



BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Commencement

2016



DARREN WALKER, Doctor of Humane Letters (LHD)

Brian J. Purnell, *Associate Professor of Africana Studies and History*

Darren Walker, as a native son of Lafayette, Louisiana, raised in working class communities in Texas, you ignored the cynics. They said the state's flagship college was no place for a young black man. You received an undergraduate and a law degree from the universities in Austin.

You put your sharp mind and boundless energy to work in legal and investment banking industries because you had younger sisters you promised to help through college.

After you honored that commitment, you brought your leadership skills to a community development corporation in Harlem. You knew from your childhood experiences that poor and working class people deserved habitable housing and fresh food. Your leadership turned vacant lots into homes. Harlem received its first major grocery store.

You became a Vice President at the Rockefeller Foundation and helped rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. As President of the Ford Foundation, you brought Detroit away from the brink of bankruptcy.

When you were a child, you attended Head Start programs. Pell grants paid your college tuition. Now you head one of the world's largest philanthropies. No supposed barrier deterred you – not blackness in a nation marred by racism, nor poverty in a land of plenty, nor being gay when loving someone of your same gender could invite violence.

You believed in yourself.

You accepted help from others.

You improved yourself.

Now, you serve others.

When you became President of the Ford Foundation, you prioritized ending human inequality. Under your leadership, the Ford Foundation commits long-term financial support so individuals and institutions can create stronger organizations, not just efficient programs.

With humor and grace, integrity and intelligence, you transformed the Ford Foundation's culture. It was a patron. Now, it is a partner working with others for justice and equity.

President Rose, on behalf of the College, I am humbled and inspired to present Darren Walker for the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*.