Yale University

Three Hundred Sixteenth
Commencement

Honorary Degrees

New Haven, Connecticut
May 22, 2017
Honorary Degrees

Since the Commencement of 1702, certain distinguished persons, selected by the Yale Corporation, have received honorary degrees. The provost announces the name of each recipient, the senior marshal and Corporation marshal place a hood over the shoulders of the recipient, and the president reads a citation and confers the degree.

The following individuals will be awarded honorary degrees:

- Marin Alsop  
  *Doctor of Music*
- Jessie Little Doe Baird  
  *Doctor of Social Sciences*
- Cornelia Bargmann  
  *Doctor of Science*
- Irwin Mark Jacobs  
  *Doctor of Engineering and Technology*
- John Forbes Kerry '66 B.A.  
  *Doctor of Laws*
- John R. Lewis  
  *Doctor of Laws*
- Stevland Morris ("Stevie Wonder")  
  *Doctor of Music*
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o  
  *Doctor of Letters*
MARIN ALSOP, a conductor and violinist, became music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in 2007, making her the first woman to lead a major American orchestra. She has served concurrently as music director of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, in Brazil, since 2012. Recognized worldwide for her artistry and innovative leadership, she is an ardent advocate for music education and for creating wider access to and appreciation of classical music.

Born in New York City to Ruth and LaMar Alsop—professional musicians who instilled a passion for the craft in their daughter from her earliest years—Ms. Alsop began learning piano at age two and violin three years later. She enrolled in Yale College at age 16 and later transferred to Juilliard, where she earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in violin performance.

The seeds of Ms. Alsop’s professional career were sown in 1965, when at age nine she heard Leonard Bernstein lead the New York Philharmonic and knew immediately that she wanted to become a conductor. In 1979, while working as a freelance violinist in Manhattan—where she played for the Philharmonic, with the New York City Ballet, and on Broadway—she began to study conducting.

In 1989, her career was launched in earnest. During the course of that year, she was a prize-winner at the American Symphony Orchestra’s Leopold Stokowski International Conducting Competition; studied under her longtime hero as a recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Conducting Fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center (where she was awarded the Koussevitzky Prize); and was named music director of the Eugene [Oregon] Symphony Orchestra. Since then, she has conducted major orchestras around the world and held numerous positions as music director.

Committed to fostering access to and understanding of the arts, Ms. Alsop is a force in the classical music world. For 25 years she led the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, focused on symphonic works by living composers, and she is the founder of the Concordia Orchestra, which performs crossover music—including at Lincoln Center’s annual “Too Hot to Handel” concert. Her swing band, String Fever, sheds new light on the classics of big-band jazz.

Ms. Alsop has dedicated herself to the continued relevance and advancement of orchestral music. In Baltimore, OrchKids, an organization she founded to bring musical education and mentorship
to urban schoolchildren, reaches more than 1,000 students. To help develop the next generation of musical leadership, her Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship supports talented young women in the field. The Alsop Entrepreneurship Award, launched in 2015, supports innovative musical projects. She is director of the graduate conducting program at the Johns Hopkins University Peabody Institute; an honorary member of the Royal Philharmonic Society and of the Royal Academy of Music, London; a 2005 recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship; and, since 2008, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

JESSIE LITTLE DOE BAIRD is a linguist whose work as co-founder and program director of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project is reclaiming the language and cultural heritage of the Wampanoag people. In 2010 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship “genius grant” for her pioneering efforts to reestablish the language of her Wampanoag ancestors.

Four centuries ago, Wôpanâak was spoken by tens of thousands of people across southeastern New England. When Puritan missionaries arrived in the region, they learned the language and encouraged the Wampanoag to transliterate it into the Roman alphabet, and to use that orthography to translate the King James Bible. As the Wampanoag community grew more fragmented with the influx of European settlers, Wôpanâak was impinged on by the increasing predominance of English. By the mid-19th century the language had ceased to be spoken; for six generations, only written records remained.

