

COMMENCEMENT 2026

Celebrating the Class of 2026

Rising to the Challenge

BY ERIN SHANLEY

PHOTOS BY MARA LAVITT



Under dazzlingly sunny skies,
Yale Law School Commencement honored
241 degree candidates in New Haven.



The Yale Law School community came together on May 18 to celebrate the Class of 2026 with friends and family during a Commencement ceremony in New Haven. Remarks from this year's speakers touched on the current political climate and reminded graduates of their responsibility to uphold the rule of law.

The day kicked off with a procession of the graduates from Sterling Law Building to Beinecke Plaza led by the Mattatuck Drum Band, the oldest fife and drum band in the U.S.

The procession continued to Old Campus, where the University's 325th Commencement ceremony was held under bright skies. Deans from each school presented their graduate candidates to Yale University President Maurie McInnis and honorary degrees were conferred.

The University-wide Commencement was immediately followed by a diploma ceremony for the Law School in the Lanman Center of Yale's Payne Whitney Gymnasium.





“I urge you to avoid the temptation to look at whatever group or institution you oppose and see that thing as a monolith.”

NICHOLAS R. PARRILLO '04

This year's Commencement started with a presentation of the maces from former dean and Sterling Professor Emeritus of Law Heather K. Gerken to Sol and Lillian Goldman Dean and Professor of Law Cristina M. Rodríguez '00, who became dean on Feb. 1.

“These maces are fit for a school — and a profession — like ours,” said Gerken. “They are meant to slip into the hands of someone who works rather than someone who rules. They are meant for a school that trains you to serve as the voice of others rather than pronouncing from on high. These maces are simple — humble, even — which means they are the right symbols for a school that teaches our students to be humble about their beliefs, to be righteous but never self-righteous.”

In her opening remarks to the graduates and their families, Dean Rodríguez highlighted the turbulent environment into which students are graduating, emphasizing the importance of using their Law School degree to meet the challenges of the moment and lead the world toward a better place.

“Even as we need lawyers and leaders who can keep up with the fast-moving challenges facing our nation and our world, we also need lawyers who are wise enough to be calm in the storm, who have equanimity in a restless and churning world,” she said.

Rodríguez also urged graduates to fiercely protect the rule of law as they go forth in their careers.

“We need you to be stewards of the rule of law,” she said. “As a protective force against arbitrary treatment. As a force that holds people with power accountable. That ensures equal treatment of all people, even and especially those who are unpopular or marginalized. As a force necessary to our liberal democracy and to mediating political conflict.”

Rodríguez continued, “It is not self-executing, and its preservation does not depend on courts alone or even primarily. It depends on you acting with integrity, honesty, and restraint, no matter your chosen field or pursuit.”

Nicholas R. Parrillo '04, the William K. Townsend Professor of Law, served as this year's faculty speaker and faculty marshal, elected by the graduates. In his address, he encouraged graduates to let themselves create space for free and open exchange of ideas when





HEAR FROM OUR GRADS

"I'm looking forward to spending a year after graduation as a Robina Fellow, serving as a foreign law clerk at the Constitutional Court of South Africa in Johannesburg."

Tasneem Hussain '26 LLM



"Courses in international business transactions and federal tax law changed the way I think about markets, incentives, and the economy as a whole, and they were indispensable to my intellectual growth here at Yale."

Dezzie B. Ligon III '26



"I am so grateful to my professors for instilling in me a love of learning about the law, encouraging me in my own research and writing, and challenging me to grow and think critically about legal issues."

Madison Rinder '26



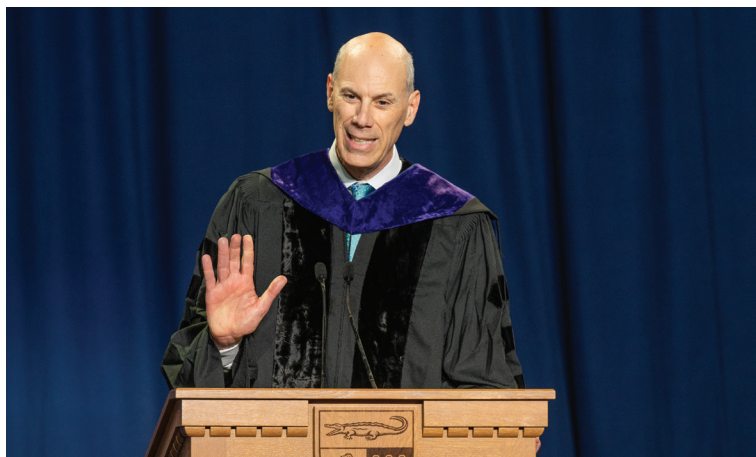
"At Yale Law School, I learned that I should not shy away from having and promoting big ideas."

Florian Kriener '26 LLM



"My time at YLS has been some of the best years of my life. I'm so grateful to be surrounded by such brilliant, kind, and multitalented classmates and now lifelong friends."

Catey Vera '26



“Let it be said that you were the kind of lawyer
and the kind of person that your law school and your
community could be proud of.”

JAMES E. BOASBERG '90



working in groups and to refrain from being a polarizing force as stewards of the law.

“I urge you to avoid the temptation to look at whatever group or institution you oppose and see that thing as a monolith,” he said. “A government agency contains different offices with different points of view. An industry contains different companies that have different investments. A political movement is a coalition of subgroups that have different preferences.”

To accomplish this, Parrillo implored graduates to see issues from an opponent’s point of view.

“Be alert to the possibility of some unexpected ally from among your opponents — if not in all things, then in one narrow thing, on which you happen to find agreement,” Parrillo said. He continued, “If you would know the world, you must know [your opponents]. And knowing the world is the precondition for any rational effort to change it.”

Judge James E. Boasberg '90, who serves as the chief judge of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, addressed the graduates as this year’s guest speaker with three pieces of advice: prioritize the mission of an organization when choosing a job, embrace opportunities to take career risks, and live a well-rounded life.

“I know you will live up to your achievement as Yale Law School graduates every day,” Boasberg said in his closing remarks. “Take a job where the mission matters, don’t be afraid to take risks in your career, lead a life of balance, and always remember the support of this community and the friends you have made here. Thirty-six years from now, let it be said that you were the kind of lawyer and the kind of person that your law school and your community could be proud of.”

A reception in the Baker Hall Courtyard for graduates, families, and friends capped off the day’s festivities.

This year’s Commencement honored 241 degree candidates, comprising 207 J.D., 29 LL.M., and five J.S.D. candidates. Additionally, the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences awarded two Ph.D. in law degrees. 🍷