

Opening General
Session & Keynote
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KEYNOTE SPEAKER
JOHN WATERS

"This Filthy World"
Sunday, July 15
9:00 a.m.–10:15 a.m.

As an American film director, screenwriter, author, actor, stand-up comedian, and journalist, John Waters rose to fame in the early 1970s for his transgressive cult films that featured his regular troupe of actors known as Dreamlanders. Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, he started his film career in the 1960s writing, producing, and independently financing his films. As his body of work grew, Waters went from a local boy making cheap, underground movies, to a local man making counter-culture Hollywood comedies. He is most well-known for breaking boundaries of acceptable filmmaking—his movies often cover topics of drugs, queers, abortion, and religion—nothing is sacred in his field of vision. In 1999, he was honored with the Filmmaker on the Edge Award at the Provincetown International Film Festival.

An accomplished writer, photographer, and visual artist, he has published several volumes of his journalist exploits, screenplay collections, and artwork. An openly gay man, Waters is an avid supporter of gay rights and gay pride. He has also authored a string of hysterically funny, bestselling books, including last year's *Make Trouble* and 2015's hitchhiking diary *Carsick*. His live one-man engagements around the country are deliciously raucous and un-PC.

MEET JOHN WATERS

2018 AALL Annual Meeting & Conference Keynote Speaker

John Waters, the iconic writer and director of the box office hit, *Hairspray*, doesn't shy away from spectacle. His films are known for breaking boundaries of acceptable filmmaking. His keynote address for the upcoming AALL Annual Meeting in Baltimore this July is titled "This Filthy World," which will touch on a little bit everything. "It's updated and always changing—it's about humor, it's about crime, it's about law, it's about fashion, it's about movies, and it's about politics," says Waters. AALL President Greg Lambert caught up with the Baltimore native to help introduce AALL members to the man behind the brightly colored suits and distinct pencil-thin mustache. When it comes to censorship, librarians, and criminal justice, Waters has plenty to say.

On Baltimore . . .

Well, I think Baltimore to me is better than it's ever been because it's the only city left that's cheap enough to have a Bohemia. Kids are moving here because it's cheap in places and it's near big cities. You don't have to leave where you were born anymore. You don't have to go to New York or LA. As a matter of fact, you almost can't—nothing new is happening there because it's too expensive. So, it seems to me [Baltimore] is even more vital. We've got edge, come on down!

On librarians . . .

You know, librarians are radical. There's this popular cliché of librarians being timid old ladies—you are the opposite. You are radical. You want to give kids books that are on the banned list. Anybody who becomes a librarian in any field likes to read, is smart, and I always feel like they're my people.

On censorship . . .

Of course there is censorship. In the old days, movie censors were pretty stupid, they said ridiculous things, and they were easy to make fun of. But

now, the Motion Picture Association of America gives you an NC-17, and they're liberal censors, which are the worst kind because they have a faulty rating system. They also have the same people in power there for decades and decades. We need to get young people in these positions. When liberals are villains, they're just as fascist because they think that no one ever disagrees with them. Now, I'm a bleeding-heart liberal, but I do know that we have to stop being such separatists. In my show, I make fun of "gayly correctness." I think I am politically correct in a weird way, but at the same time, I don't think they had political correctness arguments in poor schools; it's the rich people's problem.

On libraries and free speech . . .

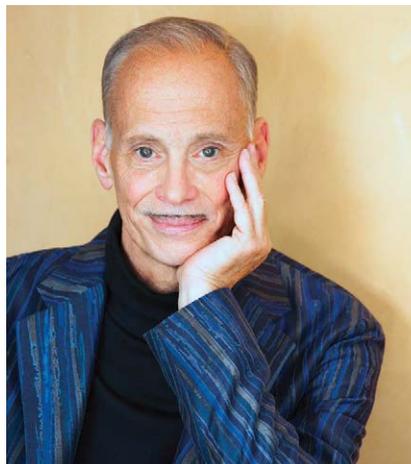
Well first of all, I was corrupted at the library. When I was a kid, I went to the library and I looked up everything in *Life* magazine on the files. I'd look up drug addiction, homosexuality, I'd look up everything that I was never allowed or supposed to be interested in. And so I found all of my education at the library; I wrote about this in one of my books, *Role Models*. I tried to get a Tennessee Williams book of short stories when I was really young and it said

I don't think books should be censored for children, and I think free speech is being able to read what you want. So I think libraries are incredibly important. In most cases, it's the first time any young person can find out information that their parents don't want them to know.

