

Citation for Janet Langhart-Cohen, May 2022
Presented by Sara A. Dickey, Professor of Anthropology

Janet Langhart-Cohen, path-breaking journalist, acclaimed author, and former “First Lady of the Pentagon,” we honor you for your unrelenting struggles against racism, sexism, and antisemitism, and your multipronged efforts to promote reconciliation among Americans and across our borders.

Your 2004 memoir, *From Rage to Reason: My Life in Two Americas*, charts the course of a revelatory life. During your childhood in Indianapolis, growing up in boarding houses and segregated government projects, your mother insisted that you stand up against racist stereotypes—but she also admonished you not to hate people because of *their* hate. In 1969, you began a twenty-five-year career in broadcast and print journalism. Excelling at hard-hitting interviews with some of the most influential people in the world, you challenged workplace obstacles of race and gender and provided “African-Americans a voice in the mainstream media.”

In 1997, your passions took a new course when you became “First Lady of the Pentagon,” working alongside your husband, William S. Cohen, then the new Secretary of Defense (also former Maine Representative and Senator, and Bowdoin Class of 1962). You soon turned your genius for empathy and dialogue toward potent advocacy for members of the military and their families, an activism that earned you comparisons to Eleanor Roosevelt. Observing that the military is “the most integrated institution in our society,” you also describe how this work “enabled me to reach past my rage and to embrace my country.”

This theme of reconciliation would blossom most poignantly in your lauded one-act play, *Anne & Emmett*, which premiered in 2009. You had been fourteen when Emmett Till, himself fourteen years old, was murdered. At age fifteen, you read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, who was fifteen at her death. Sixty years later, you united Emmett and Anne in uncanny conversation in a place called “Memory.” Their dialogues about lives, hopes, and attempted social annihilation reveal connections so stunning that they feel surreal—but only for a moment, when the reader must confront their plain, sharp, inescapable truth. *Anne & Emmett* calls us to find the “willingness to open up and relate as human beings, in all our imperfection,” one of the consummate goals and contributions of your diverse career.

President Rose, on behalf of the College, it is my honor to present Janet Langhart-Cohen for the degree of doctor of humane letters, *honoris causa*.