in the South, was a dedicated student of languages and literature. He attended Atlanta University and graduated in 1875 from Oberlin College, where he later received an MA. After teaching at various Southern schools, Scarborough was appointed professor of Latin and Greek at Wilberforce University. He later served as

president of the university from 1908 through 1920. Scarborough's published works include *First Lessons in Greek* (1881) and *Birds of Aristophanes* (1886) and many articles in national magazines, including *Forum* and *Arena*. In 1882 he was the third black man to be elected for membership in the American Philological Association. Scarborough's areas of interest included classical philology and linguistics with an emphasis on African American dialects.