

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



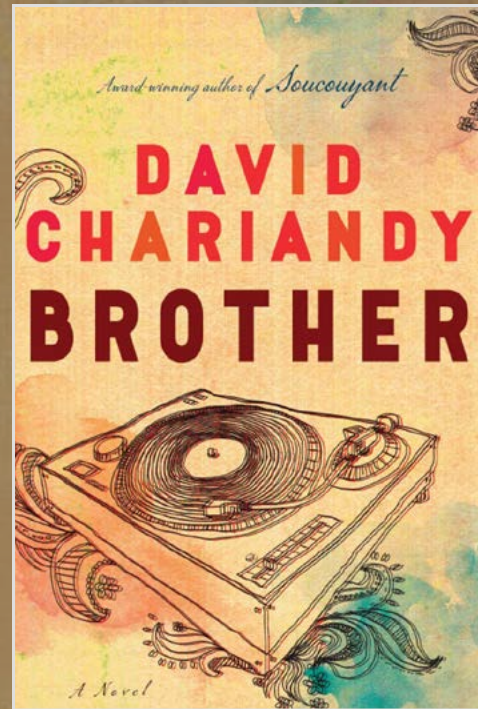
BOOK CLUB  
DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2018

# BROTHER

BY DAVID CHARIANDY

RECOMMENDED BY LAWRENCE HILL



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## HAPPY NEW YEAR AND WELCOME AMNESTY BOOK CLUB MEMBERS!

Welcome to another year of reading great books with the Amnesty International Book Club. We are happy to be sharing our January/February 2018 book pick, starting off the New Year with the novel *Brother*, by David Chariandy. This title has been recommended by guest reader Lawrence Hill, acclaimed author of several books including *The Book of Negroes* and *The Illegal*.

In this guide, you'll find Lawrence Hill's considered reflection upon the story, as well as discussion questions, an Amnesty Background section on the issue of racism and the administration of justice, and an action you can take asking the Prime Minister of Jamaica to protect Shackelia Jackson and ensure justice for all those killed by police.

*Brother* explores questions of masculinity, family, race, and identity as they are played out in a Scarborough, Ontario housing complex during the sweltering heat and simmering violence of the summer of 1991.

With shimmering prose and mesmerizing precision, David Chariandy takes us inside the lives of Michael and Francis. They are the sons of Trinidadian immigrants, their father has disappeared and their mother works double, sometimes triple shifts so her boys might fulfill the elusive promise of their adopted home.

Coming of age in The Park, a cluster of town houses and leaning concrete towers in the disparaged outskirts of a sprawling city, Michael and Francis battle against the careless prejudices and low expectations that confront them as young men of black and brown

ancestry. We come to learn the brothers' hopes and dreams. But these bright hopes are violently, irrevocably thwarted by a tragic shooting, and the police crackdown and suffocating suspicion that follow.

David Chariandy, a unique and exciting voice in Canadian literature, crafts a heartbreaking and timely story about the profound love that exists between brothers and the senseless loss of lives cut short with the shot of a gun.

Thank you for choosing to be part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca).

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### About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

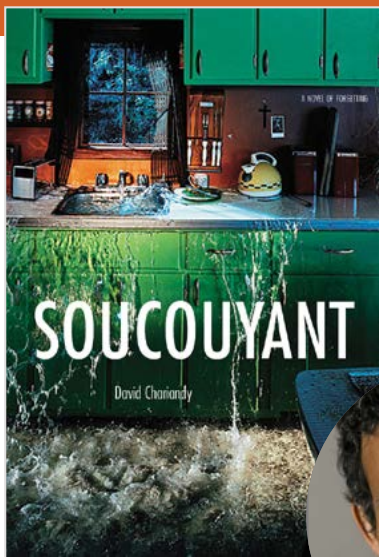
Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit [amnesty.ca](http://amnesty.ca) or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.





About this month's featured author,

## David Chariandy

David Chariandy is a Canadian writer and one of the co-founders of Commodore Books.

Chariandy grew up in Toronto and lives and teaches in Vancouver. His debut novel, *Soucouyant*, received stunning reviews and nominations from eleven literary awards juries, including a Governor General's Literary Award shortlisting, a Gold Independent Publisher Award for Best Novel, and the Scotiabank Giller Prize longlist. *Brother* is his second novel.

Chariandy has an MA from Carleton and a PhD from York University. He lives in Vancouver and teaches in the department of English at Simon Fraser University.

