Absolutely stunning conditions—brilliant blue sky, low humidity, comfortably breezy in the mid 60s, spring-green leaves and lots of flowering things—made for a picture-perfect 367th Commencement on May 24. With Harvard at its loveliest as backdrop, two narratives unspooled, wrapping around the week’s graduations and reunions. One focused, optimistically, on the transition within the University (President Drew Faust’s valedictory, the welcome to her successor-elect Lawrence S. Bacow—the first routine Massachusetts Hall transition since Neil L. Rudenstine concluded his service in 2001). The other, wary, was propelled by the rising disregard for Veritas in the world beyond fair Harvard (prompting responses that ranged from calls for outright resistance to advancing a positive vision for the country’s way forward).

Passing the Baton
The corporation’s senior fellow, William F. Lee, and Faust herself set the stage for the succession at the least political occasion of Commencement week, the Wednesday night dinner for honorands in Annenberg Hall. Lee toasted her for leading Harvard through unprecedented challenges with “courage, grace, and deep institutional conviction.” She, in turn, thanked those who made her job possible, and a joy: members of the governing boards; “my beloved Council of Deans, my academic cabinet”; departing

Jubilating J.D.s (top left), and College class of 2018 celebrants (clockwise from top right); Dudley House members Solange Neena Azer (left) and Olutoyin Demuren; Leverett House’s Garrett E. Rupp; and part of the Lowell House contingent, with gift marshal Allison Li in the lead. Visible behind her (from left) are Eric Abreu, Cecilia Zhou, A.M. ’18, Jessica Levy, and class committee member Flavia Cuervo.
Official recognition gave way to a personal one as Faust then focused on “my interlocutor, my defender, my resident faculty voice”—Charles Rosenberg, Monrad professor of the social sciences emeritus, her husband—who, she continued, was always ready with a quip to deflate creeping grandiosity. He received a robust ovation. After lauding the honorands, Faust offered a final toast “to my esteemed friend and successor, Larry Bacow.”

During the exceptionally orderly proceedings Thursday morning, the Medical School’s George Daley made the first notable tweak to the decanal scripts for presenting degree candidates, adding, “Madam President, we thank you for your years of distinguished service, we
thank you for your wise leadership.” No one seemed to mind the freelancing. There might have been a whiff of politics when the J.D.s’ turn came: as new dean John F. Manning pronounced the ritual words about the students whose studies point them toward “promoting the rule of law,” and Faust responded about “those wise restraints that make us free,” the traditional text seemed to assume a new, contemporary force.

After the honorands received their actual degrees (below; students have to wait until later in the day), Provost Alan Garber, showrunner, interjected, “Before we conclude, I note that this ceremony marks Drew Faust’s eleventh and final time presiding over the Morning Exercises. “Words cannot adequately express our gratitude for her extraordinary leadership,” he continued; he invited applause to do that work instead.

There was plenty. As Faust put her hand over her heart, Bacow, to her right, nodded and applauded, and president and president-elect embraced—and applauded each other.

Offstage, Faust, who has emphasized the importance of the arts and of interpreting visual evidence in a digital age, was the subject of a Widener exhibit, “President Drew Gilpin Faust: Eleven Years of University Growth, Reinvention, and Inclusion”: two corridors of highlight photos, suitably placed for viewing by guests at the chief marshal’s spread in Loker Reading Room.

Back outside for the Harvard Alumni Association’s afternoon hoopla, Faust received a final formal encomium, a Harvard Medal (see page 74), purportedly a surprise. Given her lifelong engagement with civil rights, and her strong support for the guest speaker, U.S. Representative John R. Lewis, LL.D.

The Spirit of ’68

The wider world loomed during the week, too, of course, eliciting multiple responses, from subtle to nearly strident.

• The Crimson rainbow. In the context of

Honoris Causa

Four men and three women received honorary degrees at Commencement. University provost Alan M. Garber introduced the honorands in the following order, and President Drew Faust read the citations. For fuller background on each, see harvardmag.com/honorands-18.

Wong Kar Wai. The creator of visually vibrant, character-driven films from Chungking Express to In the Mood for Love to The Grandmaster. Doctor of Arts: A cosmopolitan grandmaster of kinetic flair, whose tales of tears and ashes, forsaken spouses and fallen angels, transfix the senses, transcend conventions, and evoke dark shades of longing and love.

