

**The original documents are located in Box 31, “5/8/76 - Remarks at Commencement Exercises, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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- THANK YOU, CHANCELLOR BRECKENRIDGE

- DR. VARNER

- MR. MOYLAN

- SEN. HRUSKA

- SEN. CURTIS

- GRADUATES, FAMILIES AND GUESTS

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1976

PRESIDENT VARNER, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,

GRADUATING MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 1976, AND

FELLOW NEBRASKANS:

IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE AND A VERY HIGH HONOR

FOR ME TO JOIN YOU HERE ON THIS OCCASION.

What a <sup>fantastic</sup> ~~great~~ sports center //  
Dan DeVanney is not only a great  
football coach // but not a bad  
architect, either.

I WAS BORN NOT FAR FROM HERE IN OMAHA AND

ALTHOUGH I MOVED AWAY AT AN EARLY AGE, I HAVE ALWAYS <sup>had</sup> ~~HELP~~

A GREAT AFFECTION AND RESPECT FOR NEBRASKA AND FOR THE

PEOPLE OF THE GREAT PLAINS.

SOME YEARS BEFORE MANY OF YOU WERE BORN,

I CAN REMEMBER THE WELCOME GIVEN BY GREAT BRITAIN

TO DWIGHT EISENHOWER, WHO WAS RAISED, \ OF COURSE, \

IN YOUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR, THE STATE OF KANSAS•

IT WAS JUST AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, AND HE WAS A HERO

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC•

THERE IN THE GUILDHALL, BEFORE AN ASSEMBLAGE  
OF LEADING DIGNITARIES, IKE TOLD THE AUDIENCE IN SIMPLE  
BUT MOVING ELOQUENCE, "I COME FROM THE HEART OF AMERICA."

IT WAS ALWAYS ONE OF HIS PROUDEST CLAIMS,

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF MY PROUDEST CLAIMS, AND IN

THE YEARS AHEAD I HOPE THAT IT WILL BECOME ONE OF YOUR

PROUDEST TESTAMENTS AS WELL.



BEFORE COMING HERE TODAY, I THOUGHT BACK  
FOR A FEW MOMENTS ON HOW MUCH YOU, THE GRADUATING  
STUDENTS OF THE CLASS OF 1976, HAVE SEEN AND WITNESSED  
DURING THE FOUR YEARS YOU HAVE BEEN IN COLLEGE•

CERTAINLY THESE FOUR YEARS HAVE BEEN AMONG THE

MOST TRAUMATIC AND TRYING IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED

STATES• SINCE YOU CAME HERE AS FRESHMAN:

-- ONE OF OUR LONGEST AND MOST DIVISIVE WARS

HAS WOUND TO A TRAGIC CONCLUSION•

-- WE HAVE EXPERIENCED THE WORST RECESSION SINCE  
THE DUST BOWL DAYS OF THE 1930'S.

-- WE HAVE SUFFERED THE WORST INFLATION IN OUR  
PEACETIME HISTORY.

-- AND SCANDAL IN HIGH OFFICE ████ CAST A SHADOW  
OVER THE PRESIDENCY ITSELF.

NOR DID ANY OF THESE EVENTS OCCUR IN A VACUUM•

THEY FOLLOWED DIRECTLY UPON A DECADE THAT WAS FILLED

WITH EVEN GREATER SOCIAL UNREST AND TENSION•

VIOLENCE, CAMPUS RIOTS, CIVIL DISTURBANCES,

MOUNTING DISTRUST - ALL OF THESE WERE AN UNHAPPY LEGACY

OF THE 1960s•

BY THE TIME ~~THAT~~ YOU CAME TO COLLEGE, SOME

OF OUR MOST INFLUENTIAL CITIZENS SEEMED TO BE LOSING

FAITH IN AMERICA.

IN THE GREENING OF AMERICA, A BOOK THAT SWEPT  
MANY COLLEGE CAMPUSES EARLY IN THE 1970'S, AUTHOR CHARLES  
REICH (RIKE) ASSERTED THAT "FOR MOST AMERICANS, WORK IS  
MINDLESS, EXHAUSTING, BORING, SERVILE, AND HATEFUL . . .  
OUR LIFE ACTIVITIES HAVE BECOME PLASTIC, VICARIOUS AND FALSE  
TO OUR GENUINE NEEDS•

"THE NATION," CONCLUDED A WELL-KNOWN HISTORIAN,  
"IS ESSENTIALLY EVIL AND THE EVIL CAN BE EXORCISED ONLY  
BY TURNING THE SYSTEM UPSIDE DOWN."

A LEADING NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST SAID IT

MORE POINTEDLY: "AMERICAN LIFE DOESN'T WORK ANYMORE."

FORTUNATELY, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE

NEVER GAVE UP + NEVER LOST FAITH IN THEMSELVES

OR IN THEIR COUNTRY.

IN THE FOUR YEARS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN

[~~HERE~~] AT THE UNIVERSITY, THE NATION HAS NOT ONLY PERSEVERED;

IT HAS PREVAILED.



AS YOU LEAVE TODAY TO ENTER THE MAINSTREAM OF  
THE WORKING WORLD OR PERHAPS TO CONTINUE YOUR STUDIES,  
I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THE UNITED STATES IS FAR  
DIFFERENT TODAY FROM THE WORLD YOU KNEW WHEN YOU CAME  
HERE AS FRESHMEN•

THE CHANGES ARE PERHAPS MOST EVIDENT IN AREAS  
SUCH AS OUR ECONOMY. FOR MILLIONS UPON MILLIONS  
OF OUR CITIZENS, THE FEARS OF INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT --  
SO STRONG ONLY A YEAR AGO -- ARE NOW RECEDING.  
NO ONE BELIEVES THAT WE HAVE FULLY CURED OUR ECONOMIC AILMENTS,  
BUT THE PATIENT IS MENDING RAPIDLY AND THERE IS EVERY REASON  
TO BE MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT THE FUTURE.