*"Mesmerizing. Poetic. Achingly soulful. Brother is a pitch-perfect song of masculinity and tenderness, and of the ties of family and community."*

—Lawrence Hill, author of *The Book of Negroes* and *The Illegal*

About this month's guest reader,

## Lawrence Hill

Lawrence Hill, a professor of creative writing at the University of Guelph, is the author of ten books, including *The Illegal*, *The Book of Negroes*, *Any Known Blood*, and *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*. He is the winner of various

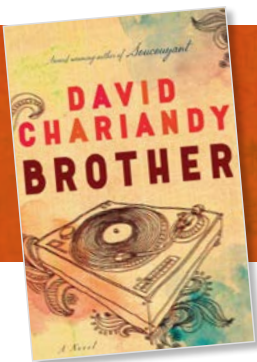
awards including

The Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and two-time winner of CBC Radio's Canada Reads. Hill delivered the 2013 Massey

Lectures, based on

his non-fiction book *Blood: The Stuff of Life*. He co-wrote the adaptation for the six-part television miniseries *The Book of Negroes*, which attracted millions of viewers in the United States and Canada and won eleven Canadian Screen Awards in 2016. The recipient of seven honorary doctorates from Canadian universities, as well as the 2017 Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize, Hill served as chair of the jury of the 2016 Scotiabank Giller Prize. He is the grandson and son of African-American soldiers who served with the American Army during WW I and WW II, respectively, and is working on a new novel about the African-American soldiers who helped build the Alaska Highway in 1942-43. He is a Member of the Order of Canada, and lives with his family in Hamilton, Ontario and in Woody Point, Newfoundland. [www.lawrencehill.com](http://www.lawrencehill.com)





## Lawrence Hill's reflections on *Brother*

*Brother*, the second and latest novel from David Chariandy, is a short, intense, lyrical meditation set in a black community Scarborough, Ontario.

*Brother* shares an interesting parallel with Chariandy's first novel, *Soucouyant*. Both novels feature Black mothers who are living in Scarborough and suffering some form of loss (memory in the case of *Soucouyant*, and spatial orientation and willingness to speak in the case of *Brother*) and who have a loaded, uneasy relationship with a son. Both novels offer a rare literary glimpse into the multiracial, complex community of Scarborough – a neighbourhood in the east end of Toronto which became a mecca for black and immigrant families in the 1970s and beyond. Chariandy, who grew up in Scarborough, now lives in Vancouver and teaches English at Simon Fraser University.

First published by McClelland & Stewart in 2017, *Brother* went on to be long listed for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and to win the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize. It offers a quiet, confident, meticulous writing style perfectly exemplified by the opening lines:

*"Once he showed me his place in the sky. That hydro pole in a parking lot all weed-broke and abandoned. Looking up, you'd see the dangers of the climb. The feeder lines on insulators, the wired bucket called a pole-pig, the footholds rusted bad and going way into a*

*sky cut hard by live cables. You'd hear the electricity as you moved higher, he warned me. Feel it shivering your teeth and lighting a whole city of fear inside your head. But if you made it to the top, he said, you were good. All that free air and seeing. The streets below suddenly patterns you could read."*

*Brother* serves both as a minutely crafted book with close tending to the pulse of each sentence, and a song of Black masculinity and tenderness. It is a novel about loss and recovery within a family and a community. At the heart of the novel is the narrator, Michael, who lives in an apartment with his mother and is trying to recover from the death of his older, more adventurous, more live-life-to-the-hilt brother Francis. *Brother* sings the melodies of Michael's early childhood, adolescent and young adult memories of his brother, and of how he and other Black men have died on or next to the streets of Scarborough, and of how a single, working-class mother and traumatized son carry on in the face of indescribable loss: the death of Francis. It is a novel about cruelty inside the Black community and in its relationships with the outside world – police included. It is also a novel about kindness, and memory, and the redeeming quality of testifying. *Brother* offers the beautiful, poetic testimonial of a brother and a mother trying to navigate the world and find their way after an utterly unnecessary bullet hacks away at their too-small, too-fragile immigrant family and community.

