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Skirball Cultural Center to present new online exhibition

TIGHTROPE: AMERICANS REACHING FOR HOPE **January 21–May 31, 2021**

Stories and photographs highlight viable solutions to major American crises

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center announces *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope*, an online exhibition illustrating a central tension of American life: In one of the world's richest economies, all too many struggle to survive. Based on the *New York Times* bestselling book of the same name by Pulitzer Prize winners Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, the exhibition takes a humane approach to understanding our country's many socioeconomic troubles. These include the opioid epidemic, the prison industrial complex, and lack of access to affordable healthcare. Yet the exhibition underscores the potential of grassroots action, highlighting practical, results-driven steps to bring about social change. Featuring the real-life stories of people in both urban and rural areas, paired with more than thirty images by acclaimed photojournalist Lynsey Addario, *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* shines a light on the trials and triumphs of a nation in need.

"As COVID-19 continues to have a disproportionate effect on America's working class, it is even more critical that we confront the half-century of policy failure that has led to the state of our union," commented Jessie Kornberg, Skirball President and CEO. "We are grateful to Nick Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, as well as Lynsey Addario, not only for chronicling the lived experiences of individuals and families left behind by a changing labor market and diminishing opportunities, but for amplifying the work of organizations offering workable solutions to some of America's most pressing problems and helping to build a more just society."

On view at skirball.org from January 21 through May 31, *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* is organized into eight sections: Introduction, The Kids on the Number 6 School Bus, Deaths of Despair, Incarceration, Homelessness, Healthcare, Child Poverty, and Action Guide. Its narrative is told in part through the lives of people with whom Kristof grew up in rural Yamhill, Oregon. Although this region prospered for much of the twentieth century, it has been devastated over the past few decades by the loss of blue-collar manufacturing jobs. About one-quarter of the children on Kristof's old school bus have died prematurely from drugs, alcohol, suicide, or reckless accidents. While these particular hardships have unfolded in one corner of the US, they are representative of the many communities featured in the exhibition.

Even as *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* takes an unflinching look at crises hiding in plain sight, it presents alternative outcomes beyond the confines of entrenched poverty and inequality. The life of Daniel McDowell serves as an example. McDowell joined the army in 2004 after high school, served in

Afghanistan and Iraq, and earned a Purple Heart after sustaining a knee injury from an antitank mine. When he subsequently became addicted to doctor-prescribed painkillers, he endured the collapse of his marriage and experienced homelessness before entering a two-year residential program supported by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Today, McDowell is working on his sobriety and focusing on being a good father to his son.

Skirball curator Cate Thurston explained, “Daniel McDowell’s descent into drug addiction and homelessness has been repeated across the country on a vast scale, yet his story demonstrates that with modest financial investment, people can rebuild their lives. Our hope is that through stories like McDowell’s, coupled with Addario’s poignant imagery, we can peel back the anonymity of data points, bring a human face to the numbers, and highlight interventions that are proving successful at changing the course of our nation.”

Thurston added, “In keeping with Kristof and WuDunn’s commitment to encouraging their readers to get involved, we urge exhibition visitors to explore the Action Guide, offering ten steps they can take to make a difference—such as becoming a mentor to at-risk youth, volunteering at a local homeless shelter, or learning to lobby members of Congress effectively on issues like mental health and early childhood education.”

To mark the opening of the exhibition, journalists **Nicholas D. Kristof** and **Sheryl WuDunn** will participate in a FREE virtual talk on Tuesday, January 26, at 6:00 pm. The co-authors will provide insights on the many challenges facing the American public and offer ideas on how to forge a new path forward. The discussion and Q&A will be moderated by **Eric Liu**, co-founder and CEO of Citizen University. Reservations required: skirball.org/kristof-wudunn.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Journalists Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have co-authored several bestselling books focused on advancing social conscience, including *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* and *A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity*. Together they were awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for Lifetime Achievement in 2009. Kristof an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*, who won his second Pulitzer in 2006 for his columns on the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. WuDunn is a business executive.

Lynsey Addario is an American photojournalist whose work focuses on conflicts and human-rights issues, especially the role of women globally. Addario regularly works for *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, and *Time* magazine. She is the recipient of numerous international awards throughout her career, including a MacArthur Fellowship and the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting, both in 2009.

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The exhibition *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* and its related educational programs are made possible by generous support from the following donors:

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About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. It is temporarily closed in support of efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and in accordance with California's closure of indoor museum operations.