Honorary Degree Citations

Arlin M. Adams
As an eminent jurist and committed citizen-volunteer, you epitomize the ideal Penn alumnus whom Benjamin Franklin characterized as “distinguished in Abilities, serviceable in Public Stations, and an ornament to the country.” It is not merely what you have done that has shed honor upon your distinguished accomplishments; it is the scope and scale of your selfless service to your country, your profession, your community, and your school.

You ostensibly retired from the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in 1986, but presidents, governors, legislatures, and courts continue to call on you to handle investigations and arbitrate disputes of the greatest sensitivity and public importance.

Your service to the community, which merited you the prestigious Philadelphia Award in 1997, is of legendary proportions. Currently president of the American Philosophical Society, the nation’s oldest learned society, your outstanding service on behalf of many of the area’s colleges, foundations, and hospitals mirrors your belief that cities must be re-created in each generation by believing and caring citizens.

What you once said of Philadelphia’s First Citizen, Benjamin Franklin, holds equally true for you: “It’s unbelievable what one person can do.”

And here at the University of Pennsylvania, your own legend as leader, activist, and role model continues to grow, fueled by the distinction with which you have filled your many roles on campus, from University trustee and adjunct professor at the Law School to your service on the Board of Overseers for the Law School.

To have filled many offices, to have acted on principle, to have served many causes, to have written many books, to have been mentor and role model for law students, and in your distinguished 50-year career to have done so much that excites the admiration and respect of others is a mighty commendation that merits highest praise.

The Trustees take particular pride in acclaiming you as a colleague and rejoicing in the opportunity to add to your Alumni Award of Merit, your second Penn degree by according you, Arlin Adams, the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

Jimmy Carter
Throughout your illustrious public life as president and peacemaker, you have epitomized the ideal of selfless service, bringing definition to the phrase “natural social worker.” Whether negotiating cease-fires, monitoring elections in nations in turmoil, or building homes for homeless families in Appalachia and the inner city, you have used your reputation, your stature, and your hands-on leadership to heal division and oppression wherever found. Internationally honored and admired for your altruistic efforts, you embody the qualities that the American public most admires in its leaders: integrity, practical idealism, and a passionate commitment to the common good.

As president of the United States, you raised the level of public discourse, bringing conscience to the policy table. Your administration bore the stamp of rapprochement: the Camp David Accords, the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China. And when you left the White House, you did not need to reinvent yourself, for yours has always been less a political agenda than a moral one.

As co-founder of The Carter Center with your wife Rosalynn in 1982, you have made the Center the institutional base for your continuing role in public life and a means of putting into action your deeply felt humanitarian concerns that know neither bounds nor boundaries. Under your inspirational leadership, the Center has led the worldwide effort to eradicate guinea worm disease which annually crippled more than two million Africans; coordinated a multi-agency effort that increased the international immunization rate for children from 20 to 80 percent; mediated conflicts in Haiti, North Korea, Bosnia, and the Middle East; and monitored democratic elections in Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, Zambia, and other nations, to name but a few of its many accomplishments.

With unbounded admiration and enormous respect for your extraordinary life’s work in service to your nation and to others, the Trustees unanimously commend you to the student constituents of the University of Pennsylvania and cast their bloc vote for you, Jimmy Carter, as exemplar of ethical integrity, champion of human rights, and statesman “in action faithful and in honor clear,” by conferring upon you the University’s highest accolade: Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

Rosalynn Carter
Committed advocate and tireless activist on behalf of those least served, you broke new ground as first lady and went forthrightly, fearlessly public in the role of presidential partner. Despite naysayers who would have preferred that you keep to the beaten path, you have continued to blaze your own trail, exploding the popular myth of what women do, simply by the force of your powerful example and achievements. From the White House to The Carter Center, which you co-founded with your husband, former President Jimmy Carter in 1982, your life-work has been a passionate commitment to issues that speak to the meaning of a humane society.

As the first lady from Plains, you used your position as honorary chair of the President’s Commission on Mental Health as a bully pulpit to make mental health a top national priority, and your advocacy was instrumental in the passage of the Mental Health Act of 1980. Like the redoubtable Eleanor Roosevelt, you put your own stamp on the role of first lady: traveling the world as a special presidential envoy and bringing to the ear of the president first-hand accounts of the concerns of people everywhere.

In your work for The Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity, you have continued to break new ground as an advocate for human rights, conflict resolution, the empowerment of urban communities, and issues of concern to women and children. Your efforts range from co-founding “Every Child by Two” to publicize the need for early childhood immunizations, which have virtually eliminated measles in the United States, to your service on the board of The Atlanta Project, a program addressing the social ills associated with urban poverty.