—Lawrence Hill

## Discussion questions on *Brother*

### Discussion questions from guest reader Lawrence Hill

1. David Chariandy chooses to circle around and around the stories of Michael and Francis and their mother in *Brother*. Why does he choose this approach, instead of narrating in a direct, linear fashion?
2. What picture is the author attempting to paint of Scarborough, the community in the east end of Toronto where *Brother* is set?
3. In the canon of Canadian literature, one doesn't find too many novels set in Scarborough. David Chariandy sets *Brother* squarely in that community, as he does with his first novel *Soucouyant*. Catherine Hernandez has also recently published a novel about the neighbourhood, and hers is aptly named *Scarborough*. Can you think of other communities which, like Scarborough, have been largely overlooked by Canadian writers? Is Canada's literary landscape and focus now changing, and if so, in what ways?
4. Discuss the ways that music and food enrich the telling of *Brother*.
5. How do you square the intermingling of violence and tenderness in *Brother*, and what is David Chariandy saying in his novel about the lives of young Black men?

### Discussion questions from Amnesty International Book Club

1. What did you think of *Brother*? What aspects did you enjoy and which aspects did you find challenging in the novel?
2. Describe the family dynamics in Michael's family, how were the relationships between Michael, Francis, their mother, and their father?
3. The older figures in Michael and Francis' world are immigrants, although they themselves are Canadian-born. How does Chariandy incorporate the themes of foreignness and loss of home through the different characters' eyes?
4. In what ways does Francis' death impact Michael, and how does he cope with it?
5. What role does the boys' father play in the book? How have his actions affected them and their mother, and the family as a whole?



# BACKGROUND



Amnesty International supporters in Finland speaking out against discrimination and racism.

## Racism and the administration of justice

*Brother* explores the issue of racism through the eyes of a young black man, and focuses on racism in the justice system. Although racism impacts people's lives in a variety of ways, and through many different institutions and structures in society, racism in the justice system continues to be one of the most readily apparent examples of institutional racism.

Racism is an attack on the very notion of universal human rights. It systematically denies certain people their full human rights just because of their colour, race, ethnicity, descent (including caste) or national origin. It is an assault on a fundamental principle underlying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – that

human rights are everyone's birthright and apply to all without distinction. It undermines all human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural.

Racism, to varying degrees and in various forms, infects virtually every country of the world. The law and its administration, which should uphold the values of justice and equality, is one of the primary forces in opposing the effects of racism. Yet justice systems all too often fail in this purpose and instead mirror the prejudices of the society they serve.

Racial discrimination in the administration of justice systematically denies certain people their human rights



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University of Natal Amnesty International Group in Durban, South Africa being led by drummers on an Anti-Racism Protest, during the World Conference Against Racism in 2001.

because of their colour, race, ethnicity, descent (including caste) or national origin. Research conducted by Amnesty International shows that members of ethnic minorities often suffer torture, ill-treatment and harassment at the hands of the police. In many parts of the world they face unfair trials and discriminatory sentencing which puts them at increased risk of harsh punishments, including the death penalty.

The right not to suffer racial discrimination is a fundamental principle of international human rights law. The principle appears in virtually every major human rights instrument as well as in the UN Charter. Indeed, one of the stated purposes of the UN is to “achieve international cooperation... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”. And yet racial discrimination persists in virtually every society, despite all the efforts of the UN and organizations

## Racial discrimination in the administration of justice systematically denies certain people their human rights.

around the world dedicated to combating racism, and the fine-sounding commitments in so many constitutions and laws.

The concept of race has no biological basis. It is a socio-political construction usually based on supposed physical characteristics of groups. Racial categories are arbitrary and often used for political ends. The meaning of race and the ideological expressions of racism have changed over time and across continents. Racism has often been used by dominant racial groups to justify their domination, and in some cases racist attitudes



are an expression of alienation and despair among the powerless, including victims of racism.

The various manifestations of racism are invariably linked to broad economic and social issues. In the modern globalized market economy, the poor and the marginalized are frequently members of racial groups whose position has been determined by generations of exploitation, oppression and discrimination by

other racial groups. Racist ideologies have helped to create and then reinforce the inequalities – racial groups who had been enslaved, impoverished and disenfranchised, or even virtually exterminated, were branded as biologically inferior. This was used to justify the power and privileges of the dominant groups, and perpetuated inequalities by blocking access to education, land and other resources, jobs, positions of influence and prosperity.



## Amnesty International's work against racism

Amnesty International opposes racism through our work to promote observance of the UDHR around the world. We call for ratification and implementation by states of international and regional human rights instruments that prohibit all forms of discrimination. We also work worldwide on cases of grave violations of the right to be free from racial discrimination.