Ms. Baird, who earned her master of science degree in linguistics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2000, was, as the MacArthur Foundation noted in her fellowship citation, “determined to breathe life back into the language” spoken by her forebears. In 1993 she co-founded the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, an intertribal collaboration of the Mashpee, Herring Pond, Aquinnah, and Assonet Wampanoag communities. While at MIT, she partnered with Kenneth Locke Hale, a linguist and activist for the preservation of endangered languages, to develop a Wampanoag-English dictionary. Working from archival documents and drawing on the pronunciation of related Algonquian languages, they pieced together the vocabulary and grammar of the long-silent language to arrive at the beginning of a dictionary database resource that Ms. Baird and her colleague Norvin Richards continue to update to this day.

Having developed the dictionary and a related curriculum, Ms. Baird—fluent in Wôpanâak herself—is leading efforts to restore fluency among the Wampanoag nation. She is a dedicated educator, organizing after-school classes for youth, courses for adults, and summer immersion camps to preserve the rich linguistic traditions...
of her people. Her work was the subject of a documentary film, *We Still Live Here–Áš Nutayuneán*, directed by Anne Makepeace, which examines “the first time a language with no native speakers has been revived in this country.”

Ms. Baird—a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe and vice-chairwoman of the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council—has a long history of engagement and leadership in the Wampanoag community. She is a member of the Wampanoag Women’s Medicine Society, was a commissioner of the Mashpee Housing Authority, and works with Mukayuhsak Weekuwan, an immersion preschool and kindergarten funded by the Administration for Native Americans’ Esther Martinez Immersion program. She has lectured at many colleges and universities and advises other tribal communities on language reconstruction and curriculum development.

In addition to her MacArthur Fellowship, Ms. Baird has received National Science Foundation funding as a Documenting Endangered Languages Fellow. She is a member of the American Antiquarian Society and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Commission on Language Learning.

CORNELIA BARGMANN, a neurobiologist, is the Torsten N. Wiesel Professor in the Lulu and Anthony Wang Laboratory of Neural Circuits and Behavior at The Rockefeller University and president of science at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Her path-breaking scientific work has yielded new understanding of how the brain connects environmental stimuli to behavioral response.

Professor Bargmann’s research began with the genetic analysis of a simple system: the roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans*, which has just over 300 neurons. Using *C. elegans* as a model, her laboratory asks fundamental questions about response mechanisms: How do genes and the environment interact to generate a variety of behaviors? How are behavioral decisions modified by context and experience? Animal behaviors can be traced from molecules to neurons to circuits to behavioral decisions. Thus, mapping the circuitry by which the nervous system generates responses enables researchers, as Professor Bargmann has described it, “to close the loop between genes, neurons, and behavior.”

In 2013, Professor Bargmann was selected by President Barack Obama as co-chair of planning for the White House’s $100 million BRAIN (Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative. The project—conducted by a team of scientists from the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, and other organizations—was established to channel resources toward the creation of technology to understand and treat the human brain. Together with the other planning group members, she developed a set of concrete goals to inform the BRAIN Initiative’s grant decisions.
A graduate of the University of Georgia (where she earned a bachelor’s in biochemistry and was her class’s valedictorian) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (from which she received her Ph.D. in cancer biology), Professor Bargmann began her academic career at the University of California, San Francisco, in 1991. She became an investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in 1995, and joined the faculty of The Rockefeller University in 2004. At Rockefeller, she served as co-director of the Shelby White and Leon Levy Center for Mind, Brain and Behavior. In 2016, she was appointed as the first president of science of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, a philanthropic organization founded by Priscilla Chan and Mark Zuckerberg with the goal of advancing human potential through biomedical science, education, and policy.

