FIFTY-FOURTH COMMENCEMENT
MAY 30, 2018

DAVID GEFFEN HALL AT LINCOLN CENTER
NEW YORK CITY
ORDER OF EXERCISES

MASTER OF CEREMONIES
Joy Connolly
Provost and Senior Vice President, The Graduate Center

PRELUDE
The Graduate Center Brass Quintet

PROCESSIONAL
Die Bänkelsängerlieder

CO-GRAND MARSHALS
Professor Juliette Blevins and Professor Ofelia García

MARSHALS FOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS/FACULTY
Associate Professor Erika Lin and Presidential Professor Tony Ro

MARSHALS FOR STUDENTS
Associate Professor Matthew Gold and Associate Professor Anne Stone

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM
Xiaoming Tian, D.M.A. Program in Music

GREETINGS
Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez
Board of Trustees, The City University of New York

James B. Milliken
Chancellor, The City University of New York

ON BEHALF OF THE GRADUATES
Kristina Huang
Ph.D. Program in English
PRESENTATION OF PRESIDENT’S DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI MEDAL

Chase F. Robinson
President, The Graduate Center

PRESIDENT’S DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI MEDAL AWARDED TO

Patricia Chapple Wright, Ph.D.
Anthropology, 1985

PRESENTATION OF HONORARY DEGREE CANDIDATES

President Chase F. Robinson

HONORARY DEGREES AWARDED TO

Neal Kumar Katyal, Doctor of Humane Letters
Presented by Professor Don Robotham

Katharine Viner, Doctor of Humane Letters
Presented by Professor Peter Beinart

ADDRESS

André Aciman
Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and French

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES

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Professor Peter Eckersall

CLOSING REMARKS

President Chase F. Robinson

RECESSINAL

Canzona Bergamasca
PATRICIA CHAPPLE WRIGHT
President's Distinguished Alumni Medal

Patricia Chapple Wright (Ph.D. ’85, Anthropology) is renowned for her research in the behavioral ecology of nonhuman primates in South America, Asia, and Madagascar, and for her significant contributions to conservation. She has been honored as a MacArthur Fellow and is the recipient of many awards, including the Chevalier d’Ordre National of Madagascar and the Indianapolis Prize for conservation. She is a distinguished professor of anthropology at Stony Brook University.

A tropical biologist and primatologist, Wright took on conservation issues more than 30 years ago in Madagascar when she and her colleagues discovered the golden bamboo lemur and rediscovered the greater bamboo lemur, a species thought to be extinct. The lemurs lived in one of the country’s last remaining intact rain forests, a habitat that was threatened by timber exploitation. She spearheaded an integrated conservation and development project that focused on protection and conservation. In 1991, the Ranomafana National Park was officially inaugurated.

Wright’s ongoing research in Madagascar on the behavioral ecology of another lemur, Milne-Edward’s sifaka, led her to establish the Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments in 1991 and Centre ValBio Research Station in 2002, an award-winning green, sustainable research station on the edge of the rainforest with molecular and infectious disease laboratories, high-speed internet, and modern facilities. Centre ValBio hosts programs in biodiversity research, environmental arts, village education, health, and reforestation.

Wright was awarded a MacArthur “genius” grant in 1989 and three national medals of honor from the president of Madagascar: Chevalier (1995); Officier (2005); and Commandeur (2012). In 2014, she was elected to the American Philosophical Society, a prestigious scholarly society founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743. Also in 2014, she became the first woman to win the Indianapolis Prize, considered the Nobel Prize for conservation.

Her work has been featured in several documentaries and in the 2014 IMAX film Island of Lemurs: Madagascar, narrated by Morgan Freeman. She is the author of more than 170 scientific papers and of a two-volume autobiography, High Moon over the Amazon: My Quest to Understand the Monkeys of the Night and For the Love of Lemurs: My Life in the Wilds of Madagascar.
NEAL KUMAR KATYAL  
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Neal Kumar Katyal, the Paul and Patricia Saunders Professor of law at Georgetown University, partner at the firm of Hogan Lovells, and former acting solicitor general of the United States, has argued more Supreme Court cases in United States history than any other minority attorney, breaking the record held by Thurgood Marshall.

