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**Angela Bassett, Didier Drogba, Mavis Staples, and Lena Waithe
Among Recipients of Harvard University's Hutchins Center for African & African
American Research's W. E. B. Du Bois Medals**

Cambridge, Mass. - Honorary Academy Award recipient, Emmy Award-winning actress, director, and producer Angela Bassett; international football legend and humanitarian Didier Drogba; five-time Grammy Award-winning singer and civil rights icon Mavis Staples; and Emmy Award-winning writer, producer, and actor Lena Waithe are among the honorees who will receive the W. E. B. Du Bois Medal at the 11th Hutchins Center Honors, presented by the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University. Recipients also include artist and urban planner Theaster Gates; Netflix co-founder and philanthropist Reed Hastings; technology executive and scholar James Manyika; and, posthumously, trailblazing attorney and Boston civic leader Fletcher "Flash" Wiley.

The W. E. B. Du Bois Medal is Harvard's highest honor in the field of African and African American studies. It recognizes individuals whose work has made significant contributions to African and African American history, culture, and the life of the mind. The ceremony will take place Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026, at 5 p.m. in Sanders Theatre, Memorial Hall, 45 Quincy St., Cambridge, Mass.

Glenn Hutchins, chairman of the Hutchins Center Advisory Board, said: "Each of this year's honorees has taken their extraordinary talent and turned it toward something larger than themselves — culture, justice, community, and opportunity for others. That is exactly the spirit W.E.B. Du Bois asked of us, and it is why this class of medalists belongs among the finest we have honored."

"This year's W. E. B. Du Bois Medalists represent the highest traditions of excellence, imagination, and public service. Through their extraordinary achievements in the arts, science, business, sports, and philanthropy, they have enlarged our understanding of what is possible and enriched the lives of people around the world. It is a profound privilege for the Hutchins Center to honor them in the name of W. E. B. Du Bois," said Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center.

Angela Bassett is an actor, director, and executive producer and the recipient of an Honorary Academy Award and a Primetime Emmy Award. Her film work includes *Malcolm X*, *Boyz n the Hood*, *Waiting to Exhale*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, *Mission Impossible: Fall Out*, *Mission Impossible: The Final Reckoning*, *Black Panther*, and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Her portrayal of Tina Turner in *What's Love Got to Do with It* earned her a Golden Globe Award and her first Academy Award nomination. Her performance as Queen Ramonda in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* earned her a second Golden Globe and a second Academy Award nomination.

On television, Bassett stars as Athena Grant and serves as an executive producer of ABC's *9-1-1*. In 2024, she won her first Emmy Award, for Outstanding Narrator, for the National Geographic series *Queens*. With her husband, Courtney B. Vance, she co-founded Bassett Vance Productions, which has a first-look deal with 20th Television to develop and executive produce comedies, dramas, limited series, and television movies.

Bassett earned a B.A. in African American studies from Yale College and an M.F.A. from the Yale School of Drama; Yale awarded her an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in 2018. She was named to the 2023 TIME100 and TIME Women of the Year lists, was awarded NAACP Entertainer of the Year in 2023, and has won 17 NAACP Image Awards and was inducted as a Disney Legend in 2024.

Didier Drogba is one of the most celebrated footballers of his generation and one of Africa's most influential athletes. During two spells with Chelsea Football Club, he helped the team win four Premier League titles, four FA Cups, three League Cups, and the 2012 UEFA Champions League title. In the Champions League final against Bayern Munich, he scored Chelsea's late equalizer and converted the decisive penalty in the shootout. Twice named CAF African Player of the Year, in 2006 and 2009, Drogba scored a national-record 65 goals while representing Côte d'Ivoire more than 100 times. He played at the 2006, 2010, and 2014 FIFA World Cups and served for many years as captain of the national team.