Sallie “Penny” W. Chisholm. An Institute Professor at MIT who has studied the phytoplankton Prochlorococcus, incredibly abundant in the world’s oceans, an essential source of the planet’s oxygen, and, in her laboratory, a model for understanding complex biological systems. Doctor of Science: Enthralled by the invisible pasture of the sea, intrigued by the interplay of ocean and air, she shines sunlight on multitudes of minute marine microbes and fathoms large lessons about life on Earth.

George E. Lewis. Trombonist, composer, multimedia installation artist, and contemporary music innovator, now the Case professor of American music at Columbia. Doctor of Music: Bold voyager on sonic rivers, scholar and sage of the improvisatory arts, whose tonebursts and timbres, riffs and rambles, spring forth where rhythms and algorithms meet.

President Ricardo Lagos. A staunch opponent of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, founder of the Party for Democracy, and, from 2000 to 2006, the reforming president of Chile. Doctor of Laws: Courageous in the face of dictatorship, devout in defense of democracy, a learned leader armed with a burning patience, intent on light, justice, and dignity for all.

Twyla Tharp. One of the most innovative, influential, and important modern choreographers, whose collaborations have extended from Mikhail Baryshnikov to Elvis Costello. Doctor of Arts: A vivaciously inventive figure in the upper room of dance, whose ceaseless creativity flows from never standing still; step by nimble step, line by fluid line, from the supple human form she crafts poetry in motion.

Harvey V. Fineberg. Former dean of Harvard School of Public Health, University provost, and president of the National Academy of Medicine—and holder of four Harvard degrees before the award of this honorary one. Doctor of Laws: Dexterous herder of Crimson cats, superlative exponent of human health, caring leader with a common touch; his given name is Harvey, but to us he’s wholly Harvard.

Rita Dove. Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, the youngest Poet Laureate of the United States when appointed, and recipient of the highest honors conferred by both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. Doctor of Letters: With words that dance across the page, with lyric conception and vivid precision, she draws meaning and music from everyday moments, a Dove whose grace notes stir the soul.
prominent theme of the actu-
Ngozi Adichie
Chimamanda
E. Egi
more important that we gain the ability to
‘alternative,’ ‘fake,’ and ‘junk’—make it ever
news, and junk science. Those adjectives—
ontologist Neil Shubin, Ph.D.
to the search for truth. Pale-
ality’s fundamental commitment
al speeches was the Universi-
Christopher
a Harvard basket-
ator, Christopher
ball star and the
son of two Nigerian immigrants who was
raised in Canada. The Graduate School of
Arts and Sciences con-
firmed a Centennial Medal
(see page 73) on Guido
Goldman ’59, Ph.D. ’70—an
 immigrant whose family
 fled Nazism and who be-
came (gasp, given current
transatlantic relations) a
full-fledged Europeanist.

The separate subtexts told
a single story.

- The pursuit of truth. A
 prominent theme of the actu-
al speeches was the Universi-
ty’s fundamental commitment
to the search for truth. Pale-
ontologist Neil Shubin, Ph.D.
’87, the Phi Beta Kappa orator:
“We live in an age where people
talk of alternative facts, fake
news, and junk science. Those adjectives—
‘alternative,’ ‘fake,’ and ‘junk’—make it ever
more important that we gain the ability to
take a cold look at mar-
shaling and evaluating
evidence in making
decisions.” Faust, the
Baccalaureate: “[Y]ou
found yourselves at the
heart of an institution
whose motto is ‘veritas,’
yet you were in a cli-
mate where ‘alternative
facts’ fuel public discourse and ‘post-truth’
was the Oxford English Dictionary word of
the year.” Writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,
College Class Day speaker: “If I were asked
the title of my address to you today, I would
say, ‘Above all else, do not lie.’ Or ‘don’t lie
too often’—which is really to say, ‘Tell the
truth.”

Among those truths, politician John
Kasich, the Republican governor of Ohio,
speaking Wednesday at the Kennedy
School class day, stressed faith and inclu-
sion: “Christians and Jews and Muslims
all basically have the same view of human
life. Human life is special.” And
Egi drew a disturbing connec-
tion between Langston Hughes’s
“raisin in the sun” and Michael
Brown’s body left to lie “un-
der the hot Missouri sun in the
streets of Ferguson for eight hours.
Eight hours.”
- Taking action.

From there, it was a short step
to sharp calls for action. From the
right, U.S. senator Jeff Flake,
Republican of Arizona, address-
ing the law students, decried the
“America First crowd” and fel-
low members of Congress for ly-
ing “utterly supine in the face of the moral
vandalism that flows from the White House
daily.” His succinct summing-up argument
was, “simply put: We may have hit rock bot-
tom.” Offering a bit of professional counsel,
from experience (he is not seeking reelec-
tion), Flake advised the barristers-to-be to
do the right thing, “even if it means risking
something very important to you, maybe
even your career, because there are times
when circumstances may call on you to risk
your career in favor of your principles. But
you, and your country, will be better for it.
You can go elsewhere for a job, but you can-
not go elsewhere for a soul.”

