The Aspen Institute Launches $35,000 Aspen Words Literary Prize For Fiction with Social Impact

Aspen, CO (September 28, 2016) – The Aspen Institute announced today the launch of the Aspen Words Literary Prize, an annual award recognizing an influential work of fiction that focuses on vital contemporary issues.

Open to authors of any nationality, the $35,000 award is one of the largest literary prizes in the United States, and one of the few focused exclusively on fiction with a social impact. The inaugural award will be conferred for books published in English in the United States in 2017. Eligible works include novels or short story collections that address questions of violence, inequality, gender, the environment, immigration, religion, race, or other social issues.

More information about the prize, eligibility, and selection process is available at www.aspenwords.org/programs/literary-prize/

“We hope that this prize will elevate the role that fiction can play in illuminating social issues and building compassion around society’s greatest human challenges,” said Aspen Words Executive Director Adrienne Brodeur.

“The Aspen Words Literary Prize is an innovative application of the Institute’s mission to bring people together around the vital issues of our time,” said Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute. Elliot Gerson, Executive Vice President of Policy and Public Programs added: “Literature is one of the most powerful ways to expand our perspectives and find common ground.”

The finalists and winner will be selected by a five-member jury including Stephen Carter, an Aspen Institute trustee, New York Times-bestselling novelist, and law professor at Yale; Jessica Fullerton, a librarian and longtime participant in Aspen Words programs; Phil Klay, Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq War and author of the 2014 National Book Award-winning short story collection Redeployment; Alondra Nelson, Dean of Social Science at Columbia University and author of The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome; and Akhil Sharma, author of the PEN/Hemingway Award-winning novel An Obedient Father and the 2015 Folio Prize-winning novel Family Life.
The submission process will open to publishers early next year. Finalists and the winner will be recognized at an awards ceremony in early spring 2018 in New York City. The winner will be the featured speaker and guest of honor in Aspen, Colorado for the June 2018 Aspen Words Summer Benefit.

For all press inquiries, please contact:
Caroline Tory
Senior Program Associate - Communications
Caroline.Tory@aspeninstitute.org
Phone: 970-925-3122 ext 3#

More information:
www.aspenwords.org/programs/literary-prize/
Facebook.com/aspenwords
Twitter.com/aspenwords
#AspenLitPrize

2017 ASPEN WORDS LITERARY PRIZE JURY

Stephen L. Carter is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of law at Yale University, and a long-time Aspen Institute moderator. At Yale, he teaches courses ranging from Intellectual Property to The Law and Ethics of Warfare. A graduate of Stanford University and Yale Law School, he served as law clerk to the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. He has published seven non-fiction books, including *God’s Name in Vain: The Wrongs and Rights of Religion in Politics*, and *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*. His first novel, *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, spent 11 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. His fifth novel, *The Impeachment of Abraham Lincoln*, was published in 2013. Professor Carter is a member of numerous learned societies and has received eight honorary degrees.

Jessica Fullerton earned her BA from Western Reserve University and St. Peter's College, and a Masters in Library Service from Columbia University. She is a professional reference librarian and Marin City Children's board member and tutor. A resident of Aspen, Colorado, she has been a longtime participant in Aspen Words year-round programs. She serves on the Board of Trustees for the Aspen Music Festival and for the Aspen Animal Shelter, and is a lifetime member of the NAACP and Compassion & Choices. A co-chair of the Fullerton Family Foundation, her major interests include education, early childhood and reading preparedness, wildlife preservation and environmental issues, and Planned Parenthood.

Phil Klay is a Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq War and the author of the short story collection *Redeployment*, which won the 2014 National Book Award for Fiction. He was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor Prize and named a National Book Foundation ’5 Under 35’ honoree. In 2015 he received the National Book Critics’ Circle John Leonard Award for best debut work in any genre, the American Library Association’s W. Y. Boyd Literary Award for Excellence in Military Fiction, the Chautauqua Prize, and the Warwick Prize for Writing. A graduate of the Hunter College MFA

**Alondra Nelson** is professor of sociology and Dean of Social Science at Columbia University. An interdisciplinary scholar, her lectures, and publications explore the intersections of science, medicine, and inequality. Her widely praised book, *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome*, was published in 2016. Her first book, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*, received the 2013 Mirra Komarovsky Award and was a finalist for the 2012 C. Wright Mills Award. Her edited works include *Genetics and the Unsettled Past: The Collision of DNA, Race, and History*, and *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of California at San Diego, she earned her M.Phil. and Ph.D. from New York University.

**Akhil Sharma** immigrated to the United States when he was eight, and studied at Princeton University, where he earned his B.A. in public policy at the Woodrow Wilson School. He was awarded a Stegner Fellowship to the writing program at Stanford, where he won several O. Henry Prizes. His first novel, *An Obedient Father*, won the 2001 PEN/Hemingway Award and the 2001 Whiting Writers’ Award, and was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. His second novel, *Family Life*, is mostly autobiographical and won the 2015 Folio Prize and the 2016 International Dublin Literary Award. He has also published stories in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Best American Short Stories* anthology, and *The O. Henry Prize* story anthology. Sharma is an assistant professor in the creative writing MFA program at Rutgers University-Newark.

**Aspen Words** (formerly the Aspen Writers’ Foundation) was founded in Aspen in 1976 as a cutting edge poetry conference and literary magazine. Today Aspen Words (AW) is one of the nation’s leading literary centers and a stage for the world’s most prominent authors. AW programs employ literature as a tool for provoking thought, broadening perspectives, fostering connections, inspiring creativity, and giving voice. Since 2009, AW has partnered with the Aspen Institute, underscoring the highest humanistic ideals of Aspen founder Walter Paepcke: to better understand human challenges by cultivating one’s inner life through the exchange of words, stories, and ideas. AW’s stated mission is “encouraging writers, inspiring readers, and connecting people through the power of stories.”

**The Aspen Institute** is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, CO; and on the Wye River on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).

###