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For Immediate Release

**ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY
Racism and the Haunting of American
Psychiatry at the Milledgeville Asylum**

By Mab Segrest

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“A valuable contribution to the history of mental health care and of the racist applications of medicine.” –*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

“A must-read volume for every mental health professional in the United States. *No exceptions.*” –Julian Adler, Center for Court Innovation, author, *Start Here*

“In a gripping narrative, Segrest retells southern history through the experiences of patients committed to (Milledgeville) . . . She gives voice to the 25,000 unclaimed bodies that still lie in unmarked graves. It’s an astonishing and compelling feat.”

– Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, C. Vann Woodward Professor of History Emerita, Yale

**MAB SEGREST’S AUTHORITATIVE NEW BOOK –
ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY –
OFFERS A SHATTERING INDICTMENT OF THE RACIST ORIGINS
OF AMERICAN PSYCHIATRY**

In her new book, **ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY** (The New Press, April 14, 2020), celebrated author and social activist Mab Segrest has dug deep into the often chilling history of the Georgia State Lunatic, Idiot, and Epileptic Asylum – otherwise known as “Milledgeville” for its location – to discover how modern psychiatric practice was forged in the traumas of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow.

The Milledgeville asylum opened in December 1842. Approximately one hundred years later, it had become the largest insane asylum in the world with over ten thousand patients. In **ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY**, Segrest tells the story of this iconic and infamous southern institution, a history that was all but erased from popular memory and within the psychiatric profession. The author’s revelations are, by turns, infuriating, tender, funny, scathing – and always surprising.

More

Through meticulous research and riveting accounts of historical characters, Segrest connects the institution's history to the modern era. She uncovers the factors that helped set the stage for the eugenic theories of the twentieth century and for the persistent racial ideologies that continue to have devastating consequences in our own times. On a positive note, she also traces the connections to today's dissident psychiatric practices that offer sanity and create justice. Throughout the book, Segrest examines such issues as:

*How theories and practices of psychiatry recognizable today originated in U.S. asylums, promulgated by people who defended slavery, profited from the removal of native peoples, and supported sterilization of people considered "unfit."

*How there were also people working within these institutions whose humanity and empiricism overrode such bigotries.

*Why this historical context is critical to understanding issues of diagnoses and treatment today – for example, the situation in which 90% of public psychiatric beds in the United States are found in jails and prisons.

*Why the struggle for equity in medicine is still not won.

Being hailed as a landmark of scholarship, a gripping and compelling narrative, and a monumental accomplishment, **ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY** restores a vital thread between past and present and reveals the tangled racial roots of psychiatry in America. As Spellman College professor Beverly Guy-Sheftall says, "Segrest's meticulous research foregrounds the shameful connections between white supremacy, Cherokee removal, slavery, patriarchy, and the psychiatric profession over the past century and a half in the South . . . Since prisons and jails are now the major sites for psychiatric 'care,' the book is an urgent call as well for prison reform."

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About the Author

Mab Segrest, author of **ADMINISTRATIONS OF LUNACY**, was born in 1949 in Birmingham, Alabama and grew up in Tuskegee where her family on both sides had lived for over a century. Her childhood experience in Alabama's apartheid culture shaped her future work as an activist, writer and scholar. Her books include *Memoir of a Race Traitor*, *My Mama's Dead Squirrel*, *Born to Belonging*, and *Sing, Whisper, Shout, Pray!*

Segrest earned a PhD in English from Duke University. She has worked in a range of social justice formations for forty years. From 2002 to 2014, she chaired the Gender and Women's Studies Department at Connecticut College. Segrest has also been a Mellon Distinguished Professor at Tulane, a Fellow at Emory's James Weldon Johnson Institute, the Newell Visiting Scholar at Georgia College and State University, and a Fellow at the National Humanities Center. In 2018, after spending five years in Brooklyn, Segrest returned to Durham where she now lives, writes, and organizes.