



FORGING AHEAD WITH STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

BY ERIN SHANLEY
PHOTOS BY MARA LAVITT

The Yale Law School community came together on Monday, May 20, to celebrate the members of the Class of 2024. The Commencement festivities in New Haven included friends and loved ones who traveled from around the world to attend.

The day started with Yale University's 323rd Commencement ceremony, where deans presented their candidates to Yale University President Peter Salovey and honorary degrees were conferred.

Immediately following the University's Commencement, Law School graduates and guests made their way to the Payne Whitney Gymnasium, where a diploma ceremony was held in the Lanman Center.

Dean Heather K. Gerken delivered opening remarks, in which she recognized the School's bicentennial and credited the Class of 2024 for reviving the Law School's best traditions post-pandemic.

"The last few years haven't been an easy time for anyone," said Gerken. "Now more than ever, this profession needs people of compassion and decency — leaders who can build consensus as we try to solve the most painful problems of our time. The world is calling out for people like you. I hope you answer that call as best you can. Take the knowledge you have gained here, and leaven it with wisdom. Take the skills you have mastered here, and temper them with humility. Above all, embody the integrity and decency that are the hallmark of great scholars, great lawyers, and great human beings."

“Let them say that when faced with a world filled with bitter division... that your generation was the first to see the dawn through the darkness. And that your generation helped us heal.”

U.S. ATTORNEY DAMIAN WILLIAMS '07



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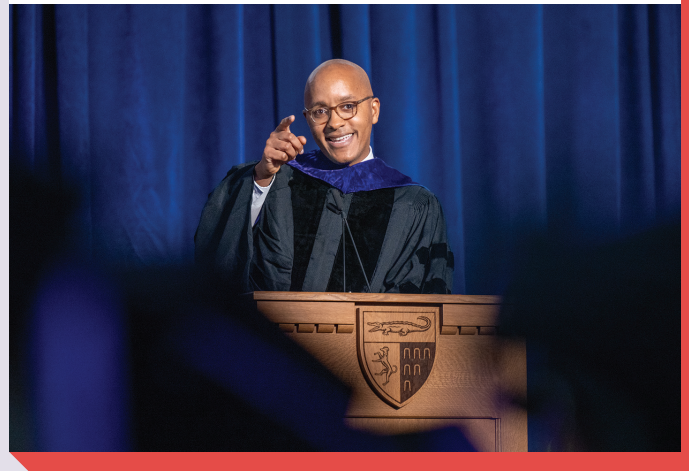
PROFESSOR DOUGLAS NEJAIME

Anne Urowsky Professor of Law Douglas NeJaime served as this year’s faculty speaker. In his remarks, he emphasized the importance of struggle — both personal and professional — and encouraged graduates to use it as a tool for resolution.

“None of you — left, right, or center, whatever your values and principles — can look at today’s world and see in it the world you would create,” said NeJaime. “How does one bring about more of the world one wants? Just as it does not happen simply through civil discourse and respectful disagreement, it also does not happen simply through critique or defiance. It happens through struggle — struggle that seeks not simply to gain power and use it to coerce but instead to move people.”

NeJaime poignantly concluded by explaining how engaging with one another’s shared humanity and shared struggle is an important way to create positive change.

“Struggle in service of something, for sure, is important, but it is also meaningful in the moment, as a practice that forges community. You seek to move someone by facing them, by living together as equals, not through exercising power and domination. In struggle, you form bonds.... Struggle is hard, but it is where you develop new forms of community, strengthen relationships, and connect to others. To produce the world you want to live in, you must struggle.”



This year’s guest speaker was U.S. Attorney Damian Williams ’07, who implored graduates to lead with humanity in the face of adversity in order to bridge divides.

“We may not have seen times like this with our own eyes. But history has. And history teaches that in times of tension, in times of conflict, in times of deep division, it takes people of good faith — people with a stubborn commitment to humanity, empathy, and grace — to bring about peace and healing,” said Williams.

In his powerful closing statement, Williams invited the graduates to imagine what future generations of law students will say about them and the work they have achieved.

“What do you want [future generations] to say about your generation? About how you lived and how you led and how you practiced the law?” he asked. “Let them say that when faced with a world filled with bitter division, when the currents of change were fierce and unrelenting — and threatened to sweep away things that we cared about most — that your generation made the choice to be that bridge over troubled water. That your generation was the first to see the dawn through the darkness. And that your generation helped us heal.”

