

# JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL COMMENCEMENT 2008



From the top: Suitably propped are (from right) Joseph Foster Robbins '36 and his wife, Jayne, of Wenham, Massachusetts; Thomas Allen '36 and his wife, Judy Welke, of Newtonville, Massachusetts; Jeremy Gilmore; and the broom-brigade organizer, Gerald Gilmore '36, of South Orleans, Massachusetts. Masters of the theological studies Quardricos Bernard Driskell, of Atlanta, and Elizabeth Siwo-Okundi, a native of Kenya now living in Boston. Ana Vollmar '08, of the veggie-loving Dudley House Co-op and Hamden, Connecticut. President Faust addresses the alumni gathering.

TOP TWO: JIM HARRISON; BOTTOM TWO: STU ROSNER



## University Magic

A NATION AT WAR, an unsettled economy, a lengthy presidential campaign: inevitably, Harvard's 357th Commencement touched on some of these concerns. On Wednesday, June 4, President Drew Faust's remarks at the Reserve Officers' Training Corps com-

missioning ceremony necessarily addressed matters military—as did the graduate English address by Iraq veteran Anthony C. Woods at the morning exercises next day (see pages 53-54). Wednesday afternoon, principal Class Day speaker, Ben S. Bernanke '75, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, honored

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J.K. Rowling

his audience with a serious analysis of contemporary inflation, productivity, and monetary policy, even as Harvard Kennedy School's graduation speaker, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, M.P.A. '71, a pioneering president of Liberia, noted another momentous event: "Who would have thought that a minority, albeit a Harvard graduate,

would change forever the American political landscape?" Barack Obama, J.D. '91, had clinched his party's presidential nomination the night before.

But Commencement at heart is a celebration of Harvard and a festive rite of passage for the students (of diverse ages and disciplines) who have entered to grow in wisdom. So it was this year as well.

Now 372 years old, the University showed its knack for newness in a fistful of firsts. The conferral of degrees began when Michael D. Smith, in his first Commencement as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, addressed "Madam President, Fellows of Harvard College, Madam President and Members of the Board of Overseers." The first degrees actually conferred by Faust as "Madam President" were to candidates from the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences—the University's newest school, elevated from divisional status just last autumn. (Presenting dean Venkatesh

Narayanamurti's first appearance in the role was also his last; he steps down in September.) Other newcomers included the deans of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard Medical School, the Graduate School of Design, and—in her first week in office—Harvard College (Evelynn M. Hammonds, the first woman and African American to hold the post).

Hinting at things to come, Faust invoked the power of ritual twice during the morning ceremony. She had to admonish the cheering Ph.D. and Kennedy School candidates to wait for their moment, saying to the former, "I'm not done!" and telling the latter, "I have to say the words!" Conferrals of degrees, like magic spells, must be done strictly to form.

Otherwise, the events proceeded like a finely tuned clock, despite ex-

## Honoris Causa

Three women and seven men received honorary degrees at Commencement. Provost Steven E. Hyman introduced the honorands, and President Drew Faust read the citations, in the order below. At a dinner the evening before, Faust noted that an honorary degree had also been voted to former Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean Jeremy R. Knowles, who died on April 3 (see page 69); she was able to tell him last winter that he had been so recognized. Faust called for a moment of silence and thanksgiving in his memory at the beginning of the morning exercises. She also an-

nounced on both occasions that the University had voted to award a degree to Edward M. Kennedy '54, who had intended to attend the dinner and the morning exercises but could not after undergoing surgery on June 2 for a malignant brain tumor; the degree is to be awarded at a later date. Faust cited Kennedy's 45 years of "able, energetic, and influential" service in the U.S. Senate, particularly his advocacy for education and higher education.

Eric R. Kandel '52. A University Professor at Columbia, he is a pioneering neurobiologist who shared the 2000 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine. Doctor of Science: *In the synapses of sea slugs and the hippocampi of mice and men, he fathoms the mechanisms of memory and illumines the biology of mind.*

Gerda Lerner. The University of Wisconsin's Robinson-Edwards professor of history emerita, she is considered the founder of women's history, and established the first graduate program in the field, at Sarah Lawrence. Doctor of Letters: *Fusing*



Wen C. Fong

life and thought, resilience and brilliance, she has unveiled the deeds of ordinary yet extraordinary women, forever altering the future of the past.