Professor Bargmann’s transformative contributions to scientific understanding are reflected in the major awards she has received, including the Kemali International Prize (2004), the Kavli Prize (2012), the Breakthrough Prize (2013), and the Benjamin Franklin Medal (2015). Known for her broad vision and impeccable science, she is also committed to nurturing the development of young researchers. Her strong mentorship is reflected in the number of new investigators emerging from her lab, and she is a frequent lecturer to and role model for young women at colleges and universities around the world.

IRWIN MARK JACOBS is an electrical engineer who led the creation of wireless technology that today connects more than 2 billion people around the world. As founding chairman and CEO of Qualcomm, he led the development and commercialization of Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA), which underpins all third-generation cellular phone and data networks—placing it among the dominant standards of modern telecommunications. Together with his wife, Joan, he is a prominent supporter of the arts and education.

Mr. Jacobs began his career in academia. He earned his bachelor of science from Cornell University in 1956, having begun his studies there in hotel administration before making the switch to electrical engineering. He then received master’s and doctoral degrees—also in electrical engineering—from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was a member of the faculty for seven years before taking a position as professor of information and computer science at the University of California, San Diego. During his tenure at MIT, he co-authored a textbook, *Principles of Communication Engineering*, that is used in the classroom to this day.

In 1968, Mr. Jacobs co-founded LINKABIT, a corporation that pioneered a number of satellite technologies—including Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs) and the VideoCipher system—during his tenure as chairman and CEO. More than 100 communications companies trace their origins to LINKABIT, among them Qualcomm,
which Mr. Jacobs co-founded in 1985. Under his leadership, Qualcomm grew from startup to a *Fortune* 500 company. Now the world’s largest supplier of semiconductors for wireless products, Qualcomm has over 30,000 employees worldwide. With Mr. Jacobs at the helm, the firm was recognized as one of *Fortune*’s “100 Best Companies to Work For”—a distinction held for 15 years.

Mr. Jacobs has been a significant donor to Cornell, MIT, UCSD, the San Diego Symphony, and the La Jolla Playhouse, among other institutions. With a $133 million gift made in 2013, he and his wife funded the creation of The Joan and Irwin Jacobs Technion-Cornell Innovation Institute, an academic partnership between the New York City-based Cornell Tech campus and Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. As signatories of the Giving Pledge, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs have committed to dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy.

A past chairman of the National Academy of Engineering and a member of the American Philosophical Society, Mr. Jacobs has earned wide-ranging honors for his scholarship and groundbreaking work in digital communications. He has been recognized by the Computer History Hall of Fame, the STEM Leadership Hall of Fame, and the National Inventors Hall of Fame; received the National Medal of Technology (for CDMA) in 1994; and was awarded the Salk Institute Medal for Public Service, the Andrew Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy, and the Clinton Global Citizen Award.

THE HONORABLE JOHN FORBES KERRY concluded his four-year term as the 68th U.S. secretary of state in January. A 1966 graduate of Yale College, he recently was appointed to serve as the university’s first distinguished fellow for global affairs.

Secretary Kerry began his career in public service as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts in 1982. Two years later he became a U.S. senator, a role he held for nearly three decades. As a senator, he worked to reduce the national deficit, promoted public education, and championed campaign finance reform. In his first term, he led an unofficial investigation that became the impetus for Congress’s hearings on the Iran-Contra affair. He chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 2009 to 2013. In 2004 he was the Democratic Party’s nominee for U.S. president.

After graduating from Yale, Secretary Kerry served two tours of combat duty with the U.S. Navy in Vietnam. He returned home as a lieutenant with a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts—and with profound questions about the war’s purpose and implementation. He cofounded the Vietnam Veterans of America and came into the public eye in 1971, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in opposition to the ongoing war. Also the son of a U.S. serviceman (his father, Richard Kerry, was a World War II
pilot), he has long been an outspoken advocate for veterans and the benefits to support them. During his senate tenure, he fought to extend the G.I. Bill for Higher Education and to improve treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Secretary Kerry inherited a fascination with international politics from his father, an officer with the U.S. Foreign Service. His family traveled extensively, and by the age of 13 he had spent time in seven different schools. He would resume his life on the move as secretary of state, setting the record (1.7 million miles) for distance traveled in the role. Highlights of his term were his visit to Havana to raise the flag over the U.S. embassy in Cuba for the first time in more than half a century, and his trip to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial in Japan, making him the first sitting U.S. secretary of state to tour the site. His work on the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran earned him *Foreign Policy* magazine’s diplomat of the year award. He was made a grand officer of the Legion of Honor in 2016.

