

DERAY MCKESSON, civil rights activist, community organizer, political commentator, educator, author, and erstwhile student of political philosophy, we honor you today for your courageous and tireless advocacy of racial justice, your dynamic participation and leadership in the Black Lives Matter movement, and your continuing work to dismantle systemic racism and bring an end to police violence and mass incarceration.

Born and raised in Baltimore, you came to Bowdoin in the fall of 2003. Very quickly you exhibited your considerable political skills, becoming the president of the student government as well as of your class. You majored in government and legal studies, and you concentrated in political theory. In your senior year, you wrote an ambitious honors project on two thinkers indispensable to any aspiring activist: Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche.

After graduating from Bowdoin in 2007, you went to New York City to teach middle school under the auspices of Teach for America. From there, you went on to work for the Baltimore and Minneapolis public school systems. You have always taken education very seriously, and though you are no longer in the classroom, you remain at heart an educator.

In August of 2014, your life changed when you drove to Ferguson, Missouri, to join the protests against the shooting of Michael Brown. It was from these protests and others like them across the country that the Black Lives Matter movement was born, a movement in which you have become one of the leading and most thoughtful voices. One year later, in 2015, you cofounded Campaign Zero, a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting legislative and policy solutions against police violence and mass incarceration. Through your work for this organization as well as your award-winning podcast, *Pod Save the People*, you have become one of the country's most powerful and eloquent voices for racial justice and social change.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of your approach to civil rights activism has been your consistent defense of the importance of hope. Despite the depressing statistics against which you fight—the all-too-frequent killings of Black men and women, boys and girls, the false imprisonments, and the everyday indignities—you have never lost this crucial motivating attitude. In your 2018 book, *The Other Side of Freedom*, you argue that hope is the indispensable precondition for social change. Hope does not assume such change will come about automatically; rather, it provides the emotional fuel to continue the struggle. As you put it so well in your book: “Hope is not magic. Hope is work. Let’s get to work.”

President Rose, on behalf of the College, I am honored to present DeRay Mckesson for the degree of doctor of humane letters, *honoris causa*.