James P. Comer. The Falk professor of child psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, he created the School Development Program, which applies principles of child development to advance students' learning and healthy growth in formerly troubled schools. Doctor of Laws: *Eminent expert on child development, he enlists family and community to enhance the culture of education, reshaping schools as new havens of learning.*

Wen C. Fong. Sanford professor of art history emeritus at Princeton, he helped establish the nation's first doctoral program in Chinese art and architecture; its graduates hold leading teaching and curatorial positions worldwide. Doctor of Arts: *Opening the eyes of the West to the art of the East, in the painter's hand he sees the heart's desire, and in the beauty of brushstrokes the breath of life.*

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The Honorable  
Damon J.  
Keith

Exulting are Graduate School of Arts and Sciences class marshals, Dudley House Fellows, and new Ph.D.s Ernesto Martinez of El Centro, California (anthropology), Priscilla Song of Solon, Ohio (anthropology), and Zeba Wunderlich of Princeton, New Jersey (biophysics).

traordinary recognition for two individuals and the awarding of fully 10 honorary degrees (see below). The celebratory peal that regularly booms from the Memorial Church belfry at the end of the morning ceremonies was absent; it's timed for 11:45 A.M., when the exercises have previously ended. This year, relieving the damp and chilly throng, they ended 15 minutes early.

IN HER INSTITUTIONAL ROLE, Faust closed the academic year by reprising a theme from her installation address last October (see "Twenty-eighth, and First," November-December 2007, page 54). Then, she



said, "The essence of a university is that it is uniquely accountable to the past and to the future—not simply, or even primarily, to the present." This Commencement afternoon, she addressed head-on what she called Harvard's "public boundary" and, in particular, "questions about the role and purposes of universities"—as exemplified by congressional queries about academic finances and endowments; lessened federal funding for research; and heightened discussion about the costs of and access to higher education.

Endowments, Faust said, "represent a

concrete embodiment of our accountability to the past and to the future. They derive from our history and the dreams of those who have preceded us; they are in turn the vehicle that enables us to project our own dreams into the future.

"The endowments at Harvard and other great universities," she continued, "have cre-

**John McCarthy.** Professor of computer science at Stanford, he has studied artificial intelligence since 1948, and coined the term itself in 1955. He was awarded the National Medal of Science in 1990. Doctor of Science: *A cardinal scholar of computer science, whose forays logical and algorithmic serve as source code in the quest to make machines think.*

**Janet D. Rowley.** The Blum-Riese Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, in 1972 she discovered the causal relationship between genetic translocations and cancer. She received the National Medal of Science in 1999. Doctor of Science: *Sage cytogeneticist of the Second City, whose transformative work on chromosomal translocation marks a triumph in translational medicine.*

**The Honorable Damon J. Keith.** U.S. Court of Appeals Judge for the Sixth Circuit since 1977, now on senior status, he has written important decisions on employment discrimination, school desegregation, and civil rights, including the ruling in *United States v. Sinclair*, which prohibited warrantless wiretapping. Doc-

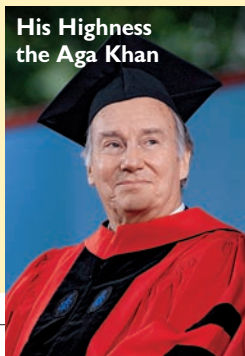
tor of Laws: *Avatar of independence, champion of equal justice under law, a just and humane jurist who has shared and shaped the action and passion of his time.*

**Daniel C. Tosteson '46, M.D. '48.** The Walker Distinguished Professor of cell biology served as dean of Harvard Medical School from 1977 to 1997, transforming the curriculum and advancing fundamental research. Doctor of Science: *Dean of his era's deans of medicine, a pathfinding educator and generative force in research fervently focused on easing the burden of human disease.*

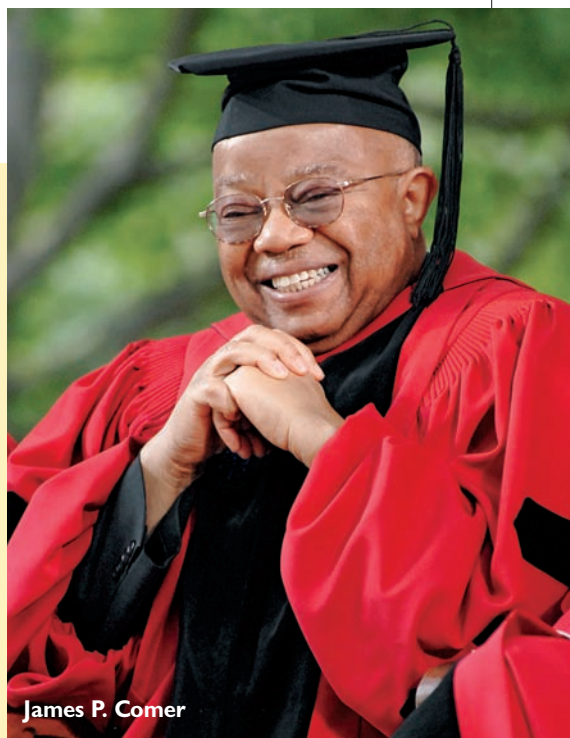


Janet D. Rowley

**His Highness the Aga Khan '58, G '61.** In his junior year, he became the forty-ninth hereditary imam of the Ismaili Muslims. The Aga Khan Development Network has improved living conditions and fostered pluralism and democracy in developing na-



