

even lesser authority, when she co-founded the United Farm Workers of America. She works with people, she said, who “may not speak English, they may not be citizens of the United States, they might be very, very poor....But the one thing is...that the power is in our person.”

WHERE DO PEOPLE find the strength to undertake the risky work of pursuing what’s right? General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, told the ROTC cadets about the importance of character within an organized institution like the military (see page 18). And student orators Genesis Noelia De Los Santos Fragoso ’19 and Lucila Takjerad, M.P.A. ’19, galvanized the Morning Exercises through with their personal journeys (from a Boston housing project and civil war in Algeria, respectively), abetted by family, friends, and strangers’ small acts of kindness. The messages of human diversity and humane inclusion could not have been embodied more strikingly.

Under cloudy but ideally comfortable conditions, especially for those swathed in academic duds, the honorary degrees conferred thereafter extended the metaphor—and reinforced the spectrum of issues on the University and world agendas. The exemplars recognized ranged from a stellar curator of the African-American experience and a social anthropologist who changed the understanding of gender to a leader in explaining economic inequality and a pre-eminent practitioner of factual journalism.

In his afternoon address, President Bacow, deliberately brief to reserve time for the guest speaker, outlined many of the challenges sounded during the week: “the coarsening of public discourse”; gun violence; “the existential threat posed by climate change”; and “the scourge of sexual harassment and sexual assault”—including at Harvard. Yet in his immersion in the University and its people he found a “spirit of hope—the willingness both to see the world as it is, and to consider how we can help make it better” through the action “of both knowledge and education at work in the world.” In place of the concerns about external threats to higher education that he voiced during his installation last year, he

seemed buoyed by examples of Harvard people engaged in bettering humanity—both for their innate value and for their role in justifying institutions like the University, in the face of continuing skepticism.



Genesis Noelia De Los Santos Fragoso

In her address, Chancellor Merkel if anything broadened that theme (see page 21). She recalled the Berlin Wall of her youth, when East Germany spied on its citizens and shot them as they sought freedom. And then, in 1989, “Something which many people, including myself, wouldn’t have believed possible, became reality”: the Wall came down, and, she learned, “Anything that seems to be set in stone or inalterable can, indeed, change.” That opening of possibilities led to other life lessons she imparted—ones deeply aligned with the values of a university. In effect, she delivered not a program, but a comprehensive critique of fearmongering, inwardly directed nationalism, and other limiting habits of mind—newly prevalent, it went

without saying, in this country, and on the rise in her own.

The day before, Juan Manuel Santos, M.C./M.P.A. ’81, NF ’88, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role as president in bringing Colombia’s horrific civil war to an end, had told his Kennedy School audience that “what seemed impossible became possible” in his country through “good will, perseverance, courage, adequate planning—yes—but above all, by recognizing each other as *human beings*.” Drawing on her very different life and leadership experience, Merkel told her huge audience, “Do we prioritize people as individuals with human dignity and all their many facets? Or do we see in them merely consumers, data sources, objects of surveillance? These are difficult questions. I have learned that we can find good answers even to difficult questions if we always try to view the world through the eyes of others. If we respect other people’s history, traditions, religion, and identity. If we hold fast to our inalienable values, and act in accordance with them.”

It seemed the perfect message, hard-earned, not only for the day and the place, but for these times, and the ages.

They Said

“I began to let that idea of myself go”

In his baccalaureate address, President Lawrence S. Bacow addressed an anxiety many students probably felt: “After years of amassing options, you are now faced with the prospect of having to exercise them—the act of walking down one avenue and necessarily forsaking others. Making these choices...can be unsettling, because for the first time in your life, you may feel as if your world is narrowing. I’m here to tell you, it’s not.” He then explained why:

After I finished my second year of law school, here at Harvard, I started a summer job at...a law firm. Now, I had spent my entire life up to that point imagining that I would become a lawyer, just like my father. I thought it was what I wanted to do, and I knew it was what my father and other people expected me to do. One afternoon that summer, I was accounting for my billable hours, filling out a time sheet that broke every hour of my workday into six-minute increments—it is what lawyers do.