He concluded, “Whether they say those things is ultimately up to you. Because that history has not been written. Those pages are blank. And, starting today, you hold the pen.”

A reception for Law School graduates and their invited guests convened in the Baker Hall Courtyard, capping off the day’s festivities.

This year’s Commencement honored 244 degree candidates, comprising 210 J.D., 27 LL.M., four J.S.D., and three M.S.L. candidates. 🎓



WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST DURING YOUR TIME AT YALE LAW SCHOOL?



Nick Fernandez '24

"The people of YLS were the highlight of my experience. I learned something new every day from such brilliant and inspiring classmates. I've made so many lifelong friends and can't wait to see how they change the world."



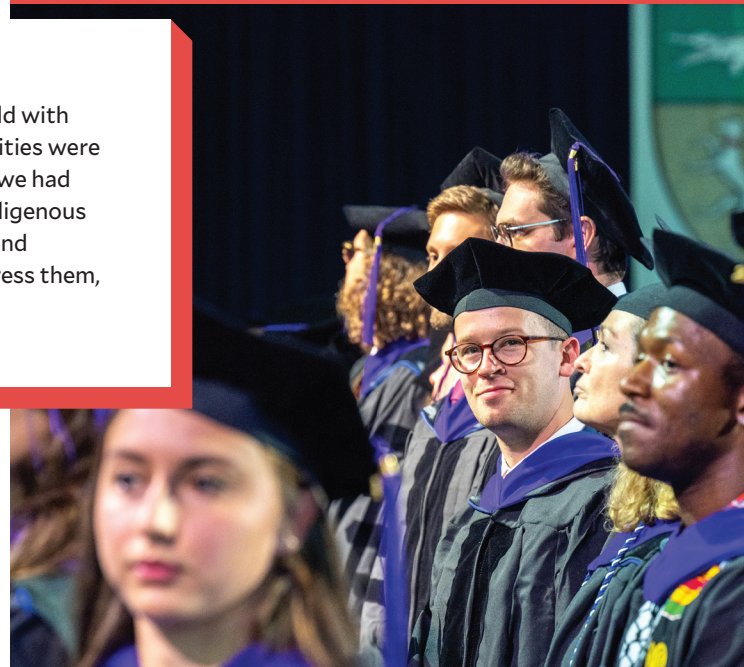
Demi Moore '24

"Law school is tremendously difficult, but people—i.e. found family—anchored and encouraged me."



Yasmin Olsen '24 LLM

"The relationships YLS enabled me to build with other Indigenous students and communities were the highlight for me. The conversations we had about the common challenges facing Indigenous communities in both the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand, and how to address them, were invaluable and deeply inspiring."



Moore photo
by Melissa Kay





WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST DURING YOUR TIME AT YALE LAW SCHOOL?



Jessie Fenton '24 LLM

“There’s a well known whakataukī (proverb) in Te Reo Māori, New Zealand’s Indigenous language: He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata he tangata he tangata! This roughly translates to: What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people! And for me, that has been true of my Yale experience as well. I have been blown away by the warmth, intellect, and enthusiasm of Yale students and have so many people from all walks of life whom I hope to count as lifelong friends.”

Davis Parker '24

“The people. Every person at YLS seems to have about a dozen hidden talents and hundreds of insights. Every conversation was a chance to learn something new about the world. YLS is a place of unlimited curiosity, and I loved being around thoughtful, perceptive people who challenged and encouraged me on a daily basis.”



Dena Shata '24

“YLS provides unparalleled opportunities for you to act on your passions and begin tackling challenging issues long before graduation. From representing clients in clinic to working alongside the editors of the *Yale Law Journal* to publish cutting-edge scholarship, it has been such a privilege to not only have these opportunities but also be able to work beside and learn from peers in these efforts.”

Santiago Carbajal '24 LLM

“The small size of the Law School and the amazing faculty allowed me to work and develop my research one-on-one with professors. It was also crucial in making me feel very comfortable and engaged in class discussions. Having a professor supervise my work was undoubtedly one of the most amazing and enriching experiences I had at YLS.”

