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February 23, 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN PODESTA
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FROM: JOSH GOTTHEIMER
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SUBJECT: COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES:
 AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

FINAL YEAR COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES

Our analysis of presidential commencement addresses dating back to Woodrow Wilson revealed the following: 1) Before the Truman administration, most presidents did not regularly deliver commencement addresses at universities other than military academies. 2) With regard to the topic or location of commencement addresses, there is no clear pattern for two term presidents in their final year. It is worth noting, however, that all of those speeches do tout the particular administration's accomplishments and related policy proposals – but do not introduce any new, sweeping initiatives or ideas.

Presidents Hoover and Truman both spoke about civil rights at Howard University in 1932 and 1952 respectively. In 1968, President Johnson addressed three graduating classes of Texas universities. He spoke about education, his domestic agenda and the Cold War. In 1960 President Eisenhower addressed Notre Dame University, focusing on citizenship and the role of government. President Reagan addressed the Coast Guard Academy during his final year. He discussed his administration's anti-drug policy and programs.

We have included a synopsis of President Clinton's commencement addresses as well as a table with the dates, locations and topics of all commencement addresses dating back to President Wilson.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: COMMENCEMENT THEMES

1993

President Clinton's 1993 Commencement addresses focused on the importance of revitalizing the nation's economy and creating investments through which the American worker could effectively compete in the global economy. These addresses focused heavily on the economy, Administration accomplishments and the responsibilities of the government. Both the New Hampshire and Northeastern speeches touched on the administration's economic accomplishments -- lower interest rates and job creations. All three speeches cited the importance of implementing a deficit reduction package and investing in education, training and technology.

1994

The President's 1994 addresses touched on the themes of personal responsibility and commitment. Both the Gallaudet and UCLA speeches mentioned AmeriCorps and the importance of embracing diversity. The Naval Academy speech was largely concerned with foreign policy matters and the transformations taking place in the world arena. It emphasized the need for an effective military force and discussed US policy vis a vis Bosnia.

1995

In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo subway nerve gas attack, the President's 1995 commencement addresses focused on the importance of international security and anti-terrorism initiatives at home and abroad. At Michigan State, Dartmouth and the Air Force Academy, the President discussed his anti-terrorism legislation, decried the militia movement and cited the importance of striking a balance between political speech and personal safety.

1996

The President's 1996 commencement remarks, delivered on the heels of the upcoming election, centered on the pillars first introduced in his 1992 New Covenant speeches at Georgetown: opportunity, community and responsibility. The first speech, at Penn State, focused on personal responsibility, including welfare reform, education, crime, and community service. At the Coast Guard Academy, the President focused on America's responsibilities in the global community -- specifically trade and security. At Princeton, the President addressed economic and educational opportunities in the United States.

1997

The President's 1997 commencement speeches addressed the issues facing America in the 21st Century. In his Morgan State speech, the President discussed the challenges posed by science and technological developments in the new millennium. His speech at UC-San Diego addressed lasting challenges posed by race and diversity in the United States -- and introduced the President's Initiative

on Race. The President's speech at the Military Academy discussed the importance of cooperative military efforts (NATO) and the rise of new security threats.

1998

Similar in theme to the 1997 commencement addresses, the President's 1998 speeches also discussed the major challenges of the 21st Century. His speech at MIT focused on the information age and related challenges -- particularly the growing digital divide. The President's remarks at Portland State addressed diversity in the new millennium and the challenges posed by immigration. His remarks at the US Naval Academy addressed new security threats in the 21st century -- terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

1999

The President's 1999 commencement addresses also reflected the theme of 21st Century challenges. At Grambling, the President stressed the importance of building strong families in the 21st Century. He proposed new childcare, family leave and education initiatives. In his University of Chicago speech, the President discussed the importance of putting a human face on the global economy. At the Airforce Academy, he addressed both the traditional and non-traditional threats facing our military in the new century -- including biological and chemical weapons and terrorism.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES: PRESIDENT WILSON TO PRESIDENT CLINTON

Clinton

1993

New Hampshire Technical College	May 22, 1993	Revitalizing the economy: Lower interest rates, job creation, deficit reduction, investing in education, training and technology
United States Military Academy	May 29, 1993	Revitalizing the economy/Military Security
Northeastern University	June 19, 1993	Revitalizing the economy: Lower interest rates, job creation, deficit reduction, investing in education, training and technology

1994

Gallaudet University	May 13, 1994	Celebrate diversity/AmeriCorps Strengthening America's future
University of California at Los Angeles	May 20, 1994	Celebrate diversity/AmeriCorps Strengthening America's future
United States Naval Academy	May 25, 1994	Foreign Policy: Bosnia

