

# Ithaca College

## Citation

*"Bye now. You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.  
And I bless you: More Life. The Great Work begins."*

These lines—a benediction for your stage audience that might also serve as inspiration for today's graduates—represent only one of the gifts that you, *Tony Kushner*, have given to the world. One of the most acclaimed playwrights of our time, you have focused your works on the most urgent social and political issues that we face—not only as Americans but as citizens of the world. These issues include gay rights, the conflicts in the Middle East, and the pressing need for us to remain politically active and dedicated to the welfare of others in dispiriting times.

Your magnum opus, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, is a seven-hour epic centered on two couples whose relationships are disintegrating. This two-part masterwork is set in the 1980s and filled with sweeping emotional, philosophical, and theological ideas that give your audience a challenging perspective on greed, conservatism, homophobia, and the discovery of AIDS.

For part one of this production, *Millennium Approaches*, you were awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play. Part two, *Perestroika*, won the Tony Award for Best Play in 1994. Later adapted for both television and opera, your masterpiece remains a standard by which other artistic works are measured for its frank treatment of homosexuality and AIDS.

Tony, you challenge your audiences to think more critically about the contemporary relevance of issues thrown up by significant chapters in our history. These issues have been depicted with such dramas as *A Bright Room Called Day*, set in Nazi Germany; *Homebody/Kabul*, about Afghanistan's troubled relationship with the West; *Caroline, or Change*, a musical set in the civil rights era; *Lincoln*, a film covering the final four months of Lincoln's life, focusing on his efforts to pass the Thirteenth Amendment; and *Munich*, a film that follows a squad of assassins as they track down and kill alleged members of Black September, a group that kidnapped and murdered eleven Israeli athletes in the 1972 Olympics. More recent works include *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures* and *Tiny Kushner*, a collection of one-acts. Your work, Tony, has truly brought our history to life and has helped each of us more fully understand who we are today.

In addition to being one of the most successful public intellectuals of this era, you have been an inspiration to the theater community. You have supported other playwrights by translating and adapting a number of plays, helping bring gifted dramatists to the attention of contemporary audiences. Your talents, Tony, are not limited to the stage as you have written several books—including a collaboration with children's author/illustrator Maurice Sendak—and published numerous essays and interviews on the state of the theater. No matter where your audience is, Tony, you are fluent in using their medium to captivate through your stories.

In addition to winning an Emmy Award for writing the HBO version of *Angels in America*, you received Academy Award nominations for your screenplays for the Steven Spielberg films *Munich* and *Lincoln*. Honored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, you have earned the PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater Award, the Spirit of Justice Award from the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, a Cultural Achievement Award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and a Chicago Tribune Literary Prize for lifetime achievement. In 2008, you were the inaugural recipient of the Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, presented biennially to honor a playwright whose body of work has made significant contributions to the American theater. In 2012, you received the National Medal of Arts from President Obama.

You have inspired young adults by being a regular on the college lecture circuit, displaying a deep commitment to educating students on the craft of writing and the theatrical arts. In 2011, Ithaca College was honored to host you for its Distinguished Speaker in the Humanities Series. You not only appeared on stage to be interviewed as part of a public presentation but also spent your day in a classroom, answering questions and offering advice to students taking an honors seminar on *Angels in America*.

Tony, your work asks audiences to face directly the darkness and injustice that can at times appear to define our world but to do so without losing a fundamental optimism about humanity and our potential for progress. That optimism is poignantly expressed by one of your characters, in a line that might again speak to our graduates as they bid farewell to Ithaca College and embrace their futures:

*"Nothing's lost forever. In this world there is a kind of painful progress.  
Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead."*

We are honored to confer upon you, *Tony Kushner*, the degree, *Doctor of Letters*, honoris causa.

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE CONFERRING OF THE DOCTOR OF LETTERS (HONORIS CAUSA) DEGREE DURING THE ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY, ON THE SEVENTEENTH DAY OF MAY, TWO THOUSAND FIFTEEN, ITHACA, NEW YORK.

