

# ALUMNI NEWS



Stacey Abrams '99



Lani Guinier '74\*



William E. Kennard '81



Robert C. Post '77

## Award of Merit

**While the cancellation** of an in-person Alumni Weekend was a disappointment to all, the Law School alumni community rallied online and in spirit. Many classes held Zoom events, from the social to the scholarly.

On November 17, the Law School invited all alumni to a special event to honor four recipients of the Award of Merit.

This year's celebration recognized the 2020 and 2021 honorees — **Stacey Abrams '99**, **Lani Guinier '74\***, **William E. Kennard '81**, and **Robert C. Post '77** — individuals who fully embody the spirit of outstanding leadership and have had a positive impact in law and beyond.

"These individuals have inspired us to rethink our approach to educating the next generation of leaders," Dean Heather K. Gerken said. "They are all examples of what effective and thoughtful leadership looks like in the world. The Yale Law School community takes enormous pride in the impact that each and every one of them has had in the world, and we are just humbled by the notion that their efforts are an extension of this community."

*\*As the Yale Law Report was going to press, we learned of the passing of Lani Guinier on January 7, 2022. Read a tribute to her on the Yale Law School website at [law.yale.edu/guinier-tribute](http://law.yale.edu/guinier-tribute).*

## 2021 Award of Merit Recipients

### Stacey Abrams '99

Founder of Fair Fight Action; Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives, 2011–2017

**Stacey Abrams** shared her leadership lessons and spoke of ambition in her remarks accepting the Award of Merit.

**“When you’re willing to speak your ambition aloud, you give it life, you give it breath and you give it more possibility. So, embrace your ambition and never mistake self-effacement for humility.”** She closed with a reminder: “To those of you who are just starting out or who are trying to figure out what comes next...every day you try [those lessons], every day you try something new, every day you strive, you are a person of merit and you are someone to celebrate.”

Abrams is a political leader, voting rights activist, and *New York Times* bestselling author. After serving for 11 years in the Georgia House of Representatives, seven as Minority Leader, Abrams became the Democratic nominee for Governor of Georgia in 2018, winning at the time more votes than any other Democrat in the state’s history.

After the 2018 election, Abrams launched Fair Fight Action to ensure every American has a voice in the nation’s election system. Abrams has founded multiple organizations devoted to voting rights, training and hiring young people of color, and tackling social issues at state and national levels. In December, Abrams announced that she is again running for Governor of Georgia.

### Lani Guinier '74\*

Bennett Boskey Professor of Law, Emerita, Harvard Law School; Professor of Law, University of Pennsylvania Law School, 1988–1998

Guinier’s award was accepted on her behalf by her son, Nikolas Bowie. Bowie illustrated Guinier’s long civil rights career and described her route to leadership as “a pathway to building community with other people” inspired by her pursuit of justice and democracy.

He defined Guinier’s ideas as ahead of their time. **“But instead of seeing those ideas merely as a way in which she could achieve recognition or power... she saw those ideas as transformative for achieving justice by building communities to support them and to support one another,”** he said.

**Lani Guinier** was the Bennett Boskey Professor of Law, Emerita at Harvard Law School, where she became the first woman of color appointed to a tenured professorship. Before her Harvard appointment, she was a tenured professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Guinier worked in the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice and then headed the voting rights project at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in the 1980s.

Guinier published many scholarly articles and books that are accessible for a general audience, including *The Tyranny of the Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America* (2015).

## 2020 Award of Merit Recipients

### William E. Kennard '81

Co-Founder, Velocitas Partners; U.S. Ambassador to the European Union, 2009–2013; Chairman, Federal Communications Commission, 1997–2001

**William E. Kennard**, Co-Founder and Chair of Velocitas Partners, LLC, said he was humbled by the award and reflected on his role in public service that led to drastically increased internet accessibility for underserved communities.

**“My leadership was inspired by my public service, being able to contribute to changing people’s lives in profound ways,”** he said. “But I also found that the most profound change I experienced was the change in me. As David McCullough has said so eloquently, ‘The great and curious truth of the human experience is that selflessness is the best thing you can do for yourself.’”

Before founding Velocitas Partners, an asset management firm, Kennard was U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. Appointed by President Obama in November 2009, he promoted transatlantic trade and investment and worked to eliminate regulatory barriers to commerce. Prior to his appointment as U.S. Ambassador, he was managing director of the global private equity firm, the Carlyle Group. Kennard also served as General Counsel and later as Chair of the Federal Communications Commission. Kennard is chair of the board of AT&T, Inc. and serves on the boards of Ford Motor Company and MetLife, Inc.

### Robert C. Post '77

Sterling Professor of Law, Yale Law School; 16th Dean of Yale Law School, 2009–2017

Former Dean of the Law School and Sterling Professor of Law **Robert C. Post** expressed gratitude to be included in the company of the other Award of Merit recipients, and spoke of leadership requiring two qualities. **“First, leaders must be possessed of a compelling and powerful vision of the future,”** he said. “And second, leaders must learn to encourage those around them to share in that vision.” Post went on to emphasize the necessity for humility and a “genuine willingness to modify one’s vision, as one takes in the lives and experiences of others.”

Post served as the School’s dean from 2009 until 2017. Before coming to Yale, he taught at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law. He is a member of the American Law Institute and a fellow of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

A legal historian and an expert in constitutional law, Post has written and edited numerous publications, including *Citizens Divided: Campaign Finance Reform and the Constitution* (2014), *Democracy, Expertise, Academic Freedom: A First Amendment Jurisprudence for the Modern State* (2012), *Prejudicial Appearances: The Logic of American Antidiscrimination Law* (2001), and *For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom* (with Matthew M. Finkin '73 LL.M., 2009).