Honoris Causa

Two women and seven men received honorary degrees at Harvard’s 355th Commencement. Provost Steven E. Hyman introduced them to the Commencement audience, and President Lawrence H. Summers read the citations. In order of presentation, the honorands were:

Leo Steinberg. One of the great art historians of the age, who, one observer said, “brings to scholarship the candor and wit of a private conversation and the suspense of a whodunit,” he is Franklin professor of the history of art emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania. Doctor of Arts: From Rembrandt to Rauschenberg, from Leonardo to Picasso, his wisdom and wit illuminate art at its finest, reminding us the eye is part of the mind.

Shirley Ann Jackson. Formerly a physicist at Bell Labs, professor of physics at Rutgers, and chair of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, she has been president since 1999 of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Doctor of Laws: Bestriding the worlds of academy, government, and industry, a champion of science in service of society whose exemplary life is itself a renewing source of energy.

Philip Converse. Introduced as “one of the nation’s most astute scientific observers of a particular species of party animal—the enigmatic organism known as the American voter,” he was for decades a faculty member of the University of Michigan. Doctor of Laws: A franchise player among America’s social scientists, whose rigorous studies reveal what we think, why we think it, and how we choose whom we choose.

Norman F. Ramsey. In 1989 he shared the Nobel Prize in physics for work on which the functioning of atomic clocks relies. A member of the Harvard community for six decades, “a revered teacher,” he is the Higgins professor of physics emeritus. Doctor of Science: Expert investigator of molecular beams and atomic oscillations, whose experiments have conjured magnetic moments and whose inventive discoveries mark our time.

Philippe de Montebello ’58. Born in Paris, he has spent nearly his entire career at “one of the world’s premier cultural institutions,” of which he is now director and CEO. New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Doctor of Arts: Museum maestro par excellence, who has cultivated collections of magnificent sweep and helped millions experience the expression of the sublime.

Michael Atiyah. Once described as “the great unifier” of mathematical subfields, he has also connected mathematics to other fields, such as economics, engineering, and the multidimensional world of string theory. The former master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Sir Michael has won both the Fields Medal and the Abel Prize. Doctor of Science: Uncommonly Abel unifier of disparate fields, whose insights have reordered Euclid’s domain; his mathematical ideas, in Newton’s spirit, extend the frontiers of physics.

Elizabeth Helen Blackburn. The Herzstein professor of biology and physiology at the University of California, San Francisco, she is “a courageous advocate” of embryonic stem cell research. Doctor of Science: An illustrious biologist fixing her gaze on tiny chromosomal tips, she has found telling clues to how cells divide and cast new light on aging and cancer.

Robert Parris Moses, A.M. ’57, G ’87. A leader of the civil-rights movement in the 1960s, this activist/educator was the catalyst in a landmark effort to register poor rural blacks in Mississippi to vote. As a MacArthur Fellow, he launched what is now called the Algebra Project. Doctor of Laws: Exponent of opportunity, intrepid and inspirational, who brought the power of the vote to Mississippi’s poor and brings the power of math to America’s young.

James Charles Lehrer. Longtime anchor of the NewsHour on PBS, he is seen, said Hyman, “as a paragon of fairness, of probity, and of dignity in the pursuit of truth.” Doctor of Laws: Anchor of inestimable weight, model of masterful moderation, a connoisseur of America’s tribulations and trailways who enlightens us nightly with news.

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746.