Your courage, faith, ideals, and service have shaped America and its values. In recognition of your extraordinary example as pioneering first lady; your unifying efforts on behalf of others; and your outstanding achievements as committed activist, distinguished lecturer, internationally honored volunteer, and author, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania now confer upon you, Rosalynn Carter, the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.
Francis S. Collins

Internationally acclaimed explorer and cartographer of the human genetic landscape, you have been the major contributor to the development of what may be the most important biomedical advance of this century: the identification of the gene causing a disease by its position in the human genome, otherwise known as positional cloning. Every step forward into this microscopic realm bears witness of your stunning achievements, from your development of the technology of gene mapping to your identification of the cystic fibrosis gene, a scientific milestone that represented the first disease gene to be discovered solely by positional cloning.

As director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, based within the National Institutes of Health, you have carried the case for genetic research into the national arena, arguing for its enormous significance in relationship to human disease and ultimately to medical interventions. Aware that sequencing of the human genome alone—however precious in its own right—does not guarantee wisdom in decisions regarding heredity, you also have taken the lead in calling to public attention the ethical, legal, and social implications of issues such as presymptomatic diagnostic genetic testing.

Your peers have applauded you, heaping honors upon you for your brilliant career in which you have accomplished the work of several lifetimes. As one who has changed the very paradigm through which scientists view the human genome, your greatest plaudits are yet to come. They will be truly realized in the future achievements of those who follow in the trails you have blazed and in the new therapies for human disease made possible through your visionary discoveries.

With all this in mind, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania take particular pride in honoring you as scientific explorer of the new world of the human genome, compassionate physician concerned with the wise uses of knowledge, and superb teacher by force of your research and personal example. In recognition of your brilliant contributions to the field of molecular genetics, the Trustees commend your service to science, medicine, and humanity by conferring upon you, Francis Collins, the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.

Frank Moore Cross

A world-renowned scholar of Near Eastern Studies as emeritus Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Semitic Languages at Harvard University and former director of The Harvard Semitic Museum, you have been the major contributor to the development of what may be the most important biomedical advance of this century: the identification of the gene causing a disease by its position in the human genome, otherwise known as positional cloning. Every step forward into this microscopic realm bears witness of your stunning achievements, from your development of the technology of gene mapping to your identification of the cystic fibrosis gene, a scientific milestone that represented the first disease gene to be discovered solely by positional cloning.

As director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, based within the National Institutes of Health, you have carried the case for genetic research into the national arena, arguing for its enormous significance in relationship to human disease and ultimately to medical interventions. Aware that sequencing of the human genome alone—however precious in its own right—does not guarantee wisdom in decisions regarding heredity, you also have taken the lead in calling to public attention the ethical, legal, and social implications of issues such as presymptomatic diagnostic genetic testing.

Your peers have applauded you, heaping honors upon you for your brilliant career in which you have accomplished the work of several lifetimes. As one who has changed the very paradigm through which scientists view the human genome, your greatest plaudits are yet to come. They will be truly realized in the future achievements of those who follow in the trails you have blazed and in the new therapies for human disease made possible through your visionary discoveries.

With all this in mind, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania take particular pride in honoring you as scientific explorer of the new world of the human genome, compassionate physician concerned with the wise uses of knowledge, and superb teacher by force of your research and personal example. In recognition of your brilliant contributions to the field of molecular genetics, the Trustees commend your service to science, medicine, and humanity by conferring upon you, Francis Collins, the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.

Alan Greenspan

As chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System under three presidents, you have been dubbed the second most powerful person in the United States. Throughout your remarkable career as a public servant, you have been extraordinarily successful in managing the nation's monetary policy. And when you speak, the whole world, from stockbroker to shopper, listens.

Your greatest successes in the real-time, real-world milieu that is the U.S. economy include more than the visible problems the Fed has resolved; they necessarily encompass all the potential crises that have been averted. To this enormous responsibility of steering the dollar safely between the Scylla of inflation and the Charybdis of deflation, you bring a keen intellect, precision of thought, prudent judgment, and fortunately, a deep understanding of the power of numbers. It has been said of you that you are the kind of person who knows how many bolts are used in a Chevrolet and what it would do to the national economy if you removed three of them.

From your earliest days as a saxophonist in a swing band and an economic consultant on Wall Street to your current tenure as the leader of the Fed, you have always known the score. Your theme, in countless variations, has been that a democratic society requires a stable and effectively functioning economy. To that end, you have been both visionary and activist in reducing and containing the risks inherent in a dynamic and constantly evolving economy.

Admiring the integrity and passionate objectivity that have marked your extraordinary career in public service, the Trustees, in a state of irrepressible, but not irrational, exuberance, are delighted to welcome you to the University of Pennsylvania. In acknowledgment of your world-wide influence as economist and guardian of the purchasing power of the U.S. dollar, they proudly confer upon you, Alan Greenspan, the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.
Jessye Norman

You bring “all that we have of heaven here below” with your exquisite voice, rightly described as a catalogue of all that is virtuous in singing. As one of the world’s reigning vocalists, you have waged your own Norman Conquest from center stage of the world’s greatest opera houses, concert halls, and music festivals, enthraling capacity audiences with your amazing grace, technical artistry, and thrilling power.

