



I learned just how tight a small law school class can be. And how they'll flock together when one of them is in need.

Dwayne Betts '16

James Silk '89





JOYOUS CELEBRATIONS

Two ceremonies in May brought the community and guests together to mark the accomplishments of the classes of 2020, 2021, and 2022.

PHOTOS BY MARA LAVITT

Three graduating classes had their day in the sun — for some, a long-delayed chance to celebrate with family and friends — as treasured commencement traditions returned to Yale Law School this spring.

On May 14, the Law School welcomed back recent alumni for whom the pandemic interrupted the usual graduation rites. An Alumni Ceremony for the Classes of 2020 and 2021 was the highlight of a day with all of the hallmarks of Commencement. Scenes from the festivities — a drum corps leading a procession, graduates walking across a blue-and-white-draped stage, friends and family making toasts in the Courtyard — were repeated on May 23, when the Class of 2022 held its Commencement.

On both days, speakers acknowledged the challenging circumstances under which the graduates completed their law school years. They noted the resilience the graduates developed and the relationships they sustained during trying times.

Dean Heather K. Gerken, in remarks to the Class of 2022, described what the graduates accomplished.

“Let me tell you that the work you did here — to uplift one another while simultaneously managing to win injunctions and produce pathbreaking scholarship and become leaders in all manner of fields — it’s nothing short of amazing,” she said. “If you did not already believe that you could accomplish absolutely anything, let there now be no doubt.”

I hope you know that idealism versus realism is a false choice. And I hope you continue to refuse to accept that unacceptable things must remain as they are.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

If we've learned nothing else in the last two years, we know that so much of what we assume is durable could slip away at any moment. But what we will always have — and be proud of — is the time and energy we invest in building loving relationships of many kinds with the people around us.

Monica C. Bell '09



[I am grateful for] my friends, who have been a loyal source of support and who have shown me that I can learn things, and also the clinics, which are an incredible source of learning and lawyering that I will always remember for the rest of my life.

Shariful Khan '22 will be a Skadden Fellow through Public Justice's Students' Civil Rights Project. In this role, he will be representing students in their civil rights claims against school districts and cities.

In each of the ceremonies, Gerken spoke about how the graduates supported each other and maintained a sense of community. "You showed that this community endures, regardless of distance or difficulty," she told the Classes of 2020 and 2021. "These examples continue today, with your class already out in the world doing remarkable things and facing challenges head on with grit and determination."

Sustaining a community was a recurring theme of both the Alumni Ceremony and Commencement.

Professor of Law Monica C. Bell '09, chosen by the classes of 2020 and 2021 as the faculty speaker, spoke about the transformative power of friendship.

"If we've learned nothing else in the last two years, we know that so much of what we assume is durable could slip away at any moment," she said. "But what we will always have — and be proud of — is the time and energy we invest in building loving relationships of many kinds with the people around us."

Visiting Clinical Lecturer in Law Dwayne Betts '16, the Alumni Ceremony's guest speaker, described how the community rallied around him when the Connecticut Bar Examining Committee mailed him a letter questioning his character and fitness because of his felony convictions at the age of 16.

"In getting in a bind, I learned just how tight a small law school class can be," said Betts, the Founding Director of Freedom Reads, which establishes libraries in prisons to bring literature to incarcerated people. "And how they'll flock together when one of them is in need."



Yale Law School is very supportive of people who want to go into academia and the Moot Camp [a workshop in which candidates moot their job talks] was particularly helpful.

Maily Fidler '20 will start as an Assistant Professor in the fall at the University of Nebraska College of Law, where she will be teaching criminal law.



I'm looking forward to seeing what the next stage has in store for me. The classes that I've taken have definitely prepared me and the clinical work I've done has given me training as well.

Spurthi Jonnalagadda '22 will join the white collar practice of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in New York. At YLS, she was involved with the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Clinic, Free Exercise Clinic, and Gender Violence Clinic.



I've made the strongest friendships I've ever had in my life at Yale Law School. There are so many people who have fundamentally made my perspective on the world broader and have helped me stay true to my principles.

Emily Jo Coady '22 is heading to Oakland, California, where she be working for a union-side labor firm on workers' rights issues.



This is a reunion with regalia. I am awestruck by how attached I am to a place I was only in for a year and how happy I am to see everybody.

Harley Etienne '20 MSL, now an Associate Professor at Ohio State University's Knowlton School and Moritz College of Law, on being back for the Alumni Ceremony.





It's wonderful to be here today. I have loved being able to see all of my peers again and catch up with them.

Esther Araya '20 is a Skadden Fellow at Kids in Need of Defense, where she represents children seeking asylum.



I took every single tax course at Yale Law School. It's an exciting field because of the mix of policy and real world application.

Ya Sheng Lin '22 will join the firm of Davis Polk in New York as a tax lawyer.



As lawyers and prospective lawyers, we are uniquely situated to do good in the world and to work for the public interest — whether that be immigrant rights; prosecuting war crimes in Syria, Libya, Ukraine; or defending indigent people pro bono in evictions.

Max Labunsky '22 will be clerking on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.





Currently I'm working as legal adviser to the Iran-U.S. claims tribunal in the Hague. It's interesting work helping to resolve disputes between the U.S. and Iran.
Michael Beechert '21



I'm spending as much time, energy, and thinking as I can on the abolition of youth prisons, school desegregation, and youth voting rights. It won't be change that I'll see in my lifetime, but I think it's worth planting the seeds.
Sarah Camiscoli '21



Judge Myron Thompson '72

Speakers also described the principles that graduates will carry throughout their careers.

Binger Clinical Professor of Human Rights James Silk '89 was selected to address the 2022 graduates as faculty speaker. He touched on two themes — humility and solidarity — that guide his work.

To achieve justice, he said, lawyers must “listen to those resisting unjust power and ... help them wield the language of rights and the language of law to make their demands.”

Award-winning novelist and essayist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Commencement guest speaker, urged the Class of 2022 to hold close to the ideals and goals they first entered law school with.

“I hope you know that idealism versus realism is a false choice,” she said. “And I hope you continue to refuse to accept that unacceptable things must remain as they are.”

The 2022 Commencement included recognition of an honorand, federal Judge Myron Thompson '72, whom Gerken called “a civil rights champion,” and who received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Yale University earlier in the day.

The Alumni Ceremony honored 466 graduates. The classes of 2020 and 2021 comprise 422 J.D., 28 LL.M., two M.S.L., 14 J.S.D. degree recipients. Commencement honored 270 degree candidates, comprising 217 J.D., 40 LL.M., three M.S.L., and 10 J.S.D.s from the class of 2022. 📍