His Highness the Aga Khan



James P. Comer

tions, building bridges between the Islamic world and the West. Doctor of Laws: *Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, visionary exponent of education and development, whose abundant good works and eloquent words create hope for understanding across ancient divides.*

**Joanne Kathleen Rowling.** She is known to and beloved by hundreds of millions of children of all ages, thanks to her seven *Harry Potter* books, now translated into 65 languages. Doctor of Letters: *A wizard with words whose spellbinding tales enchant millions of Muggles with a love for the magic of reading.*

# JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL

Commencement 2008

ated a system of higher education that is the envy of the world. It has opened doors of opportunity ever more broadly; it has generated powerful new understandings about human nature and the world we inhabit; it has fueled revolutionary advances in science; it has helped drive economic growth and expansion in our nation and the world." Were those resources diminished, she said, "we would have to do less—less research, less teaching, at a lesser level of quality—or we would have to generate more income from other sources—tuition increases or external funding." Now, when "knowledge is increasingly important, our accountability to the future challenges us to do not less, but ever more..." (The speech appears at [www.harvardmag.com/-commencement](http://www.harvardmag.com/-commencement); for more on these issues, see page 65.)

FAUST HAD AD-LIBBED that she was "the warm-up act," referring to her successor at the lectern, J.K. Rowling. And indeed, the *Harry Potter* author cast her spell over Harvard—although perhaps not as her fans expected.

The University had prepared for her arrival. The Wednesday banquet for honorands in Annenberg Hall usually features dozens of small tables; this time, guests dined in long rows—a bow to Hogwarts. When it came time for her to speak on behalf of the other honorary-degree recipients, Rowling said, "I never dreamed that Harvard would feel so familiar." She said that *Harry Potter*'s magic broom had carried her around the world to unexpected places, but that this honor was "the greatest and most intimidating"—a disarming admission. (Asked the next morning about the unfolding graduation scene, Rowling replied, "It's a little better organized than Hogwarts, I'd say.")

Much of the week's best rhetoric focused on a potentially hackneyed subject: what sort of people the privileged new graduates would become. Faust had fresh things to say in her Baccalaureate talk on Tuesday afternoon, and Bernanke ended his academic text on a personal note, addressing the same concerns (see pages 54-55).

But Rowling, to whom both unimaginable wealth and celebrity had come unex-

pectedly, seemed to model the matter even more directly. At the chief marshal's Commencement luncheon, she recalled that when filmmaker David Heyman '83 (whose firm produces the *Harry Potter* movies) approached her on Harvard's behalf to offer an honorary degree, she asked for a week to think it over. That she had accepted meant "I was more honored than terrified." Three hours later,



**Celebrants (from top right):** Theresa Cheng of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Matthew "Hezzy" Smith of Mountainside, New Jersey, both of Quincy House; Maliheh Paryavi of Shiraz, Iran, who earned an M.P.A. in international development from the Kennedy School; and M.B.A. candidates Reagan Grabner (left), of Bickleton, Washington, and Davidson Severn, of Yakima, Washington.

Rowling won over the Tercentenary Theatre crowd, confessing, "I have wracked my mind and heart for what I ought to say to you today."

It is Rowling's gift (see page 55) to draw universal life lessons from her own discoveries—of personal failure "on an epic scale," and, from a day job at Amnesty International, "evidence about the evils humankind will inflict on their fellow humans, to gain or maintain power." And yet, "I also learned more about human goodness...than I had ever known before." Of those who "prefer not to exercise their imaginations at all," who "choose to remain comfortably within the bounds of their own experience," Rowling said, "I do not think they have any fewer nightmares than I do....I think the willfully unimaginative see more monsters."

Quoting Plutarch, she said, "What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality." In a final challenge, the 42-year-old Rowling—seeming too young and too slight for



JIM HARRISON



STU ROSNER

the weight of her words—told the graduates, "If you choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; if you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; if you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped transform for the better. We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better."

In honoring Rowling for igniting in millions the passion to read, Harvard discovered that it had also welcomed a teacher beyond compare.