President Bacow’s first baccalaureate

9:00 to 9:06 – Finalize the deposition of Mrs. Jones

9:06 to 9:12 – Call Dr. Smith to review his expert report

9:12 to 9:18 – Continue to review expert report with Dr. Smith

9:18 to 9:24 – Summarize telephone conversation with Dr. Smith

You get the idea. Now, before I continue, I want to say that the law can be deeply interesting and that that form of practice can be deeply satisfying for many people.... I, however, had a totally different reaction to

this experience. In fact, as my pencil hovered over 9:24 to 9:30, that particular window in time (six minutes), my mind offered up a line from the T.S. Eliot poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: *I have measured out my life with coffee spoons*;

That line repeated itself to me over and over and over—six minutes, six minutes, six minutes—and I realized that I was doing something because of what other people thought I should do and not, perhaps, what I thought I should do. When the summer ended, I began to let that idea of myself go, and started figuring out how I really wanted to spend the rest of my life.

Was it easy? Absolutely not. My father was not happy that I abandoned the law. In fact...I had to become president of Tufts before my father finally admitted that I made the right decision.

“You’re to be judged by the content of your character”

At the ROTC Commissioning Ceremony Wednesday morning, General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, and President Donald Trump’s nominee as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had blunt things to say about the qualities of leadership, within the military in a democracy—and beyond. The new ensigns and lieutenants would need to be extraordinarily competent as part of their obligation to the men and women looking to them not only for personal leadership but for evidence of competence and character.



General Mark A. Milley

Those troops “don’t want to follow someone who’s immoral, who’s out there doing things like lying, cheating, carrying on.... They’re looking to you to have the spine of titanium steel to stand up and do that which is right, even when it’s going to cost you your career... who is not afraid to speak truth to power no matter what the cost will be to yourselves. Someone who is honest, who has standards, and never, never, hides behind his soldiers.”

Enlisted personnel, he continued, are also “looking to you to be humble....” Referring to the ancient Greek concept of hubris, he said, “We see that in our daily lives all over the place: we see that in the military, we see it in politics, we see it in sports, we see it in commercial life.... We see people who really think that they are above everything else....” Military officers,

he noted, “take an oath—an oath that says, ‘I’m willing to die,’ an oath that says, ‘I’m willing to sacrifice’—and it’s not an oath to a king or queen or a dictator or a president or any individual. We don’t do that.... We...do not take an oath to a tribe, a person, a country, or a flag, or an individual. We take an oath to an idea embedded in this document called the Constitution of the United States. And it’s an incredibly powerful idea.... That idea has brought down tyrannies and dictatorships.... The idea that’s embedded in this oath—and that you’re willing to die for—it says that everyone under those colors of red, white, and blue—and that flag—every one of us is born free and equal, and...you’re to be judged by the content of your character, not the color of your skin.”

“The destination is freedom”

On Class Day, Design School graduates heard Teju Cole, Vidal professor of the practice of creative writing, speak about professional ethics, and doors.

Design is not an intellectual exercise. It comes with ethical burdens. The work you will go on to do from here...will in aggregate be influential. But the question of what kind of influence you will have is up to you. We face challenges and we need you to be a door for us.... There are those who agree to build prisons. There are those who agree to build detention camps. Oppression has always had great use for architects and designers and urban planners. Redlining was a technical skill. And everything that betrays our collective humanity depends on people just like you with skills just like yours.

Fascism in guises large and small requires signage and advertising. It requires vivid design and the architecture of enmity. History assures us that many, many people get swept up in the flood of its seduction. Will you be one of those who refuses to participate? Even when you know that there will be no medals for your refusal? Even when you’re assured that your refusal will only earn you mockery, poverty, or worse? You are the makers. I want to dream for you, and implore of you, a participation in a making worthy of your skills....

[E]xpertise is not the destination.... The



Teju Cole

The Personal President

In a year of rather stern speechifying about political polarization and the need to engage on such divisive issues as access to abortion and controlling climate change, President Bacow had serious things to say (see page 17). But he also indulged in some asides that revealed a quick wit that appears often in private conversations, the long-established ties that preceded his move into Mass Hall, and a bit about his cultural roots.