Hailed as one of the world’s greatest singers, you approach your work with intelligence, reverence, honesty, and in your own words, “love — that’s the fuel.” Refusing to be limited in your repertory, you portray operatic heroines, interpret lieder, perform with the world’s premier orchestras, and sing spirituals and ballads — all with a dazzling brilliance that has won you the highest accolades the world over. A 1997 Kennedy Center honoree for your extraordinary lifetime achievement in the performing arts, you have been recognized with many other awards and distinctions in the United States, Europe, and Japan. French President Mitterrand awarded you the Legion of Honor and you were invested as Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France — a testament to the impact of your artistry. You hold 29 honorary degrees from colleges, universities, and conservatories including Howard University, the first to recognize your prodigious talent by awarding you a full scholarship.

In workshops and outreach programs in high schools throughout the United States, you play another and highly significant role, that of mentor and role model for young singers. You teach a powerful lesson, that of a distinguished artist who adamantly refuses to let prejudice dictate identity, saying, “I do not consider my blackness a problem. I think it looks rather nice.” And in raising your beautiful voice in song, you raise the hearts of all who hear, the most powerful lesson of all.

For your unforgettable performances and unremitting pursuit of excellence in your art, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania cry, “Bravissima, prima donna,” and take pride in casting you, Jessye Norman, in the especially appropriate role of Doctor of Music, honoris causa.

Stanley B. Prusiner

The sole winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, you have shaken the very foundations of modern biology with your discovery and characterization of the prion: an entirely new class of proteins that is now generally accepted as the infectious agent in mad-cow disease and in human neurodegenerative diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Your elegant work, once considered highly controversial, is now acclaimed as one of the major biomedical discoveries of the recent past. As you yourself have noted, “No prize, not even the Nobel, can make something true that is not.”

Like all new truths that defy conventional thinking, your theory of the prion, first proposed in your seminal 1982 study, was deemed heretical in certain scientific circles. Despite the opposition, you persisted, with enormous scientific and personal courage, to put your ideas to the test. You ultimately won over the skeptics with your path-blazing research, undertaken with a distinguished group of international collaborators, that has elucidated the biochemical and genetic basis for the prion diseases: diseases that are unique in being simultaneously transmissible and inheritable.

While the world scientific community has showered its highest honors upon you for your brilliant and innovative research, the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine prides itself on being among the first to recognize your splendid achievements by presenting you with its Distinguished Alumnus Award in 1991, and we are proud to claim you as our own as the world scientific community has showered its highest honors upon you for your brilliant and innovative research. Your greatest honor, however, and the true measure of your revolutionary influence on the field are that you have fueled new hope that the riddle of Alzheimer’s and other fatal brain diseases may soon be solved.

Admiring the integrity, courage, and rigor with which you have pursued your search for scientific truth, and commending you as a role model in the highest tradition of academic excellence to our students, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania take greatest pride in welcoming you home as you celebrate the 30th reunion of your Penn Medical School class. Justly proud of the reflected glory that your visionary work has brought to your alma mater, they rejoice in the opportunity to confer upon you, Stanley Prusiner, your third Penn degree, Doctor of Science, honoris causa.

Maurice Sendak

The most honored author-illustrator in the annals of children’s literature, you have elevated the picture book to a high art form by creating a fantastic, delightful, and sometimes frightening universe whose armature is childhood. By taking children seriously and speaking even to their deepest anxieties and unpleasant emotions, you have revolutionized the field and challenged long-held notions regarding the kind of content appropriate for “the small courageous people who deal with problems every day.”

Your more than eighty books translated into more than a dozen languages neither sentimentalize nor sugarcoat what you have called the “serious business of childhood.” Your honesty in dealing with sensitive issues such as anger, sibling rivalry, and fear has troubled some who would prefer that children be sheltered, yet your work has been a major force in helping American culture come to grips with the singular importance of the realities of childhood experiences.

The children, of course, have always understood you. You have given their feelings a shape, form, and place by taking them where the wild things are, into the night kitchen, and outside over there. You have given them your own compass with its fixed points of absolute honesty and respect to lead them to the place where someone loves them best of all and supper is still hot. And because you know the truths of childhood, you have won their trust.

The only American ever awarded the Hans Christian Andersen International Medal and recipient of honors that range from the National Medal of the Arts to the Caldecott Medal, you delighted this City and this University by your decision to make the Museum of the Rosenbach Foundation in Philadelphia the repository of your personal archives.

Equally delighted by this opportunity to celebrate your storied career, your exceptional contribution to children’s literature, and the 35th anniversary of the publication of Where the Wild Things Are, the book that launched your international reputation, the Class of 1998 names you king of all wild things. More decorously, the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania take greatest pleasure in conferring upon you, Maurice Sendak, the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa.