

ANISFIELD-WOLF BOOK AWARDS

NEWS

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ABOVE

Ronn Richard, president and CEO of the Cleveland Foundation, which administers the Anisfield-Wolf book prize, celebrated that the awards allow new voices to be heard.

LEFT

Young poet **Essence Cain**, front, was featured during the ceremony along with this year's honorees, from left, **David Eltis**, **David Richardson**, **Isabel Wilkerson**, **Nicole Krauss**, **Mary Helen Stefaniak**, and **John Edgar Wideman**.

History Comes Alive at Ceremony

The importance of understanding history was a powerful thread that ran through the ceremony for the 2011 Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards on September 15.

Several of the six award-winning authors who took the stage before 800 people at the Ohio Theatre underscored how vital appreciating history is when trying to learn about cultural differences and similarities.

Author **John Edgar Wideman**, honored with a lifetime achievement award for works that span five decades, compared himself to Sankofa, a mythical African bird that flies forward but looks backward.

"I have to look behind myself," he said. "African-American history is not about race. It's about the necessity of seeing in more than one direction. It's only by doing that that one makes sense of the present and has hope for the future."

For 76 years, the Anisfield-Wolf prizes have recognized books that

strive to make sense of our world by opening and challenging minds on issues concerning race and diversity. Cleveland poet and philanthropist **Edith Anisfield Wolf** established the book prizes in 1935 to honor her family's passion for issues of social justice.

While welcoming the audience to the ceremony, Cleveland Foundation President and CEO **Ronn Richard** reflected on Edith Anisfield Wolf's belief in the power of the written word to help shape a better world.

"Edith loved literature, and she saw it as a catalyst to spark dialogue, which she believed was essential to bridging distrust and misunderstanding," he said.

Isabel Wilkerson, who was recognized for "The Warmth of Other

Save the Date

Thursday, September 13, 2012, the ceremony for the 77th annual Anisfield-Wolf book prizes will be held at the Ohio Theatre in Cleveland's Playhouse Square. *Reservations will be accepted beginning in July.*

Suns," said the story of the Great Migration that brought millions of African-Americans from the South to the North is, in some ways, the story shared by all immigrants.

"African-American history is American history," Wilkerson said. "The hearts of those in the Great Migration were the same as those who crossed the Atlantic in steerage, journeyed across the Pacific, or arrived by crossing the Rio Grande."

While Wilkerson's book documented the impact that the Great Migration's voluntary relocation had on our country, "Atlas of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," the other non-fiction winning book, showed how the forced migration of millions of Africans transformed the world.

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2011 Ceremony

Continued from front

“It sheds light on how the largest and most brutal forced oceanic migration in human history became a powerful promoter of cultural diversity,” said **David Richardson**, who co-authored the book with **David Eltis**.

The award-winning authors for fiction also focused on universal themes. **Nicole Krauss** said her novel “Great House,” which follows the journey of a writing desk through decades of ownership, was “the only mechanism that I could have invented to capture everything that I felt about becoming a parent for the first time.”



WCPN host **Dee Perry** ably filled in as emcee after Jury Chair Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., who has been ceremony host since 1997, became ill and was unable to attend.

Photos by Robert Muller

Mary Helen Stefaniak drew laughter from the audience when she said she was thrilled just to know that the esteemed jury members had read her novel, “The Cailiffs of Baghdad, Georgia.” Jury member **Rita Dove** called the book “a rollicking tale that manages to speak seriously to the tragedy of ignorance and the damage caused by fear.”

After the ceremony, hundreds of people filled the lobby of the State Theatre for a chance to talk with the winning authors and purchase their books. This was the first year that the Anisfield-Wolf book prize event was held at Playhouse Square.

Check Out the Retooled Anisfield-Wolf Website



The revamped Anisfield-Wolf website is a bookworm’s delight. You’ll find information on every winning title and author dating back to the first award in 1936. You can access data you could never get before. Read authors’ biographies and see lists of their previous works. If you want to know which winners have won Pulitzer prizes or MacArthur fellowships, it’s right there at your fingertips. You can submit questions and comments as well on our new blog. Also, be sure to visit our new Twitter feed, YouTube channel, and Facebook page.

www.Anisfield-Wolf.org

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Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards
The Cleveland Foundation
1422 Euclid Avenue, Suite 1300
Cleveland, Ohio 44115

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