

Visionary healthcare leader, Pulitzer Prize winner and civil rights pioneer to be honored at Tulane Commencement

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At the Unified Commencement Ceremony on May 18, 2024, Tulane will recognize Dr. Victor Dzau, Leona Tate and Jon Meacham for their significant achievements and contributions to society.

Tulane will recognize the significant achievements and contributions to society of three individuals at the Unified Commencement Ceremony.

Visionary healthcare leader and scientist Dr. Victor Dzau, Pulitzer Prize winner and presidential historian Jon Meacham, and civil rights pioneer and educator Leona Tate will receive honorary degrees at the May 18 ceremony.

“The remarkable achievements of these iconic individuals will serve as an inspiration for our graduates as they prepare to make their own mark on the world,” said Tulane President Michael A. Fitts. “We are honored and humbled to recognize them for their exceptional accomplishments as we celebrate the Tulane Class of 2024.”

Dr. Victor Dzau is a globally recognized physician scientist, administrator and healthcare leader who’s devoted his career to advancing scientific innovation, global health and equity. His groundbreaking research in cardiovascular medicine and genetics set the foundation for the development of ACE inhibitors, lifesaving drugs used to treat hypertension and heart failure. He also pioneered gene therapy for vascular disease.

He focuses on developing solutions to broad-reaching social challenges. As president of the National Academy of Medicine, he’s launched initiatives on a global risk framework, human gene editing and climate change. He’s also cochaired the G20 Scientific Panel on Global Health Security and was an advisor to the G7 Japan Health Task Force. He serves as vice chair of the National Research Council and chancellor emeritus of Duke University, was the former CEO of Duke Health System, and formerly served as chairman of medicine at Harvard and Stanford. He is receiving an honorary Doctor of Science degree.

Jon Meacham, who will also deliver the keynote address at the ceremony, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, presidential historian and commentator with a depth of knowledge on topics ranging from history to religion and current affairs. He’s known for bringing history to life and offering historical context to current events and issues. He’s written numerous New York Times bestsellers, his latest being “And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle,” and has covered other prominent figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and civil rights icon John Lewis. He’s released two podcasts with the History Channel and is a frequent guest on MSNBC, CNN and other news outlets.

Meacham was named a “Global Leader for Tomorrow” by the World Economic Forum. He’s also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a fellow of the Society of American Historians. He is a distinguished visiting professor of political science at Vanderbilt University, where he holds the Rogers Chair in the American Presidency. He is receiving an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

Leona Tate began her life’s work as a civil rights activist and leader at six years old, when she integrated New Orleans public schools in 1960. Six years after Brown vs. Board of Education ruled racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, she enrolled in McDonogh No. 19 Elementary School in the Ninth Ward.

In 2009, she established the Leona Tate Foundation for Change to purchase that very school, and served as executive director through 2021, fostering free summer camps, after-school tutoring, adult literacy programs, Christmas toy drives and a monthly food pantry. The school has now been renovated and reopened as the Tate, Etienne and Prevost (TEP) Center, in honor of the other girls who joined her on that historic day in 1960. The TEP Center is an innovative mixed-use development that is transforming the community and setting a national example for neighborhood revitalization. Tate is receiving an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

This year’s Commencement will include fireworks alongside the traditions only seen in a New Orleans setting — second-lining graduates, live jazz performances, Mardi Gras beads and more lagniappe in store. Learn more about this year’s event at the [Commencement website](#).