Representative Lewis, from decidedly dif-
f erent political and cultural traditions, be-
seemed the new graduates to lead, and to
vote. “We must save our country,” he thun-
dered. “We must save it. We must save our
democracy. There are forces in America to-
day, and around the world, that are trying
to take us to some other place.”

Occupying what might qualify as the mid-
dle ground today, the education-school’s
speaker, John Silvanus Wilson Jr., M.T.S. ’81,
Ed.M. ’82, Ed.D. ’85—past president of More-
house College, now on leave as
a Harvard Overseer to serve as
adviser to Faust and Bacow on
inclusion and belonging—drew
on his “teacher (Mom)” and
“preacher (Dad)” background
and his degrees to depict a join-
able moment when “Teachers
are marching...holding strikes
and walkouts for...the freedom to teach with-
out being undermined by basic deficiencies.”
Students, beginning with those from Park-
land, Florida, are marching because “they
want freedom from violence and the threat
of violence...They simply want the freedom

Humor, Too
Commencement oratory and the con-
ferring of degrees are not all spinach.
Phoebe Lakin ’18, the Latin Salutatorian,
had the wit to draw upon one of the great
Harvard graduation moments: J.K. Row-
ling’s afternoon speech 10 years ago. For
those, um, rusty in Latin, she said:
“Harvard University, as many of you
have no doubt already observed, is not so
different from the Hogwarts School of
Witchcraft and Wizardry. Were we not
just as astounded as Harry when we received our acceptance letters, delivered not by
owl but—incrediably—upon the wings of email? Have we not spent our nights brewing
potions in the Science Center, as though in the Dungeons? Did we not often greet the
dawn among the bookshelves of the Restricted Section—that is to say, Lamont Library!…
“Wherever we go next, by broomstick or by automobile, the gates of the Yard
will always be open for us….Now farewell, my classmates, and let us go and work
our magic!”
to be safe to learn.” Women are marching for “their optimal empowerment and to finally and completely upend a toxic culture that has existed for far too long. They want freedom from the tyranny of silence and the crime of zero accountability around sexual violence, harassment, and misogyny.” And “Black folk are still marching…of late, just to insist that black lives matter. They are seeking freedom from the scourge of racial bias in criminal justice and throughout American life.”

In the spirit of the day, and of their own day, fiftieth-reunion members of the Radcliffe class of 1968, who graduated wearing armbands to protest the Vietnam War (and to mourn the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., whom the students had chosen as their Class Day speaker, and Robert F. Kennedy ’48 during their senior spring semester), wore new ones tailored for 2018 by Peggy Kemeny ’68, M.D. A lot of them signed a statement declaring:

Fifty years ago, we, the women of Radcliffe College, stood at our commencement to declare our opposition to the course the country was on and to affirm our dedication to achieving equality, justice, and dignity for all people.

Fifty years later, those goals have not been achieved and are receding ever further under the policies of the current administration. We stand again in protest to rededicate ourselves to

Women Leaders

As President Faust concludes her Harvard service, two other women leaders figured prominently in Commencement week. Governor Gina Raimondo ’93 was chief marshal for the College twenty-fifth reunion class; the Rhode Island Rhodes Scholar spoke at the luncheon spread in Widener. Recalling the morning and her undergraduate experience, she said, “I was just filled with gratitude.” She explained:

“[I]t was a real sacrifice for my family to send me here. My dad…worked two jobs in order to be able to allow my sister, brother, and me to go to college. He worked all day in a manufacturing firm back in the day when we manufactured a lot of jewelry in Rhode Island, and he would come home, eat dinner, and go out at night, work another job. I remember…when I got into Harvard. My mom sat me down and said, ‘Gina, if you want to do this, we’ll find a way.’ And she said to me, ‘When you get there, there will be a lot of kids who have a lot more than you do…. There is going to be a lot of kids around you who have a lot more resources. They go on vacations and do things. And you’re going to have to work… during term and summer.’ And she was right, there were a lot of kids here who had a lot more than me. But you know what? There was a place for me at Harvard…. And I found my way. And

it was hard, and I did have to work. But I was supported, at every step of the way.”