1995

Michigan State University	May 5, 1995	Foreign affairs: Global security
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U.S. Air Force	May 31, 1995	Foreign affairs/Diplomacy, security
Dartmouth College	June 11, 1995	Foreign/Domestic policy: America in the 21 st Century

1996

Pennsylvania State University	May 10, 1996	America's future: Community Responsibility
United States Coast Guard Academy	May 22, 1996	America's military: strength, decrease of major threats
Princeton University	June 4, 1996	Opportunity and education

1997

Morgan State University	May 18, 1997	21 st Century: science and technology
U.S. Military Academy	May 31, 1997	American 21 st Century: foreign affairs and U.S. military
Sidwell Friends School	June 6, 1997	America's Future: Personal responsibility in 21 st Century
University of California at San Diego	June 14, 1997	Diversity/Racial equality

1998

U.S. Naval Academy	May 22, 1998	21 st Century: U.S. Military
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	June 5, 1998	Challenges of the Information Age
Portland State University	June 13, 1998	National Cohesion

1999

Grambling State University	May 23, 1999	Working families in the New Economy
U.S. Air Force Academy	June 2, 1999	Foreign affairs: Kosovo
University of Chicago	June 12, 1999	Globalization/Economy

Bush

1989

Texas A&M	May 12, 1989	Post Cold War challenges: integrating USSR, reduce nuclear threat, broaden economy
Alcorn State University, Lorman MS	May 13, 1989	American family values/ Public service/ Opportunity
Boston University in	May 21, 1989	Foreign Affairs: Economic future
United States Coast Guard Academy	May 24, 1989	Europe, NATO's influence Foreign Affairs: Relations with USSR, spread of democracy, arms reduction, strong military deterrence

1990

Oklahoma State University	May 4, 1990	Foreign Affairs: Peaceful, stable, free Europe
Texas A&I University	May 11, 1990	America as Economic Role Model
University of South Carolina	May 12, 1990	Freedom in Eastern Europe
Liberty University, Lynchburg VA	May 12, 1990	Individual Empowerment
University of Texas at Austin	May 19, 1990	Democracies & Freedom
<i>1991</i>		
University of Michigan Ann Arbor	May 4, 1991	Protecting basic freedoms: enterprise, speech and spirit
Hampton University, Hampton VA trade,	May 12, 1991	Global opportunity: economy, education
Yale	May 27, 1991	Foreign Affairs: Spread of democracy, globalization, free and fair trade, MFN status to China
United States Air Force Academy	May 29, 1991	Gulf War lessons: Importance of military technology and personnel, need to maintain strong military
West Point	June 1, 1991	American values of freedom, self-reliance and service/Racial equality
CalTech	June 14, 1991	21 st Century: free market, technological and scientific advances, community involvement
<i>1992</i>		
Florida International University	April 27, 1992	Globalization/ Democracy in Latin America
Southern Methodist University, Dallas TX	May 16, 1992	Economic growth and opportunity / Pan for New America
Notre Dame	May 17, 1992	Strengthening freedom and American Family Values
United States Naval Academy	May 27, 1992	Globalization/ Strong military/Free market reform
Reagan		
<i>1981</i>		
Notre Dame	May 17, 1981	Human relations, end excessive government intervention, strengthen national pride
United States Military Academy	May 27, 1981	Military in domestic security
<i>1982</i>		
Eureka College, IL	May 9, 1982	East-West relations
<i>1983</i>		
Seton Hall University, South Orange NJ	May 21, 1983	Youth civic involvement

University of South Carolina at Columbia	September 20, 1983	Great human advances/National education agenda
<i>1984</i>		
United States Air Force Academy	May 30, 1984	U.S. role in the world/ Technological and scientific advancements, human creativity
<i>1985</i>		
United States Naval Academy	May 22, 1985	Foreign affairs: World Peace
<i>1987</i>		
Tuskegee University	May 10, 1987	Minority equality/ Human progress
Ohio State University	June 10, 1987	Graduation Proclamation
<i>1988</i>		
United States Coast Guard Academy	May 18, 1988	Foreign affairs: narcotic intervention/ Reduce violent crime/ Arms reduction in USSR
Carter		
<i>1977</i>		
Notre Dame	May 22, 1977	Foreign affairs: U.S. power and influence to strengthen civil/human rights, spread of democracy
<i>1978</i>		
United States Naval Academy	June 7, 1978	US-Soviet Relations
<i>1979</i>		
Cheyney State College	May 20, 1979	Racial Equality/ Civil rights progress / Importance of voting
Ford		
<i>1974</i>		
Ohio State University	August 30, 1974	Citizen-Govt. Relations
<i>1975</i>		
University of Pennsylvania	May 18, 1975	Economic goals/Increase citizen participation/Strengthen defense
United States Military Academy	June 4, 1975	Foreign affairs: Commitment to freedom, NATO's progress, strengthening defense budget, strengthening European allies, energy policy