Introducing the honorary-degree recipients at the annual Wednesday dinner in Annenberg Hall, he noted that he had the “distinct pleasure of sharing initials” with the first: museum leader Lonnie Bunch. And of economist Emmanuel Saez, said Bacow (holder of four degrees in economics, law, and public policy), the Berkeley professor was known as “a shy data jock—by the way, I can relate to that.”

When Daniel Fenn ’44, A.M. ’72, received his Harvard Medal Thursday afternoon (see page 68), reflecting 75 years of alumni service, the president went off script to recall meeting the honorand when Bacow was “a 20-year-old graduate student at the Harvard Kennedy School in 1972.”

And as someone who speaks openly about his Judaism and roots in Jewish culture (the chaplain of the day Thursday morning was the Bacows’ rabbi, Wesley Gardenswartz), it was both natural—and very funny to those who have seen her work, most notably during the \$9.6-billion Harvard Campaign—to hear Fenn’s fellow medalist Tamara Elliott Rogers, former vice president of alumni affairs and development, described as wielding “just the right balance of *chutzpah* and humility.”

destination is freedom. What can we do to free others ...[H]ow do we become a door for others to pass through...to get from here to there?

“Every change begins in the mind”

Chancellor Angela Merkel drew on the fall of the Berlin Wall to begin telling the graduates and their guests about the possibility of making a better world:

Anything that seems to be set in stone or inalterable can indeed change. In matters both large and small, it holds true that every change begins in the mind.

My parents’ generation discovered this in a most painful way. My father and mother were born in 1926 and 1928. When they were as old as most of you here today, the betrayal of all civilized values that was the *Shoah* and World War II had just ended. My country, Germany, had brought unimaginable suffering on Europe and the world. The victors and the defeated could easily have remained irreconcilable for many years. But instead, Europe overcame centuries-old conflicts. A peaceful order based on common values, rather than supposed national strength, emerged. Despite all the discussions and temporary setbacks, I firmly believe that we Europeans have united for the better. And

the relationship between Germans and Americans, too, demonstrates how former wartime enemies can become friends. It was George Marshall who gave a crucial contribution to this through the plan he announced at the Commencement ceremonies in 1947 in this very place. The transatlantic partnership based on values such as democracy and human rights has given us an era of peace and prosperity, of benefit to all sides, which has lasted for more than 70 years now....

Changes for the better are possible if we tackle them together. If we were to go it alone, we could not achieve much. The second thought I want to share with you is, therefore, more than ever, our way of thinking and our actions have to be multilateral rather than unilateral. Global rather than national. Outward-looking rather than isolationist. In short, we have to work together rather than alone.

She posed the problem of taking action because it is the right thing to do, or simply because it is possible, and cautioned the graduates not to

... always act on our first impulses, even



Angela Merkel

when there is pressure to make a snap decision. But instead take a moment to stop, be still, think, pause. Granted, that certainly takes courage. Above all, it calls for truthfulness in our attitude toward others. And perhaps most importantly, it calls for us to be honest with ourselves. What better place to begin to do so than here, in this place, where so many young people from all over the world come to learn, research, and discuss the issues of our time under the maxim of truth? That requires us not to describe lies as truth and truth as lies. It requires us not to accept shortcomings as our normality. ▢

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“The Duties of Imagination”

Scholarship “is arguably the most transformative force in the world,” said Broad Institute president Eric Lander at the 2019 Phi Beta Kappa Literary Exercises. Poet Dan Chiasson, Ph.D. ’01 (at left), read a poem specially written for the occasion.

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“Be the Voice of Health”

Pediatrician Mona Hanna-Attisha, who first exposed lead poisoning in the water of Flint, Michigan, inspires Medical School graduates.

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Dolores Huerta on the Power to Change

The labor activist talks about her life’s work: convincing ordinary people that they have power.

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Truth, in Crisis

Al Gore’s fiery Class Day speech delivered an analysis of the nation’s current state of affairs, a history lesson, and a call for Harvard to divest its endowment from fossil fuels.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: JIM HARRISON; TONY RINALDO; STEVE LIPOFSKY/HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL; JIM HARRISON