

Woman's City Club National Speaker Forum 2019

Helen Thorpe

"Helen Thorpe has taken policy and turned it into literature." – Malcom Gladwell



An award-winning immersive journalist known for the personal and profound insights of her books and articles, Helen Thorpe was born in London to Irish parents, emigrated to the United States as a one-year-old, and now lives in Denver, Colorado. She graduated magna cum laude from Princeton and received an MA in English literature from Columbia. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Texas Monthly*, *Slate*, *Westword*, *Chalkbeat*, and *5280*. Her radio stories have aired on *This American Life* and *Sound Print*. She is also the author of three books, works of narrative nonfiction that document in a human and intimate way the lives of immigrants, refugees, and veterans of foreign conflicts.

Thorpe's first book, *Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age in America* (2009) won the Colorado Book Award and was named one of the best books of the year by *The Washington Post*. The Denver Center for the Performing Arts adapted the nonfiction book for the stage as a play.

Soldier Girls: The Battles of Three Women at Home and at War (2014) was named by *TIME* as the number one nonfiction book of the year. *The Boston Globe* called it "utterly absorbing, gorgeously written, and unforgettable." And *The New York Times* said: "Thorpe achieves a staggering intimacy with her subjects."

Thorpe's most recent book, *The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship, and Hope in an American Classroom* (2017), was described by *The New York Times* as "a delicate and heartbreaking mystery story" about 22 immigrant and refugee teenagers who learn English together in a single classroom that represents a microcosm of the global refugee crisis. Many arrive directly from refugee camps, some after having lost one or both parents. Thorpe follows the journeys of three families in particular—from Iraq, Burma, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—to illustrate what life is like in refugee-producing parts of the world and the challenges of assimilation into a new and very different country. As the *New York Times* adds, "Thorpe's book is a reminder that in an era of nativism, some Americans are still breaking down walls and nurturing newcomers, the seeds of the great American experiment."

Thorpe was nominated in 2018 for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the only annual U.S. literary award that recognizes the power of the written word to promote peace.