PROGRESS CAN BE FOUND IN MANY OTHER AREAS, TOO.

WE ARE AT PEACE.      OUR FRIENDSHIPS IN EUROPE AND IN THE

PACIFIC ARE SHOWING RENEWED VITALITY.      AS YOU LEAVE

THIS UNIVERSITY TODAY, YOU BECOME PART OF THE FIRST GENERATION

*with a choice*

IN MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS THAT CAN GRADUATE WITHOUT FEAR

*rather than a mandate to be drafted into the*

OF BEING DRAFTED INTO THE ARMED FORCES.

*armed forces*

THEN, TOO, OUR FARM EXPORTS TO THE REST  
OF THE WORLD ARE AT RECORD LEVELS. WE ARE FORGING NEW,  
MORE CREATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE DEVELOPING NATIONS  
OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE.

BECAUSE WE ARE STRONG, BECAUSE WE ARE PREPARED,

BECAUSE OUR WILL IS UNDIMINISHED AND OUR PURPOSE IS CLEAR,

AMERICA HAS GAINED NEW RESPECT. THE FREE WORLD

ONCE MORE LOOKS TO US FOR LEADERSHIP AND INSPIRATION.

ALL OF THESE CHANGES ARE SURFACE EXAMPLES OF  
A BROADER PHENOMENON THAT IS OCCURRING IN OUR SOCIETY.  
I SENSE THAT THE NATION IS FINALLY TURNING AWAY FROM AN  
INCESSANT PREOCCUPATION WITH ITS TROUBLES, TURNING AWAY  
FROM THE INWARD-LOOKING PESSIMISM, TO A NEW SPIRIT OF  
OPTIMISM.

A NEW BUOYANCY IS EMERGING IN THE COUNTRY; FOR THE  
FIRST TIME IN A LONG WHILE, THERE IS A GROWING FAITH  
IN THE FUTURE *for America.*

WE SEE IT IN THE WAY THAT CONSUMERS ARE NOW  
COMMITTING MORE OF THEIR FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO NEW HOMES,  
NEW CARS AND OTHER MAJOR PURCHASES. WE SEE IT IN THE  
WAY THAT BUSINESSES ARE ONCE AGAIN BEGINNING TO INVEST  
IN NEW PLANTS AND NEW JOBS.



NOT ONLY ARE AMERICANS INVESTING IN AMERICA'S FUTURE, BUT

FOREIGNERS ARE, TOO, AS THEY DECIDE TO BUILD NEW BUSINESSES,

SHOPPING CENTERS, AND OTHER LARGE ENTERPRISES ~~HERE~~.

*in America,*

WE ALSO SEE THIS GROWING CONFIDENCE OUT ACROSS THE GREAT

BREAD BASKET OF THE COUNTRY WHERE FARMERS ARE EXPANDING

THEIR CROPS.

WE SEE IT ON CAMPUSES WHERE STUDENTS HAVE PUT DOWN

THEIR BRICKS AND TAKEN UP THEIR BOOKS.

AND WE SEE IT ESPECIALLY IN CHURCHES AND IN FAMILIES

WHERE THERE IS A DEEP YEARNING FOR SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT.

WE HAVE NOT YET OVERCOME MANY OF OUR MOST

PERSISTENT PROBLEMS, ~~AND~~ NO ONE SHOULD PRETEND WE HAVE.

WE ARE STILL FAR BELOW OUR POTENTIAL AS A PEOPLE.

UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY, CRIME, AND PREJUDICE

ARE STILL FAR TOO WIDESPREAD. BUT WE HAVE MOVED

BEYOND A TIME THAT COULD BE CHARACTERIZED AS THE GREENING

OF AMERICA; WHAT WE SEE TODAY IS THE HEALING OF AMERICA.

I WOULD URGE UPON YOU THAT AS YOUNG MEN  
AND WOMEN ENTERING A WORLD OF SWIFT, BLINDING CHANGE,  
YOU LEARN AND UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THESE LAST  
FEW YEARS. ONE DAY WHEN YOU ARE DIRECTING THE AFFAIRS  
OF STATE AND NATION, IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO LOOK BACK UPON  
THE 1970s, AND ASK HOW AMERICA PULLED ITSELF UP BY ITS  
BOOTSTRAPS.

ONE ANSWER, I SUGGEST, IS THAT EVEN

IN ITS DARKEST HOURS, THE UNITED STATES HAS RETAINED

*stayed*  
*economically, materially and morally strong*  
ENORMOUS ECONOMIC, MATERIAL AND MORAL STRENGTHS.

EVEN WHEN THE NATION WAS AFFLICTED WITH HIGH INFLATION  
AND HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, WE STILL HAD THE MOST DYNAMIC,  
MOST PRODUCTIVE ECONOMIC SYSTEM IN THE WORLD.

WITH LESS THAN SIX PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, WE  
CONTINUED TO PRODUCE OVER A THIRD OF THE WORLD'S GOODS  
AND SERVICES. OUR STANDARD OF LIVING REMAINS UNMATCHED.

OUR FARMERS CONTINUE TO BE THE WONDER OF MANKIND.

A SINGLE AMERICAN FARMER TODAY PRODUCES ENOUGH FOOD TO

FEED 50 PEOPLE, BOTH HERE AND ABROAD. AND LET US NEVER

FORGET THE GREAT RESERVOIR OF SPIRITUAL AND MORAL STRENGTH

THAT WE HAVE IN THIS COUNTRY, THