

Women Speakers Including Ketanji Brown Jackson Set to Inspire Law Graduates at Commencements



Ketanji Brown Jackson, the newest addition to the United States Supreme Court, is set to break the dry spell of SCOTUS law school commencement speakers. She is among the growing list of high-profile women who will address law graduates this year. Jackson will deliver remarks to American University Washington College of Law graduates on May 20 and to Boston University School of Law the following day.

Not all law schools have announced their graduation speakers, but thus far, Jackson looks to be the only justice hitting the law school commencement circuit - which her colleagues on the bench have sat out for the past several years. The justices still participate in law school events and panel discussions, but their commencement addresses have become less common. The late justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg were frequent commencement speakers. Sonia Sotomayor delivered recorded remarks to Yale law graduates in 2021.

Boston University law dean Angela Onwuachi-Willig was a vocal supporter of Jackson's 2022 nomination to the court and helped organize a letter urging the Senate to confirm her that was signed by more than 200 Black women law deans and professors. American law dean Roger Fairfax joined 30 Black law deans in a letter supporting her nomination. She was sworn into the high court in June.

Law schools have secured an eclectic mix of speakers, many of them women. Harvard Law School graduates will hear from Michelle Yeoh during their May 24 class day ceremony. Yeoh, in March, became the first Asian woman to win a best actress Oscar for her performance in the film *Everything Everywhere All At Once*.

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Duke Law School has secured Apple general counsel Kate Adams to speak at its May 13 ceremony, while the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School has famed women's rights attorney Gloria Allred slated to talk at its May 15 commencement. Allred's grandson is among the Penn Law students who will be collecting their diplomas.

The University of Virginia School of Law has lined up alumna Helen Wan, whose novel "Partner Track" about a woman navigating life as an attorney at a large corporate law firm, was made into a popular Netflix show last year.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul will deliver remarks to New York Law School graduates on May 25, while U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren will speak at the May 15 ceremony for the Pace University Elizabeth Haub School of Law.

Law school graduation ceremonies provide an opportunity for speakers to inspire and motivate future legal professionals. The selection of high-profile women speakers is a welcome addition to an industry that men have long dominated. The presence of Jackson, the first Black woman to sit on the nation's high court, is particularly significant, as it demonstrates the progress made towards greater diversity and inclusion in the legal field.

As more law schools announce their graduation speakers, it will be interesting to see if other Supreme Court justices decide to join the circuit. Regardless, the line-up of speakers thus far promises to provide graduates with valuable insights and inspiration as they embark on their legal careers.