



THIS YEAR'S MACARTHUR 'GENIUS' FELLOWS INCLUDE MORE WRITERS, ARTISTS AND STORYTELLERS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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This undated photo provided by the MacArthur Foundation shows MacArthur Fellow Jason Reynolds.

The 2024 class of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation fellows includes more writers, artists and storytellers than in years past, though the so-called [“genius grants” list](#) also includes multiple scientists.

The interdisciplinary awards announced Tuesday come with a [\\$800,000 grant over five years](#) that the 22 recipients — including fiction writer [Ling Ma](#), poet and writer [Juan Felipe Herrera](#), cabaret performer Justin Vivian Bond and visual artist Ebony G. Patterson — may use however they want.

Nominees are considered over the course of years, recommended by their peers, vetted by the foundation and reviewed by an independent advisory board, whose membership changes over time. While each class is never an immediate response to any particular moment, sometimes themes do emerge, said Marlies Carruth, director of the MacArthur Fellows Program.

“We have to see at least the variety and the strength and the number of nominations in the literary arts space as a response to the zeitgeist, the desire to tell stories and resurrect certain stories that have not been told,” said Carruth.

It is not possible to apply for the award, and the foundation asks recommenders and peers not to tell the person nominated that they are under consideration.

“Most of them understand the value of of the discretion, of the secrecy,” Carruth said, speaking of the nominators. The confidentiality also allows them to be very honest, she said.

Because of this secrecy, it can be hard for the foundation to actually reach the recipients.

[Jason Reynolds](#), the children and young adult writer and former National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, said he was grateful and overwhelmed when he finally did answer the call.

“I had just gotten back from taking care of my mom at the hospital,” he said. “There’s like all this real life stuff happening, that’s super intense and pressured and heavy. And there’s a phone call that just keeps coming through.”

Reynolds said he was still thinking about what the award will mean for his work, which includes the “Track” series as well as comic books and other genre crossing work that often reflect the experiences of Black children. On Oct. 8, his first love story, the young adult novel, “Twenty-Four Seconds from Now...” about a Black boy’s first sexual relationship, will publish.

“Boys are never asked, it’s never even considered, that we have feelings around this moment feeling, right? Not just biological desires,” he said.

The foundation looks for people who will be “enabled” by the award, meaning they have both a track record of work but also the potential to produce additional extraordinary work, Carruth said. They also are excited to support people who collaborate and invest outside of their specific discipline.

Nicola Dell, a computer and information scientist at Cornell Tech, wanted to credit her many collaborators, students and community groups that have worked with her to research how technology can be used to harass and abuse people and to develop tools to help survivors of such abuse.

“It is teamwork, not just mine,” she said, while also saying it was an incredible vote of confidence to receive the award. She co-founded the Clinic to End Tech Abuse, which consults with people who are [stalked or harassed by intimate partners](#) to help them both escape surveillance and to safely use technologies to apply for jobs and housing, for example.

Dell said she has tried to serve “as a bridge between the social services, basically shelters, nonprofits, people who are very far away from big tech companies and the designers and teams and those tech companies that are responsible for these products and for controlling these products.”

Astronomer Keivan G. Stassun, professor at Vanderbilt University, studies, among other things, the evolution of stars but he has also been a champion of recruiting and including diverse students in science. He said he had chosen to be at home when the announcement was made.

Stassun co-founded a joint program to recruit and prepare [diverse students to get advanced degrees in science](#) at Vanderbilt and Fisk University, a historically Black university. More recently, he founded a center to help neurodiverse people find jobs and help companies hire them. One of his children is autistic and he talked about being a parent looking to his child's future and his motivation to improve the lives of neurodiverse adults.

“Science depends on access to the full human diversity of mind to to make the mysteries of the cosmos understandable and knowable and expressible in human terms,” Stassun said. “It’s certainly true that in the day-to-day and the practicalities of doing the work of astrophysical discoveries on one hand and of building pipelines for human talent on the other, yeah, those two things in their operation require a different set of skills and an investment of time and care. But I really do see one very much in service of the other.”

He expressed immense pride in the work of the students who graduate from the Fisk-Vanderbilt Master’s-to-PhD Bridge Program, which he said is one of the leading producers of Black, Hispanic and Native American doctoral students in the physical sciences.

“That's something,” he said.