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Queen Latifah, Robert F. Smith Among Recipients of Harvard University's Hutchins Center for African & African American Research's 2019 W. E. B. Du Bois Medalists

Oct. 7, 2019—Cambridge, Mass.—Hiphop artist and Oscar-nominated actress Queen Latifah and philanthropist and entrepreneur Robert F. Smith are among seven honorees to receive the W. E. B. Du Bois Medal at the seventh annual Hutchins Center Honors presented by the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University. The 2019 recipients also include Elizabeth Alexander, president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Lonnie G. Bunch III, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; essayist and former United States Poet Laureate Rita Dove; Salamander Hotel and Resorts CEO and philanthropist Sheila C. Johnson; and world-renowned artist Kerry James Marshall.

The medal honors those who have made significant contributions to African and African American history and culture. The ceremony will take place on Tues., Oct. 22, 2019 at 4 p.m. in Sanders Theatre, Memorial Hall, 45 Quincy St., Cambridge, Mass.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and director of the Hutchins Center, said, ““Four hundred years ago this year, twenty enslaved Africans were brought to the Virginia colony, an anniversary widely marked as the beginning of slavery in the British colonies. At this year's Hutchins Honors, where we present the W. E. B. Du Bois Medal to seven remarkable individuals, we reflect on the tremendous will of our people not only to survive but to thrive, on the eternal commitment to lift as we climb, and on the indomitable spirit that has for so long made a way out of no way. In their varied accomplishments, the seven new medalists embody the drive and the spirit of excellence that have flourished throughout our history.”

Glenn Hutchins, co-founder of North Island and chairman of the National Advisory Board of the Hutchins Center, said, “This year marks the 50th anniversary of Harvard's Department of African & African American Studies and the 45th anniversary of the Du Bois Institute. The spirit of inquiry, truth-telling, activism, and reconciliation that gave birth to both is present in unique ways in each of the seven individuals we honor this year. Our medalists, who span an impressive range of backgrounds and callings, are all possessed of the depth of commitment and excellence at the heart of the mission of the Hutchins Center.”

President of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the United States' largest funder in arts and culture, and humanities in higher education, **Elizabeth Alexander** has been an influential leader of innovative programs in education, arts and culture philanthropy for more than two decades. She is an acclaimed American poet, educator, memoirist, scholar, and cultural advocate who builds partnerships at Mellon to support the arts and humanities while strengthening educational institutions and cultural organizations around the world.

Prior to joining Mellon, Alexander served as the director of Creativity and Free Expression at the Ford Foundation, where she co-designed the Art for Justice Fund—an initiative that uses art and advocacy to address the crisis of mass incarceration—and guided the organization in examining how the arts and visual storytelling can empower communities.

Alexander is the author of fourteen books, and was twice a finalist for the Pulitzer

Prize. She is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and serves on the board of the Pulitzer Prize. In 2009, she composed and delivered a poem, "Praise Song for the Day," for President Barack Obama's inauguration.

Alexander has also had a distinguished career in education. She was the Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University. At Yale University, she was a professor in African American Studies, American Studies, and English. While there, she was appointed Yale's inaugural Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry. She has also taught at Smith College where she was poet-in-residence and the inaugural director of the Poetry Center; and the University of Chicago, where she was awarded the Quantrell Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. Alexander received a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, M.A. from Boston University, B.A. from Yale, and holds several honorary degrees.

Historian, author, curator and educator **Lonnie G. Bunch III** is Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex, and is also the founding director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

Prior to his July 2005 appointment as director of NMAAHC, Bunch served as the president of the Chicago Historical Society. He has held several positions at the Smithsonian, including associate director for cultural affairs at the National Museum of American History. Prior to that, he was an education specialist and historian at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.

A prolific and widely published author, Bunch has written on topics ranging from slavery, the black military experience, the American presidency and black towns in the American west to diversity in museum management and the impact of funding and politics on American museums.

Bunch recently received the Freedom Medal, one of the Four Freedom Awards presented by the Roosevelt Institute in Hyde Park, N.Y. He was appointed by President George W. Bush to the Commission for the Preservation of the White House in 2002 and reappointed by President Barack Obama in 2009. He received undergraduate and graduate degrees from The American University in Washington, D.C. in African American and American history, and has received honorary doctorates from a number of universities including Harvard, Princeton, Brown, Northwestern, Georgetown, Dominican, Roosevelt, and Rutgers.

Bunch has held numerous teaching positions across the country including at The American University in Washington, D.C.; the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth; and The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Pulitzer Prize winner **Rita Dove** is a renowned poet, fiction writer, playwright and lyricist. The former United States Poet Laureate (1993-1995) and Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize with her third book of poems, *Thomas and Beulah*. *On the Bus With Rosa Parks* (1999) was a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist; *Sonata Mulattica* received the 2010 Hurston-Wright Legacy Award, while *Collected Poems: 1974-2004* won the 2017 NAACP Image Award.

Dove's play *The Darker Face of the Earth* was produced at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Royal National Theater in London, among other venues. She has written lyrics for several composers, including the song cycle *Seven for Luck*, with music by John Williams, which was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the song cycle *Standing Witness*, with music by Richard Danielpour, which will premiere at Tanglewood next summer.

