



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Honorary Degree Citation

The degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*,
conferred on Dr. Steven Pinker
Thursday, June 12, 2014

Madam Chancellor, Dr. Steven Arthur Pinker is a renowned experimental psychologist, cognitive scientist, linguist and popular science writer.

He is currently the Johnstone Family Professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University. He became prominent for his research on how people imagine and recognize 3-D shapes, how children acquire language, and the computational architecture of language and cognition. In addition, his argument that language is an evolutionary adaptation helped usher in a new era in the study of human language.

Later he began writing for more general audiences with *The Language Instinct* (1994) and *How the Mind Works* (1997). During the next few years, and books, he evolved into a public intellectual – *someone who uses his or her critical intellect, knowledge and writing skills to help the public understand what makes the plot of nature, life and society unfold as it does*. His most recent book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), documented that human violence has declined since ancient times – something many of us are reluctant to believe – but something that we need to believe if we are to continue making the world a better place to live.

His research and writing has won him recognition from the National Academy of Sciences of the USA, the Royal Institution of Great Britain, the Cognitive Neuroscience Society and the American Psychological Association. He is a frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, *Time* and *The New Republic*.

Time magazine has named him “one of the most influential people in the world today.”

Only a few of us can be public intellectuals at the level of Steven Pinker. However, we can all work at being public intellectuals in our daily lives by practicing the skills that he displays in his writing and speaking.

Madam Chancellor, on behalf of the senate of Simon Fraser University, I ask that you confer upon Professor Steven Pinker, the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.