In addition to his B.A. from Yale, Secretary Kerry received his J.D. from Boston College Law School in 1976. He is the author of *A Call to Service: My Vision for a Better America* and, with his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, of *This Moment on Earth*. As Yale’s distinguished fellow for global affairs, he will lead the Kerry Initiative, an interdisciplinary effort spanning teaching, research, and international exchange.

THE HONORABLE JOHN R. LEWIS, a longtime U.S. representative from Georgia, was an instrumental force in the United States civil rights movement. As a college student, he participated in the Freedom Rides of 1961 and served as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a leading civil rights organization of the 1960s.

The son of sharecroppers, Eddie and Willie Mae Carter Lewis, Rep. Lewis was born and raised in the rural, segregated South outside Troy, Alabama. He grew up on his family’s farm, where his parents cultivated cotton, corn, and peanuts. From childhood, he was inspired by the ministry and deeply offended by the injustice he witnessed all around him. As a boy, he followed the events of the Montgomery bus boycott and listened to Martin Luther King, Jr., preach on the radio. He decided in his youth that he wanted to be like Dr. King.

Rep. Lewis enrolled at American Baptist College and Fisk University in Nashville, from which he earned his bachelor of arts degrees in religion and philosophy, respectively. As a participant in the Nashville sit-in movement, he quickly became a nationally recognized leader, a tireless organizer of and participant in sit-ins, marches, and other protests. In 1963, at age 23, he was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington. Two years later, with Hosea Williams, he led a defining moment of the civil rights movement by attempting to march with hundreds of peaceful protesters across the
Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The brutal treatment they faced at the hands of state troopers—in a confrontation that came to be known as “Bloody Sunday”—ultimately helped to hasten passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

A dedicated proponent of nonviolent social protest, Rep. Lewis never wavered in his commitment to the practice. Although he was arrested and beaten dozens of times, he came to accept nonviolence as more than a tactic, but a way of life.

Rep. Lewis’s career in government began in 1981, when he was elected to the Atlanta City Council. He has served as the U.S. representative for Georgia’s fifth congressional district—which comprises nearly all of Atlanta—since 1987. He is the Democratic senior chief deputy whip and a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means.

For his unflagging service and exemplary leadership, Rep. Lewis has received countless high-ranking distinctions—among them the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Nonviolent Peace Prize, the Thurgood Marshall Lifetime Achievement Award, the only Lifetime Profiles in Courage Award ever granted, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

**Doctor of Music**

STEVLAND MORRIS, most popularly known as STEVIE WONDER, is an American singer, songwriter, musician, and producer who is one of the most celebrated and prominent figures in popular music. At the age of 12, he became the youngest recording artist to achieve a no. 1 single, with “Fingertips, Part 2.” Subsequently, he was the first to simultaneously reach no. 1 on Billboard Magazine’s “Hot 100,” R&B singles, and album charts.

To date, Mr. Wonder has amassed 49 Top 40 singles, 32 no. 1 singles, and worldwide sales of over 100 million units. He has won 25 Grammy Awards, the prestigious Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and both a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for best original song, for “I Just Called to Say I Love You.” His iconic album, *Songs in the Key of Life*, is archived in the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress for its cultural, historic, and aesthetic significance.

While Mr. Wonder’s songs are classic and his influence timeless, equally laudable are his humanitarian efforts, philanthropic leadership, and generosity of spirit. He has received numerous accolades including awards from the President’s Committee on Employment of Handicapped People, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Children’s Diabetes Foundation, and the American Association of People with Disabilities.

