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10-21-2015

### 2015 Common Book Convocation: Jeanne Marie Laskas, author of "Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make this Country Work"

Jeanne Marie Laskas

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## THOMAS ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE SERIES

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series is a program established by alumna and loyal supporter of Otterbein, Mary B. Thomas '28 (1907-1999). Her endowment was presented in honor of her parents, Fred N. and Emma B. Thomas.

The Thomas Academic Excellence Series is intended to create intellectual excitement and strengthen bonds on campus by providing a shared academic experience for many. The Series starts with summer orientation and New Student Week and continues with First Year Seminar courses and programs throughout the year. All these events create a conversation about the year's academic theme.

Mary B. Thomas graduated "cum laude" from Otterbein University in 1928 and had a lasting love of literature. An English major, Miss Thomas won the Bames Short Story Award and several other literary prizes. She entered Otterbein after spending one year at Denison University. She studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin and received her master's degree in English literature from The Ohio State University in 1933.

While an undergraduate at Otterbein Miss Thomas belonged to the Philalethean Literary Society, Sigma Alpha Tau sorority and Quiz and Quill.

She was a member of the Church of the Master, Phi Delta Gamma and the New Century Club. She served as an officer at the local, state and regional levels of the American Association of University Women, was a life member of the National Federation of Music Clubs and was a member of the Westerville Memorial Library Board. Her service to the library board included holding the offices of treasurer, vice-president and president.

Formerly employed in the treasurer's office of the University, Miss Thomas was an active member of the Otterbein Board of Trustees from 1960-1979. During that time, she served as secretary of the board and as a member of the Executive Committee. In 1979, the Board passed a resolution citing her leadership and the generosity, diversity and magnitude of her service. The resolution also named her an Honorary Trustee.

In 1977, Miss Thomas was named the Westerville Otterbein Women's Club "Woman of the Year." The award was presented to her in recognition of her "unselfish dedication and loyalty to Otterbein."

Miss Thomas was a donor to the University from the formation of the Development Board in 1948 until her death in November 1999. A member of the President's Club, she participated in many capital campaigns over the years. She donated her house to Otterbein when she moved to Friendship Village in 1979.

Her hobbies included photography, stamp collecting and travel; she visited five continents. She also owned an impressive collection of postcards depicting scenes of Westerville and Otterbein.

## The Thomas Academic Excellence Series *presents*

Jeanne Marie  
Laskas

author of the  
2015 Common Book,  
*Hidden America*



Wednesday, October 21 • 3 p.m.  
Fritsche Theatre at Cowan Hall

## About Jeanne Marie Laskas

Author of *Hidden America*

Jeanne Marie Laskas is the author of six books, including her latest, *Hidden America*, as well as the award-winning trilogy of memoirs: *Fifty Acres and a Poodle*, *The Exact Same Moon* and *Growing Girls*. Most of her long form journalism now appears in *GQ*, where she is a correspondent. Formerly a contributing editor at *Esquire*, and a weekly columnist at *The Washington Post Magazine*, she has been writing for national magazines for 20 years. She has won more than a dozen Gold Quill awards for Excellence in Journalism, and her piece on coal mining, "Underworld," was a finalist for the 2007 National Magazine Awards. Laskas serves as director of The Writing Program at the University of Pittsburgh, where she teaches creative writing.

### Past Common Books

**1995**

*Fires in the Mirror*  
Anna Deavere Smith

**1996**

*China Boy*  
Gus Lee

**1997**

*The Paradise of Bombs*  
Scott Russell Sanders

**1998**

*She Walks These Hills*  
Sharyn McCrumb

**1999**

*There Are No Children Here*  
Alex Kotlowitz

**2000**

*After Long Silence*  
Helen Fremont

**2001**

*The Sparrow*  
Mary Doria Russell

**2002**

*My Year of Meats*  
Ruth Ozeki

**2003**

*Bombingham*  
Anthony Grooms

**2004**

*The Eagle's Shadow*  
Mark Hertsgaard

**2005**

*Mountains Beyond Mountains*  
Tracy Kidder

**2006**

*The Inextinguishable Symphony*  
Martin Goldsmith

**2007**

*Under the Feet of Jesus*  
Helena María Viramontes

**2008**

*A Long Way Gone: Memories of a Boy Soldier*  
Ishmael Beah

**2009**

*Strange as this Weather has Been*  
Ann Pancake

**2010**

*Outcasts United*  
Warren St. John

**2011**

*City of Refuge*  
Tom Piazza

**2012**

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*  
Rebecca Skloot

**2013**

*Little Princes*  
Conor Grennan

**2014**

*Running the Rift*  
Naomi Benaron

*The Thomas Academic Excellence Series presents*

# Jeanne Marie Laskas

Welcome ..... Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

Recognition of Miss Mary B. Thomas, Class of '28..... Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

Introduction of Ms. Laskas ..... Emma Ward

Keynote Address..... Ms. Jeanne Marie Laskas

Concluding Remarks ..... Dr. Miguel Martinez-Saenz

A complimentary reception and book signing will be held following the lecture in Roush Hall, Fisher Gallery.

The reception is sponsored by the Common Book Committee on behalf of the Thomas Academic Excellence Series.

The taking of photographs during the lecture is strictly prohibited.

## Convocation Etiquette

- Silence your cell phone and refrain from any cell phone use (web surfing, text messaging, etc).
- Do not talk or whisper during the program.
- Stay until the end of the program. (If you absolutely must leave, wait until a break in the program, or a time when everyone is standing to minimize the disruption.)