"See librarian," like they wouldn't leave it out for children. They [the librarians] wouldn't give it to children, so I stole that book because I wanted to read it. So I believe that if an eight-year-old comes into your library and they've heard of *Naked Lunch*, they're old enough to read it. I don't think books should be censored for children, and I think free speech is being able to read what you want. So I think libraries are incredibly important. In most cases, it's the first time any young person can find out information that their parents don't want them to know. So I'm for libraries being dangerous. I even think that you should be able to look at porn in libraries. I mean I know that's a problem, but I guess information should be made available to anyone who's curious enough to get it. I think that's important, even the extremes of free speech. Without those extremes, we can't have, for example, a group such as the American Civil Liberties Union defending Nazis. I can't imagine in Charlottesville that anyone actually likes them [Nazis], but yes, I am still for the extremes. I'm almost for the right to yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater.

On an alternative career as "criminal-defense lawyer for the damned" . . .

Yes, I would be good at that. (Or a psychiatrist would be pretty good, too.) But a criminal defense lawyer, yes. I've taught in prison—several different prisons—and actually, I still visit people in prison. I've helped people get out of prison, and I've been arrested, so I think I understand the judicial crime system. Once, the corrections people I work with offered to start a reform



school using my name for the school. I loved the idea of parents saying "you're bad, you're going to John Waters." I wanted a reform school for rich-kid pyromaniacs! There is no such niche—pyromaniacs are the only kids reform schools usually will not take.

Librarians also make way for groups such as the Innocence Project—a non-profit legal organization that is committed to exonerating wrongly convicted people through the use of DNA testing, and to reforming the criminal justice system to prevent further injustice. Of course I think that's a great, radical organization. But I go beyond that: I try to free people who actually did commit the crime, and the only other person I'd really want to be is Judy Clarke, the lawyer who accepts the worst cases, and if she gets you life rather than the death penalty, she's won. She's the only person whose career I'm jealous of. And I'm not [talking about] Judith Clark—she's one of the Brinks [armored trucks] robbers. Although, I think she deserves to get out, too. I wish Judy Clarke could help Judith Clark.

On the politics of punk rock . . .

Well I think the punk rock thing is pretty great. I host a big punk rock festival every year in Oakland called Burger Boogaloo. I'm doing it again this year—last year Iggy Azalea closed the show. The punks are my people, and they're from 16 to 70 years old; punks have been around for a long time now. I told them last year that whenever there is a big demonstration—for instance, when police officers have attacked somebody for being alive and black—that instead of demonstrating, everybody should wear police uniforms. It would really be confusing if everybody went to a demonstration dressed as a cop, because then you would have true anarchy because nobody would know who's who. I'm always for using humor as terrorism. I think it's the only terrorism I'm for. It's what the Yuppies used to do—embarrassing the enemy by making them look stupid. That, to me, is the perfect kind of activism.

On the viral success of the commencement speech he gave in 2015 that became his latest book, *Make Trouble* . . .

I don't know. I was amazed it did [go viral], and then it became an illustrated gift book. Whoever thought I'd be a gift book? And now it's a record—it's out on vinyl now so I'm excited about that. I feel so proud for having a vinyl record out in 2018. I don't know, I guess it just spoke to the people. I'm of the generation where if anybody my age says "We had more fun when we were young," I always say that means you're old because you're wrong. The older generation is having just as much fun being hackers. As soon as you stop investigating the new culture and the new music, to me, it just means you're old and that you don't have much say about anything anymore. ■

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