On Friday, Radcliffe’s medalist was Hillary Rodham Clinton—former U.S. senator and secretary of state, and 2016 Democratic presidential candidate. Conveying a message to the students amid the anxieties of today, she described a visit to Cairo in 2011, after Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down:

“I met with a large group of the students who had led the Tahrir Square demonstrations, and I asked them, ‘So, what is next for you?’ And they looked at me like, ‘What a ridiculous question—we’ve done what we came to do. We got rid of Mubarak.’ And I said, ‘What do you think happens next?’ And they said, ‘We’re going to have a democracy. We’re going to move quickly into a better future.’ I said, ‘Are any of you planning to run for office in this new democracy?’ (No.) ‘Are any of you planning to start political parties to compete?’ (No.) ‘So you’ve built up all this social capital driven by social media, but you’re not ready to take the next step. There are only two organized groups other than the Mubarak regime: the Muslim Brotherhood and the army. So if you don’t help to fill the void, it’s going to be a contest between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army.’ And—indeed—that’s what happened.”
ministrators plenty crazy. Connecting more directly to young listeners, perhaps, than with the experiences of the Vietnam-era Radcliffe ’68ers or the John Lewis who survived Selma, he segued from routine evening indecisiveness over what Netflix show to watch to “the defining characteristic of our generation: Keeping our options open.” From there, he deftly made a vivid case for the “countercultural” act of committing to a cause:

“It is not only the bomb or the bully that should keep us up at night—it is also the garden untilled and the newcomer unwelcomed, the neighbor unhoused and the prisoner unheard, the voice of the public unheeded and the long-simmering calamity unhalted and the dream of equal justice unrealized.”

Therein, perhaps, lay plenty of scope for hope engendered by the young, educated, newly graduated students of Harvard.

Finale—and the “Work Still Unfinished”

As the afternoon exercises ended, Bill Lee and Faust hugged—a tangible sign of the warmth, mutual respect, and close working relationship president and Corporation had forged during deeply challenging times—and a demonstration of the kind of relationship the Corporation and its president-elect, one of its own, no doubt hope to sustain. For as Faust noted, “as I step down from my responsibilities as Harvard president, I am keenly aware of another of hope’s fundamental attributes. It implies work still unfinished, aspirations not yet matched by achievement, possibilities yet to be seized and realized. Hope is a challenge”—in the world beyond the University, beyond Cambridge and Boston, perhaps more now than ever.

—HARVARD MAGAZINE STAFF

“The Foundation of Learning”

Almost eleven years ago I stood on this platform to deliver my inaugural address as Harvard’s twenty-eighth president. Today’s remarks represent something of a bookend—a kind of valedictory—valedictory, literally, “farewell words.” When I spoke in 2007, I observed that inaugural speeches are “by definition pronouncements by individuals who don’t yet know what they are talking about.” By now I can no longer invoke that excuse. I am close to knowing all I ever will about being Harvard’s president.

But I then went on to say something else about the peculiar genre of inaugural addresses: that we might dub them, as I put it then, “expressions of hope unchastened by the rod of experience.” By now I should know that rod. In my mind I hear Jimi Hendrix of my youth asking: “Are you experienced?” I would have to answer affirmatively. Perhaps not as experienced as Charles William Eliot, who made it through 40 years as Harvard president. But 11 years is a long time.

Think about it: The iPhone and I were launched within 48 hours of each other in the summer of 2007. All of us are now so attached to our devices that it seems almost unimaginable that they were not always there. The smartphone initiated a revolution in how we communicate, how we interact, how we organize our lives. And we are only beginning to understand the impact of this digital transformation on our disrupted society, economy, politics—even on our brains.

Two thousand and eight brought the financial crisis and the loss of close to a third of our endowment—a third of our endowment—prompting us in the ensuing years to overturn a system of governance that had been in place here at Harvard since 1650, and to transform our financial—and ultimately our investment—processes and policies.

Five years ago, we lived through the arrival of terror in our very midst—and we came together as Boston Strong.

We have experienced wild weather, from hurricanes to Snowmageddon to Bombogenesis, and we’ve doubled down on our commitment to combat climate change.

We have confronted a cheating crisis, an email crisis, a primate crisis, and sexual assault and sexual harassment crises—and we’ve made significant and lasting changes in response to each.

We have faced down H1N1, Ebola, Zika, and even the mumps.

We have been challenged—as well as often inspired and enlightened—by renewed and passionate student activism: Occupy; Black Lives Matter; Divest Harvard; I, Too, Am Harvard; Undocumented at Harvard; and #MeToo.

We have faced a political and policy environment increasingly hostile to expertise and