



Contact: Michael Cirelli, Urban Word Executive Director, 212-352-3495, michael@urbanwordnyc.org

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Urban Word names five finalists  
for the inaugural National Youth Poet Laureate title**

*The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Urban Word and Youth Speaks  
Recognize and Elevate the Voice of Exceptional Young Poets*

Washington, DC—On Saturday July 16, at the Kennedy Center, award-winning New York City youth literary arts organization, Urban Word, introduced the five finalists for the title of our nation's first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate. These young poets, who represent five regions across the country, arrived at Brave New Voices International Teen Poetry Slam this past week, to celebrate their successes as local Youth Poet Laureates, and were honored by the President's Committee on the Arts & Humanities and the National Endowment of the Humanities.

NYC Youth Poet Laureate, Nkosi Nkulueko, says, "During times of outrage, I know how the arts can amplify the voices of the voiceless and I know the youth will carry that power of creativity to change the unfortunately normative ways of policing our joy. I'm glad to use this platform to engage with so many other voices such as myself; and as a Youth Poet Laureate and Ambassador I will use my own until change is made."

Nashville, Tennessee partner, Southern Word's Executive Director, Benjamin Smith notes, "If we want future generations to be more engaged, literate, creative, educated, entrepreneurial, and thoughtful than ever before, we need to celebrate heroes who reflect these values. We have the power and resources to shape a positive national culture and discourse if we choose. The National Youth Poet Laureate Program provides us with these heroes."

The National Youth Poet Laureate program was founded in 2008 in New York City by the award-winning literary arts organization Urban Word, and has grown to serve partnerships with local literary organizations in 35 cities and states to name a local Youth Poet Laureate, and award each winner with their first book deal, from Penmanship Books. This new phase of the program announced the partnership of two of the largest youth literary arts organizations in the country, Urban Word and Youth Speaks, as well as the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities,

and funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities, to also create the National Youth Spoken Word Ambassador Program.

“The National Spoken Word Poetry Ambassadors Program taps into both the power of poetry and the power of ideas,” said William Adams, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. “It expands our efforts to nurture the next generation of purpose-driven creative young leaders by having them engage with renowned scholars, poets, and, writers around contemporary issues facing our society.”

Over the course of this election year, these young poets will give a series of readings and performances, as well as start to develop workshops and national campaigns addressing the issues young people face in America. Urban Word and Youth Speaks will manage the poets’ schedules, as well as provide scholarships and resources to ensure their success.

This National Youth Poet Laureate Finalists/Spoken Word Ambassadors are:

- **Hawa Rahman**, the first-ever *Detroit Youth Poet Laureate* and recent graduate of the Detroit International Academy of Young Women. Hawa is a Muslim-American, a Gates Millennium Scholar, and will double major in Product Design and Arts Education at the College for Creative Studies this fall.
- **Amanda Gorman**, the inaugural *Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate*, and Executive Director of One Pen One Page, a nonprofit that promotes literacy and leadership through international storytelling initiatives and an online teen-lit mag.
- **Lagnajita Mukhopadhyay**, *Nashville, Tennessee’s first Youth Poet Laureate*, who has read original work at Mayor Karl Dean’s State of Metro address, Nashville Public Library, TEDxNashville, CREO Salon, and Mayor Megan Barry’s recent inauguration.
- **Nkosi Nkululeko**, the 2016 *New York City Youth Poet Laureate* who has received fellowships from Callaloo and The Watering Hole as well as nominations for the Independent Best American Poetry and Pushcart Prize.
- **Andrew White**, *Houston Youth Poet Laureate* and graduate of the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts with a creative writing major. Andrew is a founding member of the Houston Art for the New Generation (HANG) teen leadership group at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Writers in the Schools (WITS) Youth Advisory Council.

*\*Photos and full bios below*

For the last five years, the President’s Committee has supported a cadre of youth poet leaders through the National Student Poets Program. “This new initiative will support outstanding spoken word poets from across the country who will serve as ambassadors for creative expression,” said PCAH Executive Director Megan Beyer, “At the same time they will enrich spoken word and educational programming in targeted underserved communities across the United States.”

In April 2017 in New York City, Urban Word, along with the leading national poetry organizations, will name the first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate. For more information: [www.youthlaureate.org](http://www.youthlaureate.org).

**National Youth Poet Laureate Finalist/Spoken Word Ambassadors Profiles:**



**Hawa Rahman** is the first-ever Detroit Youth Poet Laureate and recent graduate of the Detroit International Academy of Young Women. This Muslim-American woman is also a Gates Millennium Scholar, and will double major in Product Design and Arts Education at the College for Creative Studies this fall.



**Amanda Gorman** is the inaugural Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate, and Executive Director of One Pen One Page, a nonprofit that promotes literacy and leadership through international storytelling initiatives and an online teen-lit mag. She has served as a United Nations Youth Delegate in New York City, an ANNpower Vital Voices Fellow in Washington, D.C, and an ANNpower Vital Voices Global Delegate in London. She is an Ambassador, editor, and leader of diversity initiatives at the online platform School of Doodle, and her work has been published in her book 'The One For Whom Food Is Not Enough', as well as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Elle*, and *The Huffington Post*.



In her role as Nashville, Tennessee's first Youth Poet Laureate, **Lagnajita Mukhopadhyay** has read original work at Mayor Karl Dean's State of Metro address, Nashville Public Library, TEDxNashville CREO Salon, and Mayor Megan Barry's recent inauguration. In addition to publishing her book, 'This Is Our War', as part of the program, Lagnajita was also published in *Nashville Arts Magazine*, *The Tennessean*, *Chapter 16*, and on the Poetry Society of America website.



**Nkosi Nkululeko** is the 2016 New York City Youth Poet Laureate, and has received fellowships from Callaloo and The Watering Hole as well as nominations for the Independent Best American Poetry and Pushcart Prize. Nkosi was also a member of the 2015 Urban Word NYC Slam Team, and a fellow at the Aspen Institute Ideas Festival.



Houston Youth Poet Laureate **Andrew White** is a graduate of the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts with a creative writing major. He is a founding member of the Houston Art for the New Generation (HANG) teen leadership group at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Writers in the Schools (WITS) Youth Advisory Council.

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**Urban Word**, founded in 1999 in NYC, began with a focus on championing the voices of New York City youth by providing platforms for critical literacy, youth development and leadership through free and uncensored writing, college prep and performance opportunities. Presenting literary arts education and youth programs in the areas of creative writing, spoken word, college prep, literature and hip-hop, Urban Word's host of programs and artistic development opportunities serve more than 25,000 NYC teens to each year. Through their Creatively College Bound Program, Urban Word awards more than \$1,000,000 in scholarships to prestigious colleges and universities each year. In 2007, Urban Word launched the National Youth Poet Laureate Program that celebrates artistic excellence, civic engagement and social justice in more than 35 cities across the county. Learn more about Urban Word and the Youth Poet Laureate movement here:

<http://www.urbanwordnyc.org>

<http://www.youthlaureate.org/>