Chicago State University	July 12, 1975	Community service
<i>1976</i>		
University of Nebraska at Lincoln	May 8, 1976	National optimism: recession recovery, more peaceful world, farm production increase, improved education
Warner Pacific College, OR	May 23, 1976	Individualism: importance of creativity and originality, era of achievements
Nixon		
<i>1969</i>		
United States Air Force Academy Post	June 4, 1969	Foreign affairs: Role of military Cold War
<i>1973</i>		
Florida Technological University	June 8, 1973	U.S. world leadership
<i>1974</i>		
Oklahoma State University	May 11, 1974	Inflation/ Energy development/ Improving agriculture and healthcare
United States Naval Academy	June 5, 1974	Foreign affairs: Navy's role in post Cold War hotspots
Johnson		
<i>1964</i>		
University of Michigan	May 22, 1964	Great Society: improving cities, countryside, and classrooms
University of Texas	May 30, 1964	Improving Education
United States Coast Guard Academy	June 3, 1964	Military Strength: deter atomic attack, ability to fight less than all-out war, struggle against subversion
Swarthmore College education,	June 8, 1964	General Agenda: improve civil rights, citizen participation
Holy Cross College disease, decrease natural resources	June 10, 1964	Post cold war challenges: poverty,
Brown University	September 28, 1964	Education: Strengthen science and humanities, equal opportunity
<i>1965</i>		
Baylor University, Waco TX	May 28, 1965	Dominican Republic peace

Howard University	June 4, 1965	Racial equality/ Civil rights
Catholic University	June 6, 1965	Foreign affairs: working towards world peace
<i>1968</i>		
Texas Christian University	May 29, 1968	General agenda: education,
poverty,		healthcare, transportation, world peace
Glassboro State College	June 4, 1968	Foreign affairs: peace efforts in Middle East, Soviet Union, and Vietnam
Southwest Texas State College	August 24, 1968	Education: Improve standards, increase funding
Kennedy		
<i>1962</i>		
Yale	June 1962	Public confidence in government/ Government reduction
<i>1963</i>		
United States Air Force Academy	June 5, 1963	Relationship between government and private industry
San Diego State College	June 6, 1963	Education: economic and racial equality of opportunity, improve quality, increase literacy
American University	June 10, 1963	Foreign affairs: world peace, ban nuclear tests, spend less on war and more on poverty and disease
Eisenhower		
<i>1953</i>		
Dartmouth College	June 14, 1953	Personal leadership, courage,
protect		basic American freedoms
<i>1954</i>		
Washington College	June 7, 1954	Role of government in citizen's lives, importance of public service
<i>1955</i>		
West Point	June 7, 1955	Changing role of military, importance of peace and military readiness, spiritual values in military service
Pennsylvania State	June 11, 1955	Nuclear Energy: importance of new

scientific achievements increase
skills and understanding, peaceful
reactors

1956

Baylor University

May 25, 1956

Foreign affairs: fighting
communism, liberty and free
government, international
cooperation with NATO and UN

1957

FBI National Academy

November 8, 1957

Growing importance of FBI

1958

Mary's College

June 2, 1958

General Agenda: crime, racial
equality, anti-communism,
economic development, protecting
American freedoms

U.S. Naval Academy

June 4, 1958

Foreign affairs: Navy's role in
achieving peace, ways to improve
individually as servicemen

1959

Air Force Academy

May 16, 1959

Foreign Service Institute

June 12, 1959

University of Notre Dame

June 5, 1960

General good luck
Importance of Foreign Service
Importance of public service and
citizen participation in government
and leadership

Truman

1947

Princeton University

June 17, 1947

Need for trained public service
agents, importance of U.S. role in
world peace

1948

University of California

June 12, 1948

Foreign affairs: UN, economic
recovery, relations with USSR,
policy of recovery, reconstruction,
and prosperity

1950

University of Missouri
program,

June 9, 1950

Foreign affairs: U.S. peace

global economy

1952

Howard University

June 13, 1952

Racial equality/ Civil rights

Franklin D. Roosevelt

1933

United States Naval Academy

June 1, 1933

Civic Responsibility

1938

United States Naval Academy

June 2, 1938

Combining education with life experiences

1939

West Point

armed

June 12, 1939

Leadership and cooperation in services

1940

University of Virginia
world

June 10, 1940

Foreign affairs: importance of peace, problems with Italy and Germany

Hoover

Howard University

June 10, 1932

Racial equality/ natural rights of all citizens, importance of integration

Wilson

1914

United States Naval Academy

June 5, 1914

Importance of education and social responsibility

1916

United States Naval Academy

June 2, 1916

Importance of naval duties and American unity

West Point

June 14, 1916

Military role: preparedness, American pride, U.S. military power