



JOHN JAY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

2010 Honorary Degree Recipients

John Jay College of Criminal Justice will grant three honorary degrees on May 27, 2010. This year's honorary degree recipients are renowned for their contributions to academia, journalism and the arts.

Taylor Branch, Doctor of Letters

At the age of 16, Taylor Branch watched as dogs and fire hoses were turned against civil rights demonstrators in Birmingham, AL. It was a life-changing experience. Years later, Branch began a biography of Martin Luther King Jr. that would be more than just the story of the murdered civil rights leader, but in fact provided a narrative history of a turbulent era.

Branch's three-volume, 3,000-page work began with *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, for which he won both the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in History and that year's Book Critics Circle Award. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65*, came next. This middle volume, published 10 years later, won the American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award among other prizes. In the final volume, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68*, Branch concluded with the violent suppression of a King-led voting-rights march in Selma, AL, and with King's assassination on April 4, 1968.

An Atlanta native who studied American history at the University of North Carolina and politics, religion and philosophy at Princeton, Branch spent one summer working on a voter-registration project in Georgia and turned his summer diary into an article for the *Washington Monthly*, a publication to which he remains a contributing editor more than three decades later. He is a professor at Goucher College where he teaches a course about civil rights.

In addition to his civil rights trilogy, Branch also authored or co-authored a number of books, including *Labyrinth: How a Stubborn Prosecutor Penetrated a Shadowland of Covert Operations on Three Continents to Find the Assassins of Orlando Letelier* (1982), and *Blowing the Whistle: Dissent in the Public Interest* (1972). Branch was also the ghostwriter of John Dean's account of the Watergate scandal, *Blind Ambition*.

Seymour Hersh, Doctor of Letters

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has an unparalleled record of shedding light on injustice and human rights abuses that the highest levels of government would have preferred to conceal. The stories he has broken over the past four decades have included the massacre at My Lai and its cover-up during the Vietnam War, CIA spying on American citizens, and the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison. As an independent reporter, often working alone, Hersh has carved out a singular role in national public affairs, describing his role as a "vehicle for dissent."

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Hersh began his career as a police reporter for the city's legendary City News Bureau. In 1968, he served as speechwriter and press secretary

for Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign. Hersh worked for United Press International, and as an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* between 1972 and 1979.

In 1970, he won the Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting for his exposé of the My Lai massacre. Since then, he has also received five George Polk Awards, the Overseas Press Club award, two Sidney Hillman Foundation awards and two National Magazine awards. Hersh is currently based in Washington, DC, and is a contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine on military and security issues. His eight books include *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (2004); *Against All Enemies: Gulf War Syndrome: The War Between America's Ailing Veterans and Their Government* (1998); and *The Dark Side of Camelot* (1997).

With his commitment to speaking truth to power and his journalistic excellence, Hersh is an enthusiastic mentor of younger journalists in the United States and abroad, working through such organizations as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. He holds public officials to the same standards that he holds his family, Hersh once said. Just as Hersh would not want his children to lie to him, he said, he would not lie to them.

Anna Deavere Smith, Doctor of Humane Letters

Playwright and actor Anna Deavere Smith is a pioneer and strident advocate of a new form of theater that is fundamentally committed to social justice and advancing community dialogue.

Smith is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, including a MacArthur Fellowship; multiple Tony Award nominations; an Obie Award for Best Play, and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Solo Performance. In order to represent the multiple perspectives of a host of characters with equal dramatic force and dignity, Smith prepares for each of her solo pieces by personally interviewing dozens of people around a specific event, incident or problem. This unique process allows her to capture the speech patterns, laughter, ticks and gestures of her characters with striking accuracy.

The subjects of her work are always controversial. In *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn*, Smith explored the riots that shook that community in 1991 after a young African American boy was struck and killed by a car driven by a Hasidic man. *Twilight: Los Angeles* examined the Rodney King case. Her most recent work, *Let Me Down Easy*, is about health care and control over one's body. Smith is also the author of the books *Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics* (2000) and *Letters to a Young Artist: Straight Up Advice on Making a Life in the Arts* (2006).

In addition to her theater work, Smith is also a familiar presence on television, where she has had roles on *The West Wing*, *The Practice* and *Nurse Jackie*. She has also appeared in such films as *Rachel Getting Married*, *Philadelphia*, *The Human Stain*, *The American President* and *Dave*.

Smith holds an MFA from the American Conservatory Theater and a bachelor's degree from Beaver College. She teaches in New York University's Tisch School of the Performing Arts and the NYU School of Law.

As a writer, performer and social critic, Smith's work lends dramatic coherence to urgent contemporary events while reminding her audiences of their common humanity.