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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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72nd Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards® Winners Announced **Works Address Issues of Race and Culture** ***Historian Taylor Branch Receives Lifetime Achievement Award***

CLEVELAND, Ohio (April 12, 2007) – The Cleveland Foundation today announced the winners of the 2007 Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, created in 1935 to recognize outstanding works that contribute to society's understanding of racism and foster an appreciation of the rich diversity of human cultures. The 2007 winners are:

- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Fiction**
- **Martha Collins, *Blue Front*, Fiction**
- **Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, Non-Fiction**
- **Taylor Branch, historian, Lifetime Achievement Award**

The winners will be honored in Cleveland on Thursday, September 6, at a ceremony hosted by The Cleveland Foundation and emceed by Jury Chair Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director, W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, Harvard University.

"This year's selections reflect the many layers and global complexity of the issues of race and cultural diversity," said Gates. "The books we have chosen this year stand out not only for their creative treatment of difficult subject matter, but also for their powerful insistence on the need to respect the humanity and individuality of others."

"These outstanding works help us see the beauty in our cultural differences and the richness of humanity," said Cleveland Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Ronald B. Richard. "The men and women who created them have challenged us to look harder and deeper at who we are, and where we want to go, as a society. They are a proud testament to the legacy of Edith Anisfield Wolf."

Half of a Yellow Sun, Adichie's second novel, takes place during the bloody three-year Biafran War, when the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria seceded to form Biafra in 1967. She tells the story primarily through the lives of people living in extreme circumstances – a 13-year-old peasant houseboy and the twin sisters of a well-to-do family. *Publisher's Weekly* described *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a “transcendent novel of many descriptive triumphs, most notably in its depiction of the impact of war's brutalities on peasants and intellectuals alike.” Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003 to critical acclaim, receiving the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book and being shortlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize. Born in Nigeria, Adichie is currently pursuing graduate work in Yale University's African studies program.

In *Blue Front*, Collins transports readers to 1909 Cairo, Illinois, when two men, one white and one black, were lynched for a suspected rape, to the cheers of an adoring crowd. This crime, witnessed by her then five-year-old father, is the basis of this book-length poem. Collins combines her father's memories with other eyewitness accounts to document race relations throughout the United States since the Civil War and to illuminate how racism continues to permeate all layers of society. A selection of poems from *Blue Front* received the 2005 Laurence Goldstein Poetry Prize. Collins is the Pauline Delaney Professor of Creative Writing and English at Oberlin College and one of the editors of *FIELD Magazine*. She has previously published four collections of poems.

Steel Drivin' Man, Nelson's captivating book on John Henry, the mighty railroad man, puts to rest any doubts surrounding the myth of whether John Henry was a real person. With census data, penitentiary and railroad company reports, Nelson identified John Henry as Richmond Virginia Penitentiary prisoner #497. Sentenced to 10 years in prison on a theft charge, Henry, along with hundreds of other prisoners, was forced to labor for the C&O Railroad on the Lewis Tunnel. In telling his story, Nelson looks deep into the history of race, labor and reconstruction in the post-Civil War South. Nelson is Professor of History at the College of William & Mary.

Branch, the American author and historian, is most widely known for his trilogy of books chronicling the life of Martin Luther King Jr. and the American civil rights movement. The first installment, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963*, received the 1989 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for non-fiction and received the Pulitzer Prize for History. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*, followed 10 years later, and the trilogy concluded with the 2006 publication of *At Canaan's Edge, America in the King Years, 1965-1968*. *At Canaan's Edge* was a finalist for the 2006 National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award. Branch received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1991 and the National Humanities Medal in 1999. He holds an M.P.A. from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. In 1972, Branch helped run the Texas campaign of Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern, where one of his co-leaders was former

President Bill Clinton. He is currently working on a book based on late night hours and hours of conversations with then-President Clinton.

A panel of nationally known jurors, chaired by Dr. Gates, selects the Anisfield-Wolf winners. He is joined by:

Rita Dove, Commonwealth Professor of English, University of Virginia

Joyce Carol Oates, Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor in the Humanities, Princeton University

Steven Pinker, Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

Simon Schama, University Professor of History and Art History, Columbia University.

Now in its 72nd year, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards is the only juried American literary competition devoted to recognizing books that have made an important contribution to society's understanding of racism and the diversity of human cultures. Edith Anisfield Wolf was a published poet and civic activist who became passionately committed to social justice as a young girl. As a poet, she chose literature as a means to explore racial prejudice and celebrate human diversity. Her work and wishes continue to be carried out through these book awards.

For additional information, including a complete list of winners, visit www.anisfield-wolf.org.

Established in 1914, The Cleveland Foundation is the world's first community foundation and the nation's third-largest today, with assets of \$1.7 billion and annual grants surpassing \$80 million. The Foundation improves the lives of Greater Clevelanders in perpetuity by building community endowment, addressing needs through grantmaking, and providing leadership on vital issues. Currently the Foundation proactively directs two-thirds of its flexible grant dollars to the community's greatest needs: economic transformation (including advanced energy and globalization), public school improvement, early childhood and youth development, neighborhoods and housing, and arts advancement.

For more information on The Cleveland Foundation, please visit www.clevelandfoundation.org.