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Raven Leilani Named Grisham Writer-in-Residence

Prize-winning author to teach course, lecture during spring 2022 semester

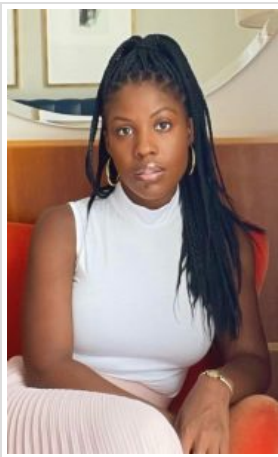
DECEMBER 20, 2021 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



OXFORD, Miss. – Author Raven Leilani, winner of several prestigious awards, will be the John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence next spring at the [University of Mississippi](#).

Leilani's work has been published in *Granta* and *The Yale Review* literary journals and *The Cut*, a blog hosted by *New York* magazine, among other publications. She is a National Book Foundation 5 under 35 honoree and recipient of the Kirkus Prize, Dylan Thomas Prize and NBCC John Leonard Prize.

Her first novel, "Luster" (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), won the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize.



Award-winning author Raven Leilani is set to be the John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence for spring at the university, where she will teach and write. Submitted photo

"Raven is a fresh, exciting new face in literary fiction, a writer whose career is just taking off, and we are honored to have her as our Grisham Writer-in-Residence for the spring 2022 semester," said Matt Bondurant, director of the UM [master's program in creative writing](#).

"The UM MFA and English department in general are proud of our long record of bringing nationally renowned writers to campus to work with our students. Raven fits perfectly in that tradition."

A native New Yorker, Leilani has never visited Mississippi. She anticipates doing meaningful work with a dedicated faculty and passionate cohort of writers.

"The Ole Miss community has a rich artistic tradition, and I'm excited to be part of it and contribute to it," said Leilani, who received her MFA in creative writing from New York University in 2019. "The John Grisham Residency has an incredible legacy of writers – Kiese Laymon, Jesmyn Ward. I am excited to be a part of that legacy, too."

"Luster" is about a young Black woman striving for the right to make art and inhabit the full, complex spectrum of her humanity. Critics have given the debut novel rave reviews.

"Luster" evokes Ralph Ellison's 'Invisible Man,' not necessarily for Ellison's political meanings, but for the state of going unobserved, unknown in a society," wrote Lee Thomas for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Lovia Gyarkye, of *The Atlantic*, wrote, "Leilani tries to liberate the Black woman figure's range of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings from an inherent virtuousness or exceptionalism. This choice challenges readers to recognize Edie's agency and see her as a young Black woman in progress."

In a starred review from *Kirkus*, another critic wrote, "An unstable ballet of race, sex, and power. Leilani's characters act in ways that often defy explanation, and that is part of what makes them so alive, and so mesmerizing: Whose behavior, in real life, can be reduced to simple cause and effect? Sharp, strange, propellant – and a whole lot of fun."

Leilani humbly received the many accolades and praises for her work.

"I feel incredibly fortunate that so many people came to the book with generosity," Leilani said. "Each one (award) has made it possible for me to have the resources to keep writing."

John and Renée Grisham Writers-in-Residence are emerging writers selected on the strength of their writing and provided with housing within walking distance of campus. They teach one class each semester and are provided ample writing time.

For more information about the program, click [here](#).

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.



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“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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