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## PRESS RELEASE

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# NASA mathematicians, Chinese-American stories, violence in India and poems of forgotten black music all subjects of the 82<sup>nd</sup> annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

CLEVELAND, Ohio (March 23, 2017) — The Cleveland Foundation today announced the winners of its 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. The 2017 recipients of the only national juried prize for literature that confronts racism and examines diversity are:

- **Isabel Allende**, Lifetime Achievement
- **Peter Ho Davies**, *The Fortunes*, Fiction
- **Tyehimba Jess**, *Olio*, Poetry
- **Karan Mahajan**, *The Association of Small Bombs*, Fiction
- **Margot Lee Shetterly**, *Hidden Figures*, Nonfiction

“The new Anisfield-Wolf winners broaden our insights on race and diversity,” said Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who chairs the jury. “This year, we honor a breakthrough history of black women mathematicians powering NASA, a riveting novel of the Asian American experience, a mesmerizing, poetic exploration of forgotten black musical performance and a spellbinding story of violence and its consequences. All is capped by the lifetime achievement of Isabel Allende, an unparalleled writer and philanthropist.”

Dr. Gates directs the Hutchins Center for African and African-American Research at Harvard University, where he is also the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor. Joining him in selecting the winners each year are poet Rita Dove, novelist Joyce Carol Oates, psychologist Steven Pinker and historian Simon Schama.

Cleveland Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer Ronn Richard called the new cadre of books essential reading, reflecting donor Edith Anisfield Wolf’s belief in the power of the written word to elevate and enlighten.

“These books excavate stories essential to our times,” Richard said. “The Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards rose from the philanthropic vision of one prescient woman who realized that literature could heighten our connected humanity. We are proud to showcase these remarkable books at a moment when our civic culture needs such strengthening.”

Past winners include four writers who went on to win Nobel prizes — Gunnar Myrdal, Nadine Gordimer, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Toni Morrison. They are among the 236 recipients of the prize.

### About the 2017 Winners

**Isabel Allende** is considered the most widely-read author writing in Spanish, having sold more than 67 million books. Born in 1942 in Lima, Peru, to Chilean parents, Allende burst onto the literary scene in 1982 with *The House of the Spirits*, which began as a letter to her dying grandfather. She starts each new book on the date of that letter, January 8. A feminist and philanthropist, Allende memorialized her daughter in the acclaimed nonfiction work *Paula*. More than 3.5 million have watched her TED Talk on leading a passionate life. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded Allende the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

**Peter Ho Davies** sees his innovative novel *The Fortunes* as “examining the burdens, limitations and absurdities of Asian stereotypes.” Anisfield-Wolf juror Joyce Carol Oates calls it a “prophetic work, with passages here of surpassing beauty.” In four linked sections, *The Fortunes* explores the California Gold Rush, actress Anna May Wong, the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin by a disgruntled Detroit autoworker and the contemporary adoption of a Chinese daughter by American parents. Davies, a University of Michigan professor, is drawn to how we construct our identities.

**Tyehimba Jess** put eight years into the creation of his second book, *Olio*, itself a physical work of art that imagines and reclaims lost African-American performances from the Civil War until World War I. A native of Detroit, Jess graduated from the University of Chicago and New York University. He is an alumni of Chicago’s Green Mill Slam Team. Anisfield-Wolf juror Rita Dove declared herself wowed by “this roller-coaster mélange of poetry, anecdote, songs, interviews and transcripts” code-switching its way through the briar patch of American history. Jess is a professor at the College of Staten Island.

**Karan Mahajan** took an incident from his New Delhi boyhood, when a car bomb exploded in 1996 in a marketplace near his home, as a spark for his second novel, *The Association of Small Bombs*. It tells of three boys caught in the blast, only one of whom survives. In a brilliant study of violence and its aftermath, Mahajan examines Punjabi society, Hindu and Muslim antagonism and the sometimes comic expression of human grievances. Anisfield-Wolf juror Simon Schama called the novel “a brilliant explosion of a book, essaying a totally original style — antic, dynamic and unrelentingly gripping.”

**Margot Lee Shetterly** saw her first book, *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*, become a juggernaut atop the bestseller lists. Simultaneously, the film version enjoyed critical acclaim and a robust box office. The writer, on a 2010 visit to her hometown of Hampton, Va., realized the stories of four local workers at NASA — Dorothy Vaughn, Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Christine Darden — deserved telling. Shetterly conducted hundreds of interviews and read thousands of documents to accurately depict her protagonists. Anisfield-Wolf juror Rita Dove called it “a riveting, important work.”

The Anisfield-Wolf winners will be honored Sept. 7 at the State Theatre in Cleveland, hosted by the Cleveland Foundation and emceed by Jury Chair Gates. The ceremony will be part of Cleveland Book Week. For additional information, and a complete list of the recipients since 1935, visit [www.Anisfield-Wolf.org](http://www.Anisfield-Wolf.org).

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### About the Cleveland Foundation

Established in 1914, the Cleveland Foundation is the world’s first community foundation and one of the largest today, with assets of \$2.1 billion and 2016 grants of \$93.6 million. For more information, visit [www.ClevelandFoundation.org](http://www.ClevelandFoundation.org) and follow us at [Facebook.com/ClevelandFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/ClevelandFoundation) or on Twitter [@CleveFoundation](https://twitter.com/CleveFoundation) and Instagram [@CleveFoundation](https://www.instagram.com/CleveFoundation).