

JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL  
 COMMENCEMENT 2009

ney professor of English literature and professor of comparative literature James Engell, the orator at the Phi Beta Kappa Literary Exercises on June 2, spoke about the urgency of changing human habits, education, and ethics to effect radically needed changes in mankind's impact on the environment. Making an analogy that would complement Claghorn's, he said, "Nature has zero ethical responsibility for us. She will let us take out large, unsecured loans. When we can no longer meet payments, she will silently and surely, with no sentiment whatsoever, repossess the house. After all, we're only tenants."

Perhaps making those forces visible, the yellowwood trees planted in Tercentenary Theatre in the 1990s to bloom during Commencement week had opened many days earlier, and shed their petals on the celebrants this June 4. Even the mighty adapt: starting this fall, Harvard's academic year begins earlier, bringing Commencement forward, too—to May 27, 2010. (Among the accomplishments of one of the honorary-degree recipients, Sidney Verba, was guiding that calendar reform toward fruition.)

The exclamation point on the environ-

mental theme was the afternoon address of U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, now a passionate evangelist for checking climate change by building a new energy system for the world (see page 50).

THEN THERE WAS WAR. Incredibly, from a Cantabrigian perspective, the largest events of June 4 took place elsewhere: in Beijing, where Tiananmen Square lay silent on the twentieth anniversary of the brutal confrontation in 1989; and in Cairo, where President Barack Obama, J.D. '91, addressed America's relationship with the worldwide Muslim community. But international matters still resonated at Harvard.

An unusually large crowd attended the Reserve Officers' Training Corps commissioning ceremony on June 3. They heard from both General David H. Petraeus, newly in charge of the increasingly dangerous war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and President Faust. (The soldier's son, an ROTC cadet at MIT, was graduating later in the week.)

A quieter, ground-

preminent investigator of human immunology and a tireless leader in striving to conquer the world's most insidious ills.

**Pedro Almodóvar.**

A moviemaker who flouted the taboos of the Franco era, he is acclaimed for *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and other works. Doctor of Arts: *Ingenious man of La Mancha, bold avatar of a new Spain, an auteur, provocateur, and fabulador whose labyrinths of passion excite the imagination and enliven the art of film.*

**Wendy Doniger '62, Ph.D. '68.** The Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, a foremost scholar of Hinduism, she illuminates the myths of many cultures. Doctor of Letters: *Freely traversing eras and borders, inventively bridging East and West, she finds in the myths of*



level perspective on the same conflict came from the College reunion class of 1984's chief marshal for Commencement, Sarah P. Chayes (see "Fighting for Afghanistan," January-February 2008, page 75). At the Chief Marshal's Spread after the morning exercises, Chayes recalled that she had grown up in Cambridge and attended the college "next door." Just a week earlier, she had been talking with tribal chiefs on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border about the Taliban, and then had worked her way back to campus—stopping off the night before to drink beers with Lt. General Stanley A. McChrystal, recently nominated to assume command of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The great distance

in space and time and culture that journey had encompassed made her think of her class's experience in the 1980s, and its contemporary resonances. "Failure

manifest cultures a microscope and telescope on how we live.

**Ronald Dworkin '53, LL.B. '57.** Perhaps the leading philosopher of law, his works range from *Taking Rights Seriously* and *Law's Empire* to *Is Democracy Possible Here?* Doctor of Laws:

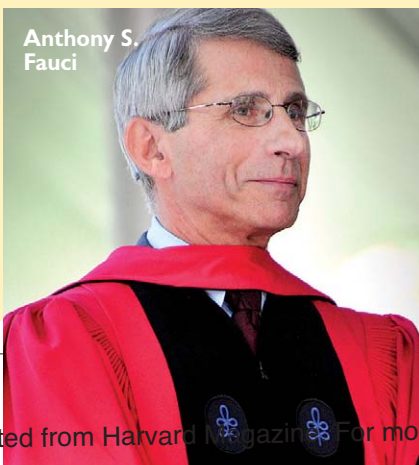
*Venturesome explorer of law's empire, learned expounder of equality's virtue, he draws constitutional meaning from the wellsprings of morality, insisting the law be respectful of all.*

**Robert Langer.** MIT Institute Professor, holder of more than 700 issued and pending patents, this biomedical engi-

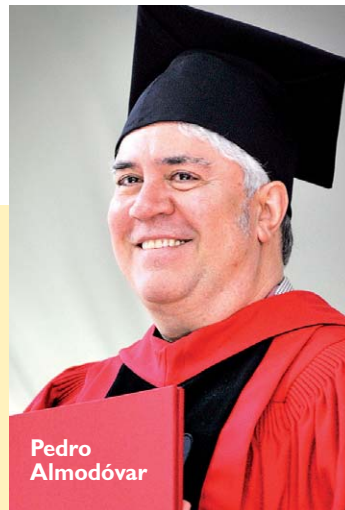
## Honoris Causa

Seven men and three women received honorary degrees at Commencement. Provost Steven E. Hyman introduced the honorands, and President Drew Faust read the citations, in the order below.

