One might have anticipated that the volumes of talk from Harvard podiums during Commencement week, so soon after the smoke cleared in Baghdad, would have been about the war, terrorism, and the role of the United States on the world’s stage. But no. The strongest statement on these matters didn’t come until the afternoon of Thursday, June 5, Commencement day itself—and then it came from a Mexican. At Radcliffe’s fête on Friday, Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, A.M. ’62, followed suit (see page 65).

The podium talk heard by multitudes began on Tuesday morning with an introspective speech by Ruth J. Simmons, Ph.D. ’73, LL.D. ’02, president of Brown University and this year’s Phi Beta Kappa orator. Simmons, who is black, spoke of finding herself by losing herself in the study of French literature, of shaping an interior world where she would be free of segregation. Mary Oliver, the PBK poet, told graduating seniors, “Stay young forever in the wide fields of your mind.”

President Lawrence H. Summers told seniors at their baccalaureate service in Memorial Church that afternoon to learn how to manage their time (better than he does) and to make private time for friends and family. The service was moved two hours later than usual, to 4 p.m., so that Summers could jet to and from Princeton to receive an honorary doctor of laws degree. His citation read in part: “As president of our pre-eminent sister institution on the Charles, he is now entrusted with assets more valued than gold—students and scholars who will help shape the world’s future.”

Summers outlined ways in which he hopes to change how these intellectual assets are treated in his speech at the annual meeting of the Harvard Alumni Association in Tercentenary Theatre on Commencement afternoon (see page 63). He focused his remarks on the undergraduate curriculum, which has not been overhauled in 30 years: “[N]o organization—certainly not one as creative as Harvard College—should go more than a generation without reassessment and renewal.”
Class Day speakers at the Law School (CNN’s Larry King) and at the College (comedian Will Ferrell) came to entertain. Ferrell mentioned the war. Known for his impersonations of President George W. Bush, M.B.A. ’75, on Saturday Night Live, Ferrell read a made-up letter from Bush to the class of 2003. “One of the challenges you will face is finding a job in our depressed economy,” Ferrell intoned. “In fact, the chances of finding a job are about as good as finding weapons of mass destruction in the Iraqi desert—slim and none, and slim just left the building.”

The governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney, J.D.-M.B.A. ’74 (’75), addressed the Kennedy School of Government. He assured the imminent graduates that the most fulfilling lives belong to people who look outward, to something larger than themselves—whether to family ties or a public mission—who choose to live by principle and who stand for something. Earlier in the week, Stephen Rosenfeld ’53, retired deputy editorial-page editor of the Washington Post, observed darkly at a fiftieth-reunion symposium that “spin is a fact of life in journalism,” and wondered aloud why there is even an expectation that people in power will tell the truth.

The plummer professor of Christian morals, Peter Gomes, got Commencement day off to a geopolitical start in his chapel talk to seniors just before the splendid hoo-ha in Tercentenary Theatre. The essence of wisdom, he said, “is a becoming modesty that flies in the face of all the current temptations to power, imperialism, absolutism, and, dare I say it? moral arrogance…The nation and the world do not require more moral arrogance, the false assumption that one can recreate the world in one’s own image. What we learn from the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and from practically every other encounter with the real world, is that moral modesty rather than moral clarity is the only hope that will save us from the inevitable cycle of decline and fall.”

People at the Science Center and other venues watching the formal Commencement exercises on television (which has...
much to recommend it from a visual standpoint) could see that Charles B.
Watson Jr. ’03, of Currier House and Columbia, South Carolina, delivering the
first of three traditional student “parts,” the Latin Salutatory, was telling degree
candidates to “go forward boldly and create a monument more lasting than
bronze or marble” because a translation of his Latin flashed across the bottom
of the screen like subtitles in a foreign film. Eric B.
Hart ’03, of Eliot House
and Connell, Washington,
urged civility in public
discourse, and Elizabeth
Carpenter, M.B.A. ’03, of
Wilmington, Delaware,
explained what poems
and discounted cash flows
have in common (see page
62 for both speeches).

At the Medical School, which has an af-
fternoon speaker of its own, Paul Farmer,
medical codirector of Clinique Bon
Sauveur, a charity hospital in rural Haiti,
laid a great burden on the shoulders of
new graduates. They must see the world
as it really is, burdened with global health
inequities. “Now why dredge up this
dreary stuff on a day of celebration?” he
asked. “Because you, members of the class
of 2003, can change all this. And you
must.” Mary-
knoll mission-
ary William
McIntire ’53, A.M. ’57, of Bangladesh, had
said earlier in a symposium that the
growing global disparity between rich
and poor, rather than a clash of civi-
lizations, is the greatest danger fac-
ing the world today.

In Tercentenary Theatre that af-
fternoon, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de
León, former president of Mexico
and now director of the Yale Center
for the Study of Globalism, praised
the United States for being the lead
architect of important international
organizations in the first half of the
twentieth century, but scolded it
for its current “aggressive unipolar-
ity.” “All the nations on earth, even
the most powerful one, need the
multilateral system,” he said. “Can
terrorism be defeated without inter-
national cooperation? Never.”
(Zedillo’s speech
will appear in
the September-
October print
edition of this
magazine and
may be read
now at www.
harvard-
magazine.com.)

Honoris Causa
Two women and nine men received honorary de-
gress at Harvard’s 352nd Commencement. In the
absence of a University marshal, Provost Steven
Hyman introduced honorands to the Commence-
ment audience. In order of presentation, this
year’s honorands were:

Donald E. Knuth. A founding father
of computer science. His work on al-
gorithms and literate programming
laid essential foundations for mod-
ern computing; his work on digital
typography has been hailed as one of
the great advances in publishing since
the invention of the printing press.
He is professor emeritus of the art of
computer programming at Stanford.
Doctor of science: Font of digital inge-
nuity, icon of algorithmic invention, whose
artful efforts have programmed the course
of a powerful modern science.

Linda Nochlin. One of the foremost liv-
ing scholars of art, she is known for her
formative influence on the understanding
of nineteenth-century European art and
culture and for her feminist perspective
on the history of art. The Wallace profes-

or of modern art at New York University,
she will be at Harvard in the coming ac-
demic year as the Charles Eliot Norton
professor. Doctor of letters: Fierce in her in-
dependence, eloquent in her iconoclasm, a trans-
formational scholar who engenders fresh per-
spectives on the history of art.

Gary Becker. Nobel laureate Becker
is a University Professor in the de-
partments of both economics and
sociology at the University of Chi-
ago. He focuses what he calls the
economic way of looking at life on
social issues beyond the traditional
scope of economics, ranging from
discrimination against minorities to
marriage and family life. Doctor of
laws: Transcending the traditions of his
discipline, seeing social behavior through an
acute new lens, he shows how economics
helps us make the most of life.