

Contact: Rachel Boon

**REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DEGREE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Rita Frances Dove, to be conferred at the spring 2022 commencement.

Details of Ms. Dove's Accomplishments: The University of Iowa nominates Rita Frances Dove for an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in recognition of her lifetime achievement as a poet, essayist, and fiction writer. A native of Akron, Ohio and former Fulbright Scholar, and she is a 1977 master of fine arts (MFA) graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop. While at Iowa, Dove met her husband, German writer Fred Viebahn, who was studying at the University on a Fulbright Fellowship. Dove's earliest work bears many of the elements that are characteristic of poets who came of age at the Workshop during that period: A meticulous attention to poetic craft; a command of traditional forms, blended with the cadences of conversational American speech; and a capacity to imbue the familiar details of day-to-day life with the charge, intensity and mystery of the mythic.

Professor Dove was named U.S. Poet Laureate from 1993 to 1995 and Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2004 to 2006. Her poetry and essay collections, novels, dramatic works, and book chapters span four decades, and the national recognition of her work includes a Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for her poetry collection *Thomas and Beulah* (Carnegie Mellon Press, 1986), a National Humanities Medal from President Clinton in 1996, the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal in 2009, a National Medal of the Arts in 2011 from President Obama, the NAACP Image Award for *Collected Poems 1974-2004* (W.W. Norton, 2016) in 2017, and a Wallace Stevens award from the Academy of American Poets in 2019. In addition to having received numerous other awards and honors from American institutions and professional societies, Professor Dove has served on distinguished literary juries and advisory boards and is a member of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. As Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, she has been a mentor to numerous graduate students and an inspiration to many aspiring young writers across the nation, including generations of students who have passed through the Iowa Writer's Workshop.

New York Times book critic Dwight Garner wrote on May 31, 2016 in reference to *Collected Poems 1974-2004*, "To read the poems of Rita Dove, to go where they take you, is to follow her deeply into a series of themes and their subsets: African-Americans in history and right now, ideas of indenture and independence, sex, travel, language (she compares commas to "miniature scythes"), family, motherhood, roomy adult love and whatever is coming out of the radio)...Ms. Dove's poems have earthiness, originality, power and range. Despair and loss are among her central themes, but so is the hunt for bedrock human pleasures." The supporting letters from distinguished UI Professors Lan Samantha Chang and Mark Levine of the Writer's Workshop and the renowned poets Camille Dungy and Joy Harjo not only speak to Professor Dove's many accomplishments, but also echo variously the themes and meanings valued so highly by Garner.

Rita Dove is an artist of extraordinary brilliance and accomplishment. She is, without question, deserving of an Honorary Degree from the University of Iowa.