Drogba has used his global platform to promote peace, health, and opportunity. On October 8, 2005—exactly 21 years before the 2026 Hutchins Center Honors—Côte d'Ivoire secured its first World Cup berth with a 3–1 victory over Sudan. In a live television broadcast from the locker room, Drogba and his teammates knelt and appealed to people across their divided country to forgive one another, lay down their weapons, and hold elections. Repeatedly broadcast across Côte d'Ivoire, the appeal became a powerful symbol of national unity and is widely credited with helping bring opposing sides closer during the peace process. The Didier Drogba Foundation supports education, health, and economic-development initiatives, particularly in vulnerable communities across Africa. Drogba also serves as a Global Ambassador for Special Olympics and supports its work to advance the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities through sport.

Theaster Gates is an internationally renowned artist whose practice brings together sculpture, installation, performance, architectural intervention, archival research, and urban planning. Working with materials and histories that might otherwise be discarded, he has created a body of work that explores Black cultural memory, labor, faith, and the social life of objects. His exhibitions and public projects have appeared at museums and cultural institutions around the world. His design for the 2022 Serpentine Pavilion, *Black Chapel*, created a space for reflection, music, and gathering in London.

In 2010, Gates founded Rebuild Foundation, an artist-led platform for cultural development and neighborhood transformation on Chicago's South Side. Its projects, including the Stony Island Arts Bank, have transformed vacant and disused buildings into community spaces for archives, exhibitions, performance, and education while supporting artists and local residents. Gates recently retired as a professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago after two decades, where he also served as the University's Special Advisor to the President for Arts Initiatives. His work has demonstrated how art, preservation, and community investment can operate together as instruments of civic renewal.

Reed Hastings is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who co-founded Netflix in 1997 and led the company as chief executive for 25 years. Under his leadership, Netflix grew from a DVD-by-mail service into a global streaming and production company that reshaped how audiences encounter film and television. Hastings has served on the boards of major technology, media and education organizations and has been a prominent advocate for organizational innovation and educational opportunity.

Together with his wife, Patty Quillin, Hastings has directed substantial philanthropic support toward public education, racial equity and global health. In 2020, they gave \$120 million—\$40 million each—to Morehouse College, Spelman College, and the United Negro College Fund to support scholarships at historically Black colleges and universities. In 2025, Hastings gave \$50 million to Bowdoin College to establish the Hastings Initiative for AI and Humanity, which examines the societal, ethical, and humanistic implications of artificial intelligence. Hastings earned a B.A. in mathematics from Bowdoin and a master’s degree in computer science from Stanford University. Between college and graduate school, he served in the Peace Corps as a high-school mathematics teacher in Swaziland, now Eswatini.

James Manyika is President for Research, Labs, Technology & Society at Google and Alphabet. He leads efforts to advance Google and Google DeepMind’s most ambitious research and innovations in artificial intelligence, computing, and science. He also oversees Google Research (including quantum computing), Google Labs, Learning, and Sustainability. Previously, Manyika served as chairman and director of the McKinsey Global Institute and as a senior partner and board member of McKinsey & Company. He has led research and published extensively on advances in artificial intelligence, computing and science, as well as on their impact on innovation, productivity, economic growth, the future of work and society.

Born in Zimbabwe, Manyika earned a B.Sc. in electrical engineering from the University of Zimbabwe and an M.Sc., M.A., and D.Phil. from the University of Oxford, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar and completed his doctorate in artificial intelligence and robotics. He has been elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an inaugural Distinguished Fellow of Stanford’s Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, and as a Fellow of Balliol and All Souls Colleges at Oxford. He has advised leaders across government, academia, and civil society, including as vice chair of President Obama’s Global Development Council, and as co-chair of the U.N. Secretary-General’s High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, and as a member of the Hutchins Center’s Advisory Board.