In 1983, Mr. Wonder spearheaded the realization of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a U.S. national holiday, and his song
“Happy Birthday” became the rallying song for the movement. His participation in the 1985 “We Are the World” fundraiser for hunger in Africa is considered a music industry milestone, and his involvement toward putting an end to apartheid in South Africa is renowned. He is the youngest recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors, is a commander of France’s National Order of Arts and Letters, and has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and the NAACP Hall of Fame, among others.

Mr. Wonder has recorded, collaborated, and performed with a variety of acclaimed artists across all genres including Tony Bennett, Beyoncé, Céline Dion, Drake, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Elton John, Quincy Jones, John Legend, Paul McCartney, Luciano Pavarotti, Prince, and Sting. He has headlined major concerts, benefits, and events such as Live Aid, the closing ceremonies of the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, halftime at Super Bowl XXXII, “America: A Tribute to Heroes,” “Tsunami Aid: A Concert of Hope,” “A Concert for Hurricane Relief,” “Hope for Haiti Now: A Global Benefit for Earthquake Relief,” the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and the Prince’s Trust.

Upon receiving the Library of Congress’s Gershwin Prize for popular song, Mr. Wonder performed his commission, “Sketches of a Life.” The award placed him among a select group of composers—including Aaron Copeland, Leonard Bernstein, and Paquito D’Rivera—who have received library commissions.

Mr. Wonder has received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, and is a designated U.N. Messenger of Peace, with a special focus on persons with disabilities. He continues to be a pivotal influence in U.S. and world events, demonstrating the activism that has made him such a vital voice for social progress and world harmony.

Doctor of Letters

NGUGI WA THIONGO is an author and social activist who spent more than two decades in exile from his native Kenya because of his politically contentious work. One of the most important writers in world literature today, he is also a longtime educator, currently Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. He was a visiting professor at Yale from 1989 to 1992.

Professor Nggigi demonstrated his prodigious intellect from an early age. When he was nine years old his mother began economizing—often forgoing food and other basic resources—to finance his studies. Determined that her sacrifices would be merited, he was a diligent student. He persisted through the unrelenting hardship of their lives and social instability of the era to earn a University of London bachelor’s degree in Makerere, Kampala, in 1963.
Already a published playwright—his first work, *The Black Hermit*, was released by Makerere University Press and staged at the National Theatre of Uganda while Professor Ngũgĩ was still an undergraduate—he published his debut novel, *Weep Not, Child*, in 1964. A fictionalized account of Kenya’s struggle for independence from Britain, the book achieved immediate critical acclaim and ushered in a period of prolific writing for the young author.

At the same time, he embarked on a teaching career—beginning at the University of Nairobi, where he was a lecturer in English. He also held posts as a fellow in creative writing at his alma mater, Makerere, and as a visiting associate professor of English and African studies at Northwestern University. In Nairobi, he soon established himself as a major voice for a movement that was sweeping universities across the African continent: with fellow scholars, he advocated for departments of English to be renamed as departments of “literature”—thereby better reflecting the global nature of the literary world.

His 1977 novel *Petals of Blood*, a harsh depiction of life in the neo-colonial country, was met with praise from critics and censure by Kenyan authorities. Not long after its publication Professor Ngũgĩ was imprisoned without trial, remaining in jail until his release was secured by Amnesty International—which declared him a “prisoner of conscience”—a year later. From that time, he faced repeated threats to his life, forcing him to flee first to Britain and later to the United States.

While in exile he continued to write both fiction and non-fiction; taught at a number of colleges and universities; and worked as a champion of human rights and democracy in Kenya. He received the 2001 Nonino International Prize for Literature and holds honorary doctorates from institutions on four continents. His books have been translated into more than 30 languages, and his *Decolonising the Mind*, a collection of essays on language, is a foundational text in post-colonial studies.