

“Indiana University Honors
David Brooks, Alecia DeCoudreaux, and Vi Simpson”

Spring Commencement Dinner

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Presidents Hall

Franklin Hall

Friday, May 3, 2013

7:00 p.m.

1. TOAST

I am delighted to welcome you all to this evening of celebration in honor of our distinguished guests, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, Mills College President Alecia DeCoudreaux, and former Indiana State Senator Vi Simpson.

We will have more formal introductions a little later in the evening.

Now would you please join me in raising your glasses to the remarkable and varied accomplishments of our distinguished guests?

Despite their very different backgrounds and experiences, each of our honorees demonstrates the extraordinary range of possibilities, positive change, and progress that can stem from a world-class education and commitment to making a difference in people's lives.

To our distinguished honorees!

Please enjoy your meal.

2. WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take a moment to recognize some of the distinguished guests who have joined us this evening.

First, would you join me in thanking Abigail St. Pierre, who has performed so beautifully on the harp this evening? Abigail is a graduate of the Jacobs School of Music and will graduate next year with a master's degree in Arts Administration.

Would you please help me welcome Bill Cast, chair of the Board of Trustees, and his wife, Anita; Pat Shoulders, vice chair of the Trustees; Trustee MaryEllen Bishop; Trustee Bruce Cole, and his wife, Doreen; and Cora Griffin, our Student Trustee.

I am also very pleased to welcome Lee Hamilton, the director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. Lee, of course, represented Indiana's 9th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives with great distinction for 34 years. He also now serves as a distinguished scholar and professor of practice in our new School of Global and International Studies, which we inaugurated earlier this week. If any of you have not seen the video message from Vice President Joe Biden that was shown at the inauguration ceremony, I would urge you to view it on the IU web site. Vice President Biden reminded us how privileged we are to have Congressman Hamilton, who he called one of the most "consequential voices in the most compelling foreign policy debates of the last generation and this generation"¹ as a member of the faculty in our new school. We strongly agree.²

¹ "Remarks from Vice President Joe Biden," YouTube video, 3:41, posted by Indiana University, April 29, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Poao_cwJhM&feature=youtu.be

² And I will add that in 2008, David Brooks urged then-candidate Barack Obama to name Lee Hamilton as his Secretary of State!

Would you join me in welcoming Lee Hamilton?

I am also very pleased to welcome Bloomington Mayor Mark Kruzan. Mayor Kruzan earned degrees in Journalism and Political Science from IU, and is also a graduate of what is now the Maurer School of Law. Mark also served for many years as the representative of the Bloomington area in the Indiana House of Representatives.

Would you help me welcome him?

And I am delighted to welcome the family members of our honorary degree recipients, who are with us this evening, including Viola DeCoudreaux, Alecia DeCoudreaux's mother; Bill McCarty, who is a former state senator and Vi Simpson's husband; Vi's daughter, Christina Simmonds, and her husband, Jason; and Joshua Brooks, who is David Brooks' son and has just finished his junior year as a history major in IU's College of Arts and Sciences.

Would you please help me greet them?

Let me also welcome John Whitehart, Chancellor of the Bloomington campus of Ivy Tech Community College, who is here with his wife, Linda.

3. INTRODUCING DAVID BROOKS

Let me begin by expressing our thanks to David Brooks for the superb address he delivered this afternoon at our Graduate Commencement ceremony.

He is widely regarded as one of the most respected political and cultural observers of our time.

David Axelrod, who, of course, was a top political advisor to President Clinton and President Obama, praised Mr. Brooks as “a true public thinker” amid the “insipid, instant commentary and one-hour news cycle.”³

His distinguished history of contributions to publications includes, of course, *The New York Times*, where he has been a columnist for the last 10 years, *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, *The Public Interest*, *Newsweek*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Commentary* among many, many others.

Mr. Brooks was born in Toronto, Canada, and raised in New York City.

He says that he knew from the time he was in the second grade that he wanted to be a writer.

As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, he studied history, and, among his other pursuits, he wrote a humor column for the student newspaper, *The Chicago Maroon*. When William F. Buckley was scheduled to speak on the campus, Mr. Brooks wrote a parody of Buckley’s memoir, in which he said that Buckley’s hobbies included “extended bouts of name-dropping and going into rooms to make everyone else feel inferior.”⁴ But the piece must have impressed Buckley, because he paused in mid-lecture to offer Mr. Brooks a job. Unfortunately, Mr. Brooks was not present for the lecture: he had been selected as one of two students to debate economist Milton Friedman, and was in California for that debate.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, Mr. Brooks worked for a year as a freelance writer and subsequently for a small weekly Chicago journal.

He was then hired as a police reporter for the City News Bureau, a wire service owned jointly by the *Chicago Tribune* and *Sun Times*. The Bureau was also a legendary

³ Christopher Beam, “A Reasonable Man,” *New York Magazine*, July 4, 2010.