An expert in constitutional law, Katyal has argued 37 cases before the Supreme Court of the United States, with 34 of them in the last nine years. They include some of the most consequential cases of the last two decades. In Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, which challenged the policy of military trials at Guantanamo Bay, the Supreme Court voted 5 to 3 in favor of his argument that President George Bush's tribunals violated the constitutional separation of powers, domestic military law, and international law. As acting solicitor general under President Barack Obama, Katyal successfully defended the constitutionality of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Most recently, in the Supreme Court on April 25, Katyal argued the “Travel ban” case on behalf of the State of Hawaii against President Donald Trump, earning Katyal a headline in Politico as “The Travel Ban’s Legal Nemesis.”

A graduate of Dartmouth College and Yale Law School, Katyal was one of the youngest professors to receive tenure and a chaired professorship at Georgetown University Law Center.

Katyal is the recipient of the Edmund Randolph Award, the highest civilian award given by the United States Department of Justice. In 2017, The American Lawyer named him Litigator of the Year, the sole grand prize winner out of all lawyers in the United States. He has published widely in law journals and is a frequent contributor to the op-ed pages of national newspapers, and now on Twitter. He is much sought after by news broadcasts to bring clarity to important legal news. He has additionally shared his expertise with The Colbert Report and appeared as himself in the Netflix series House of Cards.
KATHARINE VINER
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief of Guardian News & Media (comprising The Guardian, The Observer—the world’s oldest Sunday newspaper—and theguardian.com), is the first woman to lead the British media organization in its nearly 200-year history. She has met the challenges of running a news organization in the digital age with innovative business models and a passionate respect for reporting that, as she says, “takes time and effort, carefully uncovers the facts, holds the powerful to account, and interrogates ideas and arguments—work that speaks to the urgency of the moment, but lasts for more than a day.”

Viner joined The Guardian as a writer in 1997 and was appointed deputy editor in 2008. She launched the award-winning Guardian Australia in 2013, then moved to New York to run Guardian US before becoming editor-in-chief of The Guardian in 2015.

She is considered one of the most eloquent and thoughtful analysts of journalism today at a time, as she writes, of “dazzling political shocks and the disruptive impact of new technologies.” As advertising revenue has fallen for newspapers generally, The Guardian has chosen to keep its website open to all readers, rather than using a paywall, which limits access to paid subscribers only. Relying on voluntary support, the company reports that more of its funding now comes from its 800,000 paying supporters than from its advertisers.

Viner’s speeches and extended reflections on the press have highlighted the importance of journalism to the functioning of democracy. In her “Long Reads” on The Guardian’s website, she has set forth her newspaper’s mission as a champion of press freedom, investigative journalism, and the public interest. She has embraced the digital revolution for increasing the accountability of news organizations to their audience. At the same time, she has confronted the challenges of social media and the speed of technology that allow the proliferation of false information taken as truth. Reinforcing the essential role of journalism, Viner asserts that it is more important than ever for journalists to embrace traditional news values and do the demanding on-the-ground work of reporting a story and verifying facts.
Graduate Center Distinguished Professor André Aciman is a noted scholar of 17th-century English, French, and Italian literature and a New York Times best-selling author. The first of his four novels, Call Me by Your Name, garnered widespread praise and inspired the film by the same name, which won the 2018 Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.

While a professor at Princeton, Aciman published his acclaimed memoir, Out of Egypt. In it, he shares his memories of his childhood in Egypt, where his Jewish family made its home until 1965 when, amid escalating anti-Semitism, his parents and his family were expelled and left for Italy. The New York Times described the book as “magical and resonant … a memoir that leaves the reader with a mesmerizing portrait of a now vanquished world.” Aciman received the 1995 Whiting Award for the book.

After publishing two collections of essays, Aciman debuted as a novelist with Call Me by Your Name in 2007. A poignant story of first romance, it was hailed by The New York Times as “an exceptionally beautiful book.” The 2017 movie based on it received similar recognition, and includes a cameo role by the author. Screenwriter James Ivory, in his Oscar acceptance speech, thanked Aciman for writing “a story familiar to most of us.”


His teaching at The Graduate Center, which started in 2001, focuses on the work of Marcel Proust and the literature of memory and exile. Aciman is the former executive officer of the doctoral program in comparative literature and has an appointment in the French department. Until recently, he directed The Writers’ Institute at The Graduate Center and the Critical Theory Certificate Program.

Aciman is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship as well as a fellowship from the New York Public Library’s Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers. He is currently working on a collection of essays.
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