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## **The Holberg Prize Names Scholar of Cultural History Paul Gilroy as 2019 Laureate**

(**BERGEN, Norway**) – Today, [the Holberg Prize](#)—one of the largest international prizes awarded annually to an outstanding researcher in the arts and humanities, the social sciences, law or theology—named British cultural historian and postcolonial scholar Paul Gilroy its 2019 Laureate. Gilroy is currently Professor of American and English Literature at King’s College London. He will receive the award of NOK 6,000,000 (approx. USD 700,000) during a formal ceremony at the University of Bergen, Norway, on 5 June.

As one of the most internationally renowned contemporary British intellectuals and a preeminent scholar of modernity’s counter history, Gilroy will receive the Holberg Prize for his strong influence upon a number of academic fields and sub-fields. These include cultural studies, critical race studies, sociology, history, anthropology and African-American studies. Gilroy’s scholarship has long set the terms for investigation and study in areas such as the Black Atlantic world, colonialism and the role of racial and ethnic hierarchies, as well as the cultures generated by diasporic relations.

As a scholar and a political advocate, Gilroy is known for his opposition to all forms of racism and ethnic absolutism. Through his authorship and through public discussion, he explores the possibility of moving away from the ingrained habit of simply accepting race as a matter of political ontology. He refutes what he sees as the absurdities of “raciological thinking,” wherever they appear. In response to their appeal he has championed the creative, humane possibilities that arise with the necessity to dwell convivially and the urgent obligation to assemble institutions that can accommodate the irreducible complexity of post-colonial societies. He is also a sensitive interpreter of black aesthetics, and has done much to encourage emergent black artists, writers and intellectuals. For many years, Gilroy has been among the most frequently cited black scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

Describing the key purpose of his work, Gilroy says: «My research responds to the deficit of imagination that denies all human beings the same degree of humanity. I have focused on the infrahuman presence that results from the invocation of racial difference, and tried to re-write humanism by stretching it to more accommodating moral and political dimensions.” “For me,” he says, “a critique of racism and race-thinking provides a route into clearer, deeper understanding of humankind and its contested nature.”

Gilroy has published seven books as a sole author, three as a co-author and scores of scholarly articles and essays. With *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), he established himself as a major intellectual figure with his study of cultures of racism in Britain. The book makes the case for considering black histories in the UK as forming an intrinsic part of British history and has become a classic text delineating the complex workings of racism, as well as the vitality of cultures of anti-racism especially in popular music.

*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) was awarded the American Book Award in 1994 and is considered a late-20th century landmark in that it transforms the study of diaspora in today’s humanities and social sciences. Here, Gilroy introduces a networked model of culture that displaces the organic metaphor of “roots” to show how group-belonging adapts under historical conditions. The book also shows how race, nation, and ethnicity are culturally constituted.

In his third major work, *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy argues that the finest promises of modern democracy have been distorted by race-thinking. *After Empire* (2005) issues a challenge to post-imperial

nations to step away from the corrosive delusion that their former greatness can somehow be restored. Instead they must become prepared to invent political cultures that do not regard exposure to alterity as either loss or jeopardy. A healthier democracy, deepened by increased distance from the enduring aftershocks of empire would be the welcome outcome of this overdue reorientation.

In 2010 he returns to the questions of *The Black Atlantic* in *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture*. Here, he explores the intellectual and political legacy of W. E. B. Du Bois and asks how the changing place of black culture should be reassessed in light of economic and environmental crisis, protracted warfare and unresolved human rights issues.

“Gilroy is an original thinker and public intellectual who remains fearlessly outspoken on matters of race and racism,” says Holberg Committee Chair Dame Hazel Genn. “He is a courageous and inspiring figure, whose work has been transformative, dealing with some of the most pressing issues of our time.”

Gilroy completed his PhD at Birmingham University in 1986. He taught at South Bank Polytechnic (1985 – 1989), Essex University (1989 – 1991) and Goldsmiths’ College, University of London (1991 – 1999), where he became Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies in 1995. He then took up a post at Yale University, where he became Professor of Sociology and African American Studies in 1999 and later Charlotte Marian Saden Professor of Sociology and African American Studies (2002 – 2005). He was also Director of Graduate studies (2000 – 2002) and later Chair (2002 – 2005) of Yale’s newly-created Department of African American Studies. Gilroy was the first holder of the Anthony Giddens Professorship in Social Theory at the London School of Economics and Political Science (2005 – 2012), and he was Department Chair at the Sociology Department in 2012, until he became Professor of American and English Literature at King’s College London later that year.

Gilroy held a Nuffield Social Science Foundation Fellowship from 1997 to 1998. He was awarded an honorary doctorate of the University of London by Goldsmith’s College in September 2005. In Autumn 2009 he served as Treaty of Utrecht Visiting Professor at the Centre for Humanities, Utrecht University. Gilroy was awarded a 50th Anniversary Fellowship of Sussex University in 2012. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2014, and in 2016, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. The same year, Gilroy also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Liège. From 2016 to 2017, he held a Leverhulme Research Fellowship. In 2017, Gilroy was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Sussex, and he was elected an international honorary member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2018. In 2017, he declined a governmental invitation to be put forward as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Alongside his academic work, Gilroy has worked as a curator, journalist, researcher, and musician. His subsidiary career as a critic and commentator specialising in the literature, art, music and expressive cultures of the African diaspora has involved him in writing for numerous publications. These include *The New Statesman*; *The Wire*; *The New Internationalist*; and *The Guardian*. In addition, he has contributed commentary and essays to numerous other publications. He has also worked as a researcher and consultant on a variety of projects for the BBC and other broadcasters, and he has collaborated on important film projects and curated and published photographic projects with internationally recognised artists and filmmakers. Before securing an academic post, Gilroy was a research officer in the Police Committee Support Unit of the Greater London Council (1982 – 1985), and served on the West Midlands County Council Panel of Enquiry into the Handsworth disorders in 1985.

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#### **About the Holberg Prize**

Established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2003, the Holberg Prize is one of the largest annual international research prizes awarded to scholars who have made outstanding contributions to research in the arts and humanities, social science, law or theology. The Prize is funded by the Norwegian Government through a direct allocation from the Ministry of Education and Research to the University of Bergen. Previous Laureates include Julia Kristeva, Jürgen Habermas, Manuel Castells, Bruno Latour, Onora O’Neill and Cass Sunstein. To learn more about the Holberg Prize and the call for nominations visit: [www.holbergprisen.no/en](http://www.holbergprisen.no/en).

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