⁴ David Brooks, “Remembering the Mentor,” *The New York Times*, February 29, 2008.

training ground for journalists, including Roger Simon, Seymour Hirsch, Mike Royko, and Indiana native Kurt Vonnegut.

After a bit of time working the crime beat, Mr. Brooks called William F. Buckley and took him up on the job offer and went to New York for an internship at Buckley's *National Review*.

To call it an internship, however, does not give you a full sense of its impact on Mr. Brooks' life and career. He was given access to Buckley's world, to gatherings and discussions with leading social thinkers and literary critics, and Mr. Brooks has written about the role Buckley played in his life as a friend and as a mentor who helped to hone his writing skills.

Soon after that internship ended, Mr. Brooks began a stint at *The Wall Street Journal* that would last for several years. His first position at the *Journal* was as editor of the book review section, and he filled in for five months as the *Journal's* movie critic. He was subsequently posted in Brussels as an op-ed writer, covering Russia, the Middle East, South Africa and European affairs.

When he returned to the United States in 1994, Bill Kristol was preparing to launch *The Weekly Standard*, and Mr. Brooks joined the staff as a senior editor when the opinion magazine debuted in 1995.

He is frequently seen and heard as a commentator on National Public Radio, *PBS Newshour*, *Meet the Press*, and many other television and radio programs.

As an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times*, his work reaches millions of people around the world through the print edition and the paper's website, which receives 30 millions unique visitors each month.

I spoke this afternoon about some of his books, which are widely read, well-received, and highly influential. In his most recent, *The Social Animal*, he views current research from a variety of disciplines by following the lives and unconscious motivations of a hypothetical American couple as they grow and change throughout their lives.

We are pleased to add an honorary doctoral degree to the long list of honors and awards he has received.

Would you join me in welcoming one of the most influential political and cultural commentators of our time, David Brooks.

David, would you like to say a few words?

4. INTRODUCING ALECIA DeCOUDREAUX

Our next honored guest, Alecia DeCoudreaux, is an alumna of our Maurer School of Law. Throughout her distinguished career in business, law, and academia—and through her community service—she has combined integrity, tenacity, and a keen intellect to bring about important change.

Even as a young child, Alecia had such a knack for getting the better of an argument that, when she was six years old, her family predicted that she would one day become a lawyer. Alecia has said that they saw her as argumentative, while she thought she was merely being persuasive.⁵

Alecia believed she could become a lawyer, too, but she was very much aware that a career in law had not always been an option for women. Her third grade teacher, Ms. Thomas, was a female African-American attorney, who, in the 1960s, could not get

⁵ Michael S. Maurer, *19 Stars of Indiana: Exceptional Hoosier Women*, (Indiana University Press, 2009), 63.

enough business as a practicing attorney to sustain herself. That relationship with her teacher was Alecia's first direct contact with a lawyer, and it inspired her interest in law.⁶

She grew up on the south side of Chicago and spent summers with her grandmother and other family members on Cape Cod. When the time for college arrived, Alecia chose to attend Wellesley, in part because she had family nearby, but also because she had met many Wellesley alumna who had become successful lawyers, accountants, teachers, physicians, mothers, and volunteers committed to community service.

Alecia remained actively involved with Wellesley, serving as a member of their Board of Trustees for 10 years, and as chair of the board for four years. In those roles, she gained an intimate familiarity with the inner workings of an institution of higher learning that would serve her well later in her career.

After graduating from Wellesley, Alecia earned a law degree from what is now the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, thus fulfilling her family's prediction that she would become an attorney.

In 1980, she joined the legal department at Eli Lilly and Company, the Indianapolis-based pharmaceutical company, and she would spend much of her career at Lilly. She rose rapidly and steadily, serving as director of community relations, director of corporate affairs, director of government relations, as executive director for research planning and scientific administration for Lilly Research Labs, and as vice president and deputy general counsel.

In all of these roles, she built a well-deserved reputation as a consensus-builder whose leadership style was marked by collaboration, strategic thinking, and accountability.

⁶ "Donor Profile: Alecia A. DeCoudreaux," Women's Fund Special Advertising Supplement, *Indianapolis Monthly*, September 2006, 5.

In 2011, she became the 13th president of Mills College, in Oakland, California. She is the first African-American female president of Mills, and she leads an undergraduate program dedicated solely to women, one of fewer than 60 such institutions remaining in the United States.

In his book, *19 Stars of Indiana: Exceptional Hoosier Women*, IU alumnus and benefactor Mickey Maurer notes that Alecia has long combined her considerable professional accomplishments with a passion for community service, calling her “a model of the successful executive who also is compassionate and able to give freely despite her many professional responsibilities.”⁷

She has served as a board member of The Mind Trust; as a member of the Economic Club of Indiana Board of Governors; a member of the United Way of Central Indiana Women's Initiative. She has worked on behalf of the Women's Fund of Central Indiana and the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment.

