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**WRITER BARBARA KINGSOLVER AWARDS PRESTIGIOUS BELLWETHER PRIZE TO LOS ANGELES WRITER**

(Los Angeles, June 6, 2008) Heidi W. Durrow of Los Angeles is the winner of best-selling writer Barbara Kingsolver's *Bellwether Prize for Literature of Social Change*. Durrow will receive the \$25,000 award for her unpublished novel, and the opportunity to work with an editor at this prize cycle's participating publisher, *Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill*. The *Bellwether Prize* is awarded biennially to a promising first-time novelist working in the tradition of socially engaged literature.

"This award is an incredible honor because it speaks to the reasons I have always read: to be moved by another's experience and to be changed," Durrow said. "I believe in the power of books to both reflect and heal the deepest grief—even the wounds caused by corrosive ideas of race. I hope that in some way the story I've written will have a healing effect for its readers." The winning novel is the story of a young woman's coming of age, complicated by society's ideas of race, beauty, and intelligence.

A panel of judges selected the winning manuscript, *Light-Skinned-ed Girl*, from a national pool of entries. Durrow is a graduate of *Stanford University*, *Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism* and *Yale Law School*. She is the co-founder of the upcoming *Mixed Roots Film & Literary Festival* (June 12-14, 2008) in Los Angeles, which celebrates the stories of the multi-racial experience.

The *Bellwether Prize* was established by Barbara Kingsolver and is the only major North American prize that specifically advocates literary fiction addressing issues of social justice. "It's a thrilling search, every time we read the submissions," Kingsolver said. "We always hope for a winner that perfectly embodies the standards and hopes of this endeavor: strong writing, a compelling voice, and clear moral vision. In this year's winner we have that and much more. The story is heart-wrenching and its issues could not be more timely."

Judges for the 2008 prize cycle were acclaimed authors Ernest Hebert and John Nichols, and Kathy Pories of Algonquin, editor of the *New Stories From the South* anthologies, and of the 2006 Bellwether winner, *Mudbound* by Hillary Jordan. Previous prizes have also been awarded to: Donna Gershten, 2000, *Kissing the Virgin's Mouth* (HarperCollins, 2001); Gayle Brandeis, 2002, *The Book of Dead Birds* (HarperCollins, 2003); and Marjorie Kowalski Cole, 2004, *Correcting the Landscape* (HarperCollins, 2005).

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