



Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa

Citation

***Johanna Betsch Cole**, scholar, educator, and humanitarian, you began your college education firmly believing you would spend your life as a baby doctor. But a professor at Oberlin College inspired you to pursue studies in anthropology, and you chose a calling that is at once humble yet most profound, that of a teacher. For over half a century you have taken up the cause of racial and gender equality for countless young women and men and led them to a future they might otherwise never have known, one filled with promise and purpose.*

The hateful messages of the racially segregated south, where you grew up, were no match for your fierce spirit. The “colored only” water fountains and warnings to sit at the back of the bus only strengthened your resolve to rise above. You enrolled at Fisk University at the age of 15, completed your undergraduate studies at Oberlin College, and earned master’s and Ph.D. degrees in anthropology from Northwestern University.

A series of historic achievements followed. You were a pioneer in the establishment of black studies programs in the United States, first as the founding director of the black studies program at Washington State University and later as a faculty member in the W.E.B. Dubois Department of African American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where you taught for 12 years.

In 1987, you became the first African American woman to serve as president of Spelman College, a historically black college for women. Under your leadership, the college’s endowment grew by over \$100 million and Spelman was named the top liberal arts college in the south.

You returned to teaching in 1998 as a professor of anthropology, women’s studies, and African American Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, and in 2002, you were selected as the President of Bennett College. For the past 8 years you have served as the director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

In all your roles, in the streets, in the halls of academia and in corporate boardrooms, you have written and spoken forcefully and persuasively about discrimination and inequality. You have raised awareness. You have stood on the front lines of the battle for social justice, working always to reconcile differences and bring about a meeting of minds and hearts.

Moreover, you have dedicated yourself to ensuring that others can walk through the doors you have opened. From your fire, they have lifted an ember to light their own fires. Your warmth and courage will carry them, and those who follow them, far into the future.

For your groundbreaking career and service as a teacher, scholar, university president, and leader of one of the nation’s landmark national art museums, for your wisdom and generosity, and for reaching out to take the hand of those behind you and lead them forward, the University of Washington is proud to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa.

PATRICK M. SHANAHAN
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS

ANA MARI CAUCE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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