

Investigative reporter is 2022 Salem Award recipient

By Dustin Luca | Staff Writer March 25, 2022



SALEM — Amid renewed civil rights protests across the country, this year’s Salem Award will go to an investigative reporter who’s made a career breaking open unsolved murders from the civil rights era of decades past.

Voices Against Injustice, an organization formed out of the 300th anniversary of the Salem Witch Trials to keep its lessons alive via the annual Salem Award, announced Thursday its selection of investigative reporter and author Jerry Mitchell as recipient of the award in 2022. A ceremony honoring Mitchell will be held later in the year.

Mitchell’s work has spanned two careers fighting the same battle. As a reporter for the Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi, he worked for three decades investigating civil rights cases that had gone cold. In 2019, he founded the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting, a nonprofit continuing that work while also building up “the next generation of investigative reporters,” Voices Against Injustice’s announcement read.

The annual award is one of the ways the city's cultural center fulfills its mission of remembering the legacy and lessons of the Salem Witch Trials: By amplifying the work of people or organizations that commit themselves to righting social injustices.

In a video announcing the award, Voices Against Injustice Awards Committee Chairperson Ana Brea said Mitchell's "relentless pursuit of truth and justice in his investigative reporting make him more than deserving of this award."

"His work was instrumental in bringing facts to light which would prove key in securing convictions against perpetrators of racial violence," Brea said.

Mitchell also authored "Race Against Time: A Reporter Reopens the Unsolved Murder Cases of the Civil Rights Era," a Pulitzer Prize finalist, a MacArthur "genius" and the recipient of more than 30 national awards. He was nominated by Reena Evers-Everette, executive director of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute, and Wisconsin high school teacher Erik Shager, according to the organization's announcement.

"Jerry's work inspired others," Evers-Everette wrote in her nomination. "To date, there have been 24 convictions in cold cases from the Civil Rights Era. My mother and I believe that this would not have happened without Jerry."

Fara Wolfson, chairperson of Voices Against Injustice, said Mitchell's "relentless pursuit of justice is extraordinary, and we are thrilled to have him join a powerful list of honorees."

Mitchell, in the organization's announcement, said he was "humbled and honored by this award, which encourages people to speak up against injustices, even when no one else is speaking up."

"Justice is impossible without truth," Mitchell said, "and that is why we so desperately need truth."

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