**Anthony S. Fauci.** Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, he has led the fight against HIV/AIDS. Doctor of Science: *At the helm, on the Hill, in the lab, on the ward, a*



Anthony S. Fauci



Pedro Almodóvar



Wendy Doniger



Tercentenary Theatre on Commencement morning; a composite view

JIM HARRISON

and meltdown, personal and societal,” Chayes said, “can be an incredible opportunity to inject meaning” into an individual life or a society. (The next day, Radcliffe conferred an Alumnae Recognition Award on her as well.)

Finally, there was pestilence. With the H1N1 influenza lurking in the background, the University on June 3 informed its Local Emergency Management Teams that “University Health Services is reporting a slight uptick in the number of people treated for respiratory illnesses and fever in the last 24 hours.” Commencement emotions to the contrary notwithstanding, the medical sages recommended, in Alert Officialese, “that we forgo the traditional handshakes and embraces that accompany graduation ceremonies.”

And so, when it came time to confer degrees on the undergraduates, Provost Steven E. Hyman ordered the black-gowned throng to rise, and boomed out the traditional words: “Their chosen rep-

resentatives, together with candidates for those degrees *summa cum laude*, will draw near.” They did so. President Faust rose, applauding. But where the venerable “Form of Conferring Degrees” commands, “the President and Deans greet and shake hands” with the aforesaid chosen representatives and *summa* candidates, nary a hand was shaken, nor hug exchanged. That afternoon, School of Public Health dean Julio Frenk, presiding at his first Harvard graduation, was able to put his expertise, and his students’, immediately to work. He announced the no-handshake protocol (“We’re instituting a shoulder tap instead”), and attendees found a bottle of hand sanitizer alongside the program on each chair.

CLEARLY, THE WORLD was very much with the University in 2009: no ivory tower for the Ivy League this Commencement season. The enduring theme was economic uncertainty, best captured by

the Senior English speaker (see page 46). New circumstances compelled the University to recalculate its means, and to refocus on its singular ends. Both Faust and Chu ventured that: each endorsed the pursuit of scientific discovery, and of its practical application. From their very different backgrounds, both also found a common purpose for university communities—and their beneficiaries—in the broadest form of humanistic inquiry.

neer (and amateur magician) has pioneered inventions in drug delivery and tissue engineering. Doctor of Science: *Transforming the ways in which drugs are delivered, devising new methods to synthesize tissues, an Edison of biomedicine with a patently magical touch.*

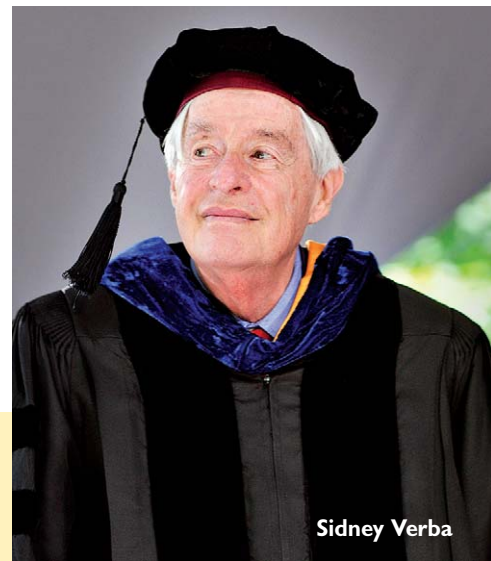
Sarah Blaffer Hrdy '68, Ph.D. '75. Professor emerita of anthropology at the University of California, Davis, she has challenged the tenets of evolutionary biology, reinterpreting our understanding of gender roles and the nature of motherhood. Doctor of Science: *Interrogating Darwinian dogma, investigating primates' ways, an intrepid evolutionist with a revolutionary flair who has introduced us anew to Mother Nature.*



Joan Didion

Wynton Marsalis. Renowned trumpeter, co-founder and artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, he has also championed his home town, New Orleans, in Hurricane Katrina's wake. Doctor of Music: *Virtuoso and impresario, maestro and messenger, whose golden horn of plenty feeds the soul, lifts the heart, and does the Crescent City proud.*

Joan Didion. A writer of exquisite precision, she has crafted enduring nonfiction from *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* to *The Year of Magical Thinking*, five novels, and (with her late husband, John Gregory Dunne) seven screenplays. Doctor of Letters: *Coolly laconic, drily ironic, discerning America's mores and moods, a writer of uncommon keenness and power who pictures the ways in which things fall apart.*



Sidney Verba

Sidney Verba '53. The Pforzheimer University Professor emeritus, a scholar steeped in electoral participation and civic culture, served Harvard as long-time director of the University Library and faculty leader, from implementing the Core curriculum to envisioning calendar reform. Doctor of Laws: *Superlative political scientist, savvy university citizen, sage steward of volumes galore, he has shaped our sense of civic culture and gently personified the professorial ideal.*

Steven Chu. A Nobel laureate in physics, past director of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, he is now the U.S. Secretary of Energy. Doctor of Science: *Grand master of atomic cooling, grand marshal against global warming, a lucent laureate whose generative mind now powers the quest for alternative energy.*