Specifically, Amnesty International opposes racism by working for the release of prisoners of conscience imprisoned by reason of race, descent, or national or ethnic origin; and through our work on cases where racism is a factor in abuses including torture, ill-treatment, the death penalty, “disappearances”, unfair trials of political prisoners, unlawful killings, excessive use of force, forcible exile, mass expulsions and house destruction.

The organization also opposes discriminatory legislation that facilitates these violations. In addition, Amnesty International intervenes when racial discrimination prevents redress for victims and perpetuates impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations, or hinders the right of those fleeing persecution to seek asylum.

Amnesty International's work against racial discrimination on the basis of race, descent (including caste), colour, ethnicity or national origin is based on the definition set out in Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: “In this Convention, the term ‘racial discrimination’ shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”

**Amnesty International intervenes when racial discrimination prevents redress for victims and perpetuates impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations, or hinders the right of those fleeing persecution to seek asylum.**





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Shackelia has battled a badly underfunded, sluggish court system to lead a bold fight for justice for her brother and others killed by police.

## Shackelia Jackson's case

In *Brother*, we experience Michael's pain as he tries to recover from the loss of his brother. Unfortunately, this story goes beyond Chariandy's novel, and an eerily similar incident took place in Jamaica in 2014.

On the morning of 20 January 2014, Nakiea Jackson was busy cooking a large lunch order of fried chicken for the local branch of the National Blood Bank when, according to eyewitnesses, a police officer stormed into his shop, and shot him.

The young man was thrown in the back of a police car and taken to hospital, where he died from two gunshot wounds according to an autopsy. Nakiea had been unarmed at the time of the shooting according to witnesses. The police had been pursuing a "Rastafarian-looking" suspect in a robbery, and Nakiea fit that description.

After police killed her brother Nakiea in 2014 in Jamaica, Shackelia decided to obtain justice and the truth. She was determined not to let Nakiea's story end there. She has battled a badly underfunded, sluggish court system to lead a bold fight for justice. In doing so, she has rallied dozens of families whose loved ones have been similarly killed, amplifying their cries for justice. The police have responded by raiding her community, timing the raids to coincide with court dates. They have also intimidated Shackelia and her family.

But Shackelia refuses to be silenced. She says their attempts only reinforce her belief in what's right. "I fight because I have no other choice," she says. "To stop would mean I am giving another police officer permission to kill another of my brothers."

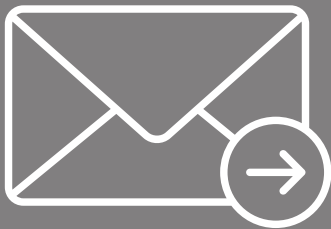
## TAKE ACTION NOW

**Protect Shackelia Jackson from harassment and intimidation while she campaigns to end police violence.**



Write a letter or email the Prime Minister of Jamaica asking him to protect Shackelia Jackson and ensure justice for all those killed by police.

In dozens of cases, Amnesty International's research revealed how police employ illegal tactics to instill fear and prevent justice from taking its course. Police officers have raided relatives' homes to stop them from showing up at court hearings, harassed witnesses to prevent them from testifying and intimidated those who managed to be heard inside the court room.



Email the Prime Minister of Jamaica at [bit.ly/shackelia-jackson](https://bit.ly/shackelia-jackson) and call on him to protect Shackelia Jackson and ensure justice for all those killed by police.

You can also send your letters to:

Prime Minister Andrew Holmes

Office of the Prime Minister

1 Devon Road, Kingston 10, Jamaica

primeminister@opm.gov.jm



COMING UP  
IN MARCH 2018

***Brown Girl in  
the Ring***  
by Nalo Hopkinson

Recommended by guest reader  
**Sarah Raughley**

The Amnesty International Book Club is thrilled to announce that our March/April book is going to be Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The novel contains Afro-Caribbean culture with themes of folklore and magical realism. It was the winning entry in the Warner Aspect First Novel Contest. Since the selection, Hopkinson's novel has received critical acclaim in the form of the 1999 Locus Award for Best First Novel, and the 1999 John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. *Brown Girl in the Ring*



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was recommended for the Amnesty International Book Club by guest reader Sarah Raughley, a writer for young adults and author of *The Effigies* book series.

**The discussion guide will be sent out  
March 2018.**

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at [bookclub@amnesty.ca](mailto:bookclub@amnesty.ca)

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