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Tavis Smiley holds back tears as he speaks at a ceremony honoring him with the W.E.B. Du Bois medal.

Nick Welles/Harvard News Office

Du Bois Institute awards four with medals of honor

The W.E.B. Du Bois Medal, Harvard's highest honor in African American Studies, was presented on Friday (Dec. 12) to Ingrid Saunders Jones, Richard L. Plepler, Tamara Robinson, and Tavis Smiley, at a ceremony at the Harvard Kennedy School to honor their outstanding "contributions to culture, art, and the life of the mind."

Ingrid Saunders Jones is part of the functional leadership of the Coca-Cola Co., senior vice president of Global Community Connections, chairperson of the Coca-Cola Foundation, and senior vice president of the Coca-Cola Co.

Under her direction, Global Community Connections has had success in the areas of conservation and sanitation, physical fitness and nutrition, recycling, and education around the world. As chairperson of the Coca-Cola Foundation, Jones has contributed more than \$256 million to initiatives including scholarships for high school students and programs that increase the academic achievement and success of students in public and secondary schools.

Richard L. Plepler is co-president of Home Box Office (HBO), where he is responsible for programming and corporate communications. In this position, and formerly as HBO's senior vice president of corporate communications and executive vice president of corporate communications, he has been involved since 1992 in all creative aspects of the network and has been a driving force behind some of its most innovative programming.

Plepler's community involvement is broad and reflects his interest in the arts, health care, education, and public policy. He sits on the board of directors of the Phoenix House as well as New York Outward Bound, and is on the Advisory Committee of FilmAid International. As a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Plepler serves on the chairman's Advisory Council, and on the Corporate Advisory Board of the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS. At Harvard, he serves on the National Advisory Board of the Du Bois Institute and is a member of the Dean's Council of the Harvard Kennedy School.

Tamara Robinson is vice president and director of programming at Thirteen/WNET in New York, where she is responsible for the development and oversight of all national and local programming, including special presentations, mini-series, and ongoing programs such as "Nature," "Great Performances," and "American Masters."

Acknowledged as a leader in public television, Robinson has received numerous awards, including a Primetime

Emmy for “Smithsonian World” and several Emmy and Golden Cine Eagle nominations.

Tavis Smiley is host of the late-night television talk show “Tavis Smiley” on PBS and “The Tavis Smiley Show,” distributed by Public Radio International (PRI). Outside of his role in the media, Smiley is also an author and a philanthropist.

As a member of the press, his interviews with newsmakers from the fields of politics, entertainment, activism, the arts, and ordinary life have earned him a reputation as a wide-ranging, meticulous, and tough journalist. His advocacy for community investment, financial empowerment, and cultural education have made him a catalyst for cultural change.