Mavis Staples is a five-time Grammy Award-winning singer and civil rights icon whose voice has carried gospel, soul, and the struggle for freedom across more than seven decades. She began performing as a child with her father, Roebuck “Pops” Staples, and her siblings in the Staple Singers. Inspired by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the group performed at civil rights rallies and events associated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s Operation Breadbasket. Their 1965 song “Freedom Highway,” written in response to the Selma-to-Montgomery voting-rights marches, became an anthem of the movement; later hits including “Respect Yourself” and “I’ll Take You There” carried their message of dignity, solidarity, and hope to an even broader audience.

Staples has sustained a distinguished solo career while collaborating with artists across generations and genres. In 2026, she won Grammy Awards for Best Americana Performance for “Godspeed” and Best American Roots Performance for “Beautiful Strangers.” The Staple Singers were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and received the Recording Academy Lifetime Achievement Award. Staples is also a Kennedy Center Honoree, a recipient of an NEA National Heritage Fellowship, and a member of the Blues Hall of Fame. Her music remains inseparable from her message of dignity, perseverance and justice.

Lena Waithe is an Emmy Award-winning writer, producer, and actor whose work has brought Black and LGBTQ+ lives to the center of contemporary film, television, and theater. In 2017, she became the first Black woman to win the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series, sharing the honor with Aziz Ansari for the semi-autobiographical

“Thanksgiving” episode of Netflix’s *Master of None*. She created the acclaimed Showtime drama *The Chi* and the BET comedy *Twenties*. She also co-developed and executive-produced BET’s *Boomerang* and co-wrote its pilot, and wrote and produced the feature film *Queen & Slim*. Waithe’s producorial credits include the Emmy-nominated documentary *Being Mary Tyler Moore*, the 2023 Sundance Films *A Thousand and One* and *Kokomo City*, as well the Tony-nominated play, *Ain’t No Mo’*, and the Tony-nominated musical, *CATS: The Jellicle Ball*. In November 2024, Waithe launched her podcast series, *Legacy Talk*, and most recently made her playwright and stage debut with *trinity* at Baltimore Center Stage.

Through her boutique imprint, Hillman Grad, Waithe has expanded opportunities for underrepresented artists and amplified stories from diverse and historically marginalized communities. The company houses its signature initiatives including the Hillman Grad Mentorship Lab and Rising Voices, which provide mentorship and funding to emerging creatives. Her work explores family, community, identity, love, and the forces that shape Black life in America. A 2006 graduate of Columbia College Chicago, Waithe has used both her storytelling and her public platform to advocate for greater access, authorship, and representation throughout the entertainment industry.

Fletcher Houston “Flash” Wiley (1942–2025) was a pioneering attorney, business leader, Air Force veteran, and civic institution builder who broke racial barriers across Greater Boston. A 1965 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, he was its fifth Black graduate, its first Black football player and its first Black Fulbright Scholar. Wiley continued his studies at L’Institut d’Études Politiques in Paris and served as a captain in the U.S. Air Force before earning both an M.P.P. from Harvard Kennedy School and a J.D. from Harvard Law School in 1974.

Wiley was a founding partner of Budd, Reilly and Wiley, then the largest minority-dominant law firm in New England, and built a career spanning corporate and commercial law, business development, and public service. In 1994, he became the first Black chair of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. He was a founding member and the third president of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association, chaired the board of the Dimock Center, and served on numerous corporate and nonprofit boards. A founding member of the Black alumni associations at both Harvard Law School and Harvard Kennedy School, Wiley mentored generations of leaders and worked to widen access to Boston’s legal, civic, and business institutions. The posthumous medal will be accepted by his widow, Benaree “Bennie” Pratt Wiley.

Tickets to the Hutchins Center Honors: Free tickets (2 per person) will be available through the Harvard Box Office on Tuesday, September 29th at noon.

More information is available at the Harvard Box Office website (boxoffice.harvard.edu).

Note to media: Media passes to the ceremony will be available beginning at 4 p.m. on Oct. 8 in the lobby outside Sanders Theatre. Media members must enter the Memorial Hall door from the circular drive on Kirkland St.