



BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Commencement

2026



CECILIA ELENA ROUSE, Doctor of Humane Letters (LHD)

Citation by Rachel Connelly, *Bion R. Gram Professor of Economics*

Cecilia Elena Rouse, economist, dean, leader, and public servant, you have spent your career asking and answering some of the most consequential questions facing our society, including how we should understand the role that education plays in our lives and how can we measure the extent of racial and gender discrimination in the labor market. As a labor economist, your academic work has fundamentally advanced our understanding of the relationship between education, work, and opportunity in the United States. Your research has brought analytical precision to fundamental questions of the value of education to individuals and the public good and how to provide higher quality education to underserved communities. In all of it, you are never content with simply measuring, but rather your work pushes beyond the numbers to how public policy can be harnessed to make things better.

Across a distinguished career in research and teaching, including more than three decades on the faculty at Princeton University, you have advanced the economics of education and championed making the field of economics a more welcoming place for women and scholars from underrepresented groups. As dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, you strengthened its role as a place where rigorous scholarship informs public policy, preparing students to move with confidence between policy and practice, between analysis and action.

Your work in public service included what you yourself characterize as “three White House tours”—the use of the word “tour,” commonly used in military tours of duty, is not lost on us. During your most recent White House tour, from March 2021 to March 2023, you served as the chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, guiding national economic policy during that crucial period of profound uncertainty caused by the economic and social fallout of the “COVID-19 pandemic.” Drawing on deep expertise and the disciplined judgment of a humane economist, you brought clarity to complex decisions and ensured that policy remained grounded in evidence while attentive to the realities it sought to address. Your leadership in these roles reflects not only intellectual authority, but also a sustained commitment to the common good.

Now, as president of the Brookings Institution, you lead one of the nation’s foremost centers for independent, nonpartisan research. You guide a community of scholars whose analysis informs policy and contributes to the decisions that define economic and public life in the United States and beyond.

An economist whose work has deepened our understanding of educational opportunity, a public servant who has shaped policy with care and rigor, and a leader whose influence extends across institutions and generations, you continue to work tirelessly to move us to a better version of collective selves.

President Zaki, on behalf of the College, I present Cecilia Elena Rouse for the degree of doctor of humane letters, *honoris causa*.