Rita Dove was born in Akron, Ohio, the daughter of the first African-American research chemist in the tire industry. A 1970 Presidential Scholar as one of the hundred best high school graduates in the nation that year, she attended Miami University of Ohio and, as a Fulbright Scholar, Universität Tübingen in Germany; she received her M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1977. She holds honorary degrees from 28 universities, including Harvard, Yale, Michigan and Smith College. Among her numerous honors are the 1996 Heinz Award and the 2019 Wallace Stevens Award. She received the National Humanities Medal from President Clinton and the National Medal of Arts from President Obama -- the only poet ever to receive both medals.

Sheila C. Johnson, a successful entrepreneur and impassioned philanthropist, is CEO of Salamander Hotels & Resorts, a hospitality company she founded in 2005; partner and vice chairman of Monumental Sports & Entertainment; and president and managing partner of the WNBA Washington Mystics. She is the only African American woman to have ownership in three professional sports teams. Johnson is co-founder of Black Entertainment Television, and has served as executive producer of four documentary films. An accomplished violinist, Johnson received a B.A. in music from the University of Illinois, along with several honorary degrees from various institutions.

Among her many activities in support of the arts and education, she is a member of the Leadership Council at Harvard Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership (CPL). There, she funded and supported the Sheila C. Johnson Fellowships for a total of 50 emerging leaders dedicated to improving the lives of the underserved in the United States. She also founded the Middleburg Film Festival, a nonprofit organization that strives to support, educate and engage a diverse audience. Over the last several years, it has built bridges of empathy and understanding.

Johnson served as global ambassador for CARE, a leading humanitarian organization that combats global poverty by empowering women. She also aided the efforts of the Accordia Global Health Foundation's International Council as board member, rallying support for the foundation's efforts to overcome the burden of infectious diseases in Africa.

Known for his compelling works, mostly in acrylics, **Kerry James Marshall** is an American artist whose work is focused on marginalized people in black history and popular culture.

Born in Birmingham, Ala., and raised in Watts, Los Angeles, much of his work is largely influenced by his experiences in those communities and his adopted hometown of Chicago, including the black power and civil rights movements. Among his many noted works, for example, in 2017, he was commissioned by the non-profit, Murals of Acceptance, to produce a public mural entitled *Rush More*. Located on the west façade of the Chicago Cultural Center, the piece is an homage to women who have contributed to the culture of Chicago.

"Within Marshall's oeuvre, the central figuration in his works is always, as he has described them, 'unequivocally black, emphatically black,'" as stated in a Sotheby's bio. Holland Cotter of *The New York Times* said, "Mr. Marshall has absorbed enough personal history, American history, African-American history and art history to become one of the great history painters of our time."

Marshall received his B.F.A. from Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles where he also received an honorary doctorate. A recipient of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, he was also an art professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago. He has been

included in exhibitions and museums around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

During her diverse career, **Queen Latifah** has excelled across a variety of fields. She is a Grammy-winning singer, songwriter, record producer, actress, and business woman. Her role as the prison matron “Mamma” Morton in the movie *Chicago* earned a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination. She was nominated for an Emmy for her role as Bessie Smith in the HBO film *Bessie*. Often referred to as one of hip-hop’s pioneer feminists, her debut album, *All Hail the Queen*, sold more than 1 million copies, and she was awarded a Grammy for her single *U.N.I.T.Y.* from her third album, *Black Reign*.

An investor in business and community, her earliest foray into business was investing in a delicatessen and a video store on the ground floor of the apartment building in which she lived. Later, her Flavor Unit Records and Management Company, developed in 1991 in Jersey City, NJ, not far from where she grew up (East Orange, NJ), had signed numerous rap groups, including Naughty By Nature, in its first two years. Latifah serves as a spokesperson for CoverGirl cosmetics, and has her own line with the company: The Queen Collection.

In 2003, the Harvard Foundation For Intercultural and Race Relations named Queen Latifah Artist of the Year. She has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, two NAACP Image Awards, and an honorary degree from Delaware State University.

Robert F. Smith is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Vista Equity Partners, a U.S.-based investment firm with offices in Austin, Chicago, New York, Oakland, and San Francisco. He is also the founding director and president of the Fund II Foundation, dedicated to preserving the African American experience, safeguarding human rights, providing music education, and preserving the environment while promoting the benefits of the outdoors. Smith is the first and only African-American to join the Giving Pledge to contribute the majority of his wealth to philanthropic causes.

Smith received worldwide attention when he announced that he would pay the college loans of some 400 Morehouse College students graduating in 2019. He also contributed \$20 million to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. He is the chairman of Carnegie Hall, and is chair of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. He serves on the Board of Overseers of Columbia Business School, is a member of the Cornell Engineering College Council, and is a trustee of the Boys and Girls Clubs of San Francisco.

Smith’s business achievements and global philanthropic work have received recognition from numerous entities. In January 2016, Cornell University honored his leadership by naming the Robert Fredrick Smith School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. Other honors include the United Negro College Fund’s President’s Award, the International Medical Corps’ Humanitarian of the Year Award, the Morehouse Candle Award in Business and Philanthropy, *Ebony*’s first John H. Johnson Award, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Chair’s Award, and the Ron Brown Scholar Program American Journey Award.

Smith holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from Cornell, and M.B.A. from Columbia Business School. In 2019, Smith received an honorary doctorate from Morehouse College.

Free tickets (2 per person) will be available through the Harvard Box Office on Tuesday, October 15, at 12pm. More information available at the Harvard Box Office website (<https://ofa.fas.harvard.edu/boxoffice>).

Note to media: Media passes to the ceremony will be available beginning at 3 p.m. on Oct. 22 in the lobby outside Sanders Theatre.
