

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **The Vilcek Foundation honors Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. with \$100,000 Award**

*The Vilcek Prize for Excellence is bestowed on the Harvard University literary scholar, author, and filmmaker*

**New York, NY, February 3, 2025** — The Vilcek Prize for Excellence is awarded by the Vilcek Foundation in recognition of intellectual and cultural leaders who have had a profound impact on society and contribute a lasting legacy to the fields of arts, sciences, and humanities. In 2025, the Vilcek Foundation awards the \$100,000 prize to Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. with the Vilcek Prize for Excellence in Literary Scholarship.

Dr. Gates is the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University, where he is also the director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. He receives the Vilcek Prize for Excellence in recognition of his contributions as a scholar of African American history; for his leadership in contemporary discourse on race, literature, and immigration; and for his commitment to excellence in public education.

An American literary scholar, cultural critic, historian, institution-builder, public intellectual, and filmmaker, Gates has dedicated his career to exploring the complexities of African American culture and history. A prolific author, he's written and edited numerous books that have helped shape the field of African American studies—including *The Signifying Monkey*, which won the American Book Award in 1989. Gates's contributions to contemporary discourse on race, literature, and immigration are unmatched. An alumnus of Yale University and the University of Cambridge, Gates has written and edited more than 50 books and appeared in numerous film and television programs as a speaker and historian. He is the host and executive producer of the Emmy-nominated PBS series "Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates Jr."

The Vilcek Prize for Excellence is awarded at the discretion of Vilcek Foundation co-founders Jan and Marica Vilcek and Vilcek Foundation President Rick Kinsel with the approval of the foundation's board of directors. Recipients of the Excellence Prize have received the honor for achievements in art history (Carmen Bambach), in the administration of justice (Robert Katzmann), in public service (Andrew Yang), and in biotechnology (Katalin Karikó). Unlike the Vilcek Prizes in Biomedical Science and in the Arts and Humanities, which specifically recognize immigrant professionals, the Vilcek Prize for Excellence may be awarded to any individual—immigrant or non-immigrant—whose work merits exceptional recognition.

"What makes Henry Louis Gates so special is his commitment to making complex histories accessible," says Vilcek Foundation President Rick Kinsel. "Through his multidisciplinary approach—ranging from documentaries to television programs, public speaking engagements, and literature—he has brought historical context and perspective on some of society's most pressing issues to the American public at home."

Says Jan Vilcek, "Dr. Henry Louis Gates's scholarship and criticism connects the past to the present, illuminating how the darkest parts of U.S. history have shaped the cultural and political divides in our

country today. In celebrating Dr. Gates with this award, the Vilcek Foundation acknowledges and shows support for his career and legacy as a literary historian and cultural authority.”

In 2025, the Vilcek Foundation awards a total of \$950,000 in prizes in support of its mission: To raise awareness of immigrant contributions in the United States and foster appreciation for the arts and sciences more broadly. The 2025 Vilcek Prize for Excellence is awarded alongside the 2025 Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Visual Arts, Curatorial Work, and Biomedical Science, and the 2025 Marica Vilcek Prize in Art History.

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### **The Vilcek Foundation**

The Vilcek Foundation raises awareness of immigrant contributions in the United States and fosters appreciation for the arts and sciences. The foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The foundation's mission was inspired by the couple's respective careers in biomedical science and art history. Since 2000, the foundation has awarded over \$15 million in prizes and grants.

The Vilcek Foundation is a private operating foundation, a federally tax-exempt nonprofit organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3). To learn more, please visit [vilcek.org](http://vilcek.org).