



Vice Provost, Chief Information Officer and University Librarian John Unsworth opened the day's events, serving as the master of ceremonies. Profs. Joyce Antler '63 (AMST) and Susan Lanser (ENG) acted as grand marshals for the ceremony, ushering the honorees, administrators, faculty and graduates down the aisle.

Protestant Chaplain Rev. Matthew Carriker delivered an invocation, telling the graduates, "Today we celebrate the unique contribution that you have already made on this world and in this campus, challenging us to acknowledge our privilege, to celebrate diversity in all its forms, to be drum majors of justice, instruments of light and love." Nyah Macklin '17 then delivered a heartfelt rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner, for which she received thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

Unsworth took the stage once more to announce faculty and staff awards, followed by a welcome address from outgoing Board of Trustees Chair Perry Traquina '78. Traquina spoke about his parents, who immigrated from Portugal and only completed elementary school. Traquina said that he came to Brandeis as a financial aid recipient, and he spoke about the help he received from professors and friends who helped mentor and shape him. Because of his background, Traquina explained, he feels most gratified when "paying it back" to the community by funding endowed scholarships for primarily first generation college students. He added that one of University namesake Louis D. Brandeis' best qualities was his "ability to adapt his thinking to evolving circumstances ... without changing his core values." Traquina concluded his speech by encouraging the graduates to embrace change as they grow and move on to bigger and better things.

Interim University President Lisa Lynch then addressed the graduating class. As she stepped up to the podium, she took out her phone and took a selfie with the audience — "a little silliness is important," she joked.

"It's worth noting that today is called 'commencement day' rather than 'completion day,'" she told the graduates. "Today is about commencing the next chapter of your lives." She drew upon several Louis D. Brandeis quotes and offered up bits of advice for the graduates and their families. "Neutrality is at times a greater sin than belligerence," she quoted, urging the graduates to refrain from being neutral. "Don't be neutral. There will be moments when you will need to fight for what you believe in, to step in and not step out," Lynch added. "Please do not give up when it's easier to be neutral than to step into a difficult and contentious dialogue."

Lynch and Interim Provost Irving Epstein then conferred the honorary degrees. Scientist and "queen of carbon science" Mildred Dresselhaus received a doctorate of science, honoris causa. She was followed by preservationist and attorney Frank Brandeis Gilbert, who received a doctorate of humane letters, honoris causa. Next came Polish filmmaker and screenwriter Agnieszka Holland, who received a doctorate of creative arts, honoris causa. Richardson was conferred a doctorate of humane letters, honoris causa, and modern artist Jack Whitten received a doctorate of fine arts, honoris causa.

Richardson then delivered the commencement address, drawing upon her past and urging the graduates to dream and to follow their passion while finding their purpose. She recalled one moment when, as a nine year old living in Ohio, she had been so ashamed to tell her classmates that she descended from slaves that she lied and said she was part African, part Cherokee and part French — "because I didn't want to be left out." "I knew I had lied," she said, adding that that feeling of "not knowing" stayed with her until she came to Brandeis and realized that "black people had contributed in significant ways to the American excellence." It was at Brandeis, in her sophomore year, that she conducted a research project in Harlem, which introduced her to black individuals of all walks of life and later inspired her to found HistoryMakers.

One of her more notable accomplishments, HistoryMakers was born of a thought she had when she reached her 40s and began to worry about the legacy she would leave behind. "What was my life going to stand for?" she recalled asking herself. Concerned that students were only learning about slavery, thereby confining the black

experience to slavery and civil rights, Richardson embarked on a 17-year-long journey that has spanned over 180 cities and towns, amassing an oral history archive with testimony from a variety of black individuals, including President Barack Obama.

While she noted that her generation had not fulfilled the “rosy” promise and optimism that they had had upon their college graduations, “I look out at you [the Class of 2016], and I don’t worry about you. ... You may end up actually being the best generation yet. I say that because you came of age as the nation was electing its first African-American president. You have seen the country at its best and at its worst. You have been witness to the breakthrough in the LBGTO movement, and you have seen hashtags bring down countries and make change,” she told the graduates. She proceeded to close her address with a dramatized reading of the lyrics to R. Kelly’s “I Believe I Can Fly.”

After Richardson spoke, Lynch conferred degrees upon students from the Rabb School of Continuing Studies, the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, the International Business School, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Joel Burt-Miller ’16 then delivered the student address, explaining how his mother always pushed him to dream bigger. “In all honesty, my dreams are scary,” he told the audience. “If your dreams don’t scare you, they aren’t big enough.” He also drew upon the South African philosophy Ubuntu, meaning, he explained, “I am because you are.” “I believe each and every one of us sitting here today has a purpose in life. ... You are never too old to dream,” he said.

Ahmad Naveed Noormal MA’16 delivered the graduate student address, drawing upon his childhood in Afghanistan and encouraging the graduates to never give up. He spoke of watching bombings take place only a few miles away from his house when war broke out in 2001, but he explained that he never gave up on his dream to get an education and educate others. “Graduation is not the end goal,” he told the audience. “It is the beginning of a new hope.”

President of the Brandeis Alumni Association Mark Surchin ’78 then welcomed the graduates to the alumni association, and Rabbi Elyse Winick ’86, the Jewish Chaplain, closed the ceremony with a benediction.