

NYU HONORS

Heumann Speaks At Commencement



Disability Rights Activist Judith Heumann receives honorary degree at 2020-2021 NYU Commencement.

New York University (NYU) recently held a special commencement ceremony, honoring the classes of 2020 and 2021.

Some 10,000 students who received undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees amid the global pandemic returned to convene with more than 20,000 family, friends, alumni, faculty and other NYU community members in a first-ever evening all-university celebration at Yankee Stadium, part of a double-header commencement day that included a morning ceremony honoring the class of 2022.

Judith Heumann, a decades-long activist who developed groundbreaking legislation supporting people with disabilities, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree (*honoris causa*). She delivered

remarks on behalf of the honorary degree recipients.

“The last few years have been hard, and at times heart-breaking, no question about it. But like the finest of swords – or chocolates if you prefer – the tempering you’ve experienced in the forge of the pandemic has made you stronger, even when you might not always feel that way,” said Heumann “That’s why I’m so excited about the world you are going to rebuild and are already shaping with your creativity, your power and your diverse voices,” she said.

NYU president Andrew Hamilton added, “It’s customary in a commencement speech for a university president to set the tone before students go out into the world and continue their new lives. But being as you’ve already been out on your own, the tables are somewhat turned today.

“I would venture a guess that we have a lot to learn from you. There is little wisdom I can impart on your classes who have displayed a maturity beyond your years, navigating your time at NYU and your new lives with such grace and aplomb. Today, I am brimming with violet pride. I am proud of you, and you should be proud of yourselves, too.”

In keeping with NYU tradition, commencement included the ceremony of the torch.

The university torch, designed and fashioned by Tiffany and Co. in sterling silver and donated to the University in 1911, was passed from a senior member of the faculty to the youngest undergraduate degree recipients from both the classes.

In honor of the graduates, the Empire State Building was illuminated in violet on the eve of commencement.