She has held numerous leadership roles at Indiana University, including serving as a member of the IU Foundation Board of Directors for nearly a decade. Alecia continues to serve as an honorary director of the Foundation. She is also an emeritus board member of the Maurer School of Law Board of Visitors, and, in 1998, she was inducted into the Academy of Law Alumni Fellows, the highest honor Maurer bestows upon alumni.

She was named one of the most influential women of 2012 by the *Indianapolis Business Journal*. She is also the recipient of the Spirit of Philanthropy Award from the IUPUI campus and of IU's Distinguished Alumni Service Award, Indiana University's highest accolade for alumni.

We are delighted that Alecia is here with us this evening and will be delivering commencement remarks at our undergraduate ceremonies tomorrow (at which time we

⁷ Maurer, 70.

will add an honorary degree to her many honors). We are certain that our graduates will be inspired by her just as all of us are.

Would you please help me welcome the president of Mills College and an alumna of the Maurer School of Law, Alecia DeCoudreaux.

Alecia, would you like to say a few words?

5. INTRODUCING VI SIMPSON

Our final distinguished guest, Vi Simpson, is widely regarded as one of Indiana's most effective and respected legislators. Her 28 years of service in the Indiana State Senate included terms on the State Budget Committee and as the Senate Democratic Leader. In the latter role, she was the first female legislative leader in Indiana history.

IU is, of course, proud to call Vi Simpson an alumna. She earned her law degree from the McKinney School of Law in Indianapolis while she was serving in the Senate.

Vi was first elected to represent District 40 in the State Senate in 1984 after having served as Monroe County Auditor. Over the course of nearly three decades in the Senate, Vi's accomplishments are so plentiful that it is virtually impossible to recount them all this evening or to give her the credit she deserves.

Vi was, for example, a leading voice on health issues in the state. She worked tirelessly to make health care affordable and accessible for Hoosiers. She wrote the legislation that created Indiana's Children's Health Insurance Program—known as “CHIP”—a program that has become a national model for delivering cost-effective health services to uninsured children.

Vi began her tenure in the State Senate at a time when PBC contamination in Monroe County was a major issue. So, she took it upon herself to study environmental issues and regulations, and became the authoritative figure in the Statehouse on environmental issues.

Also known as an expert on the state's finances, Vi became the first woman to serve on the State Budget Committee—and, of course, also served as chair of that important committee. She was also the ranking minority member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and, of course, she rose to the rank of Senate minority leader.

Vi was also largely responsible for initiating the debate on tax restructuring and property tax reform, which led to the passage of the historic legislation that revamped Indiana's tax code.

Vi has also been a strong and unswerving advocate for higher education. I think we all understand how absolutely critical it is to have seasoned, passionate, and informed legislators as our full-time advocates in the Statehouse. Particularly in the last few budget cycles—during a time of nationwide recession and widespread cuts in funding for higher education—Indiana University especially appreciated having voices in the Statehouse who understand that our public universities and colleges are precious public assets that must be nurtured and protected.

Vi Simpson was one of those leading voices. And, as a candidate for Lieutenant Governor in last year's election, Vi continued her strong advocacy for higher education in the state of Indiana.

Vi's support for IU, of course, has not been limited to her activities at the Statehouse. She served on Advisory Board of IU's Institute for Family and Social Responsibility, a joint effort of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs and the School of Social Work. The Institute works to bring together government and community resources to

improve the lives of children and families—an aim to which Vi has been dedicated for many decades.

Vi was named Bloomington's Woman of the Year in 2004, in recognition of her lifetime of achievements. She is also the recipient of the 2010 Indiana Women of Achievement Award from Ball State University. In 2009, she received the Friend of Children Award from IARCCA, a statewide association of agencies serving children and families, in honor of her many years of work to make life better for Hoosier children.

In 2009, Vi was the recipient of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce's Small Business Champion Award, which recognizes legislators who support efforts for small business advocacy and growth. She has also been named "Legislator of the Year" by the State Employees Association, the Indiana Library Federation, the Indiana Wildlife Federation, and numerous other organizations.

Vi has also received national honors, including the Distinguished Legislator Award from the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the National Legislator of the Year Award from the American Academy of Physicians. In 2005, the American Medical Association awarded Vi its highest honor, the Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service.

At tomorrow's undergraduate Commencement ceremony, we will add an honorary IU degree to those honors.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce yet another alumna of the Maurer School of Law, and a woman who will, undoubtedly, continue to be a leading voice in Indiana's public policy debates for many years to come, former State Senator Vi Simpson.

Vi, would you like to say a few words?

6. CONCLUSION

Thank you all for coming this evening, and I look forward to seeing you at tomorrow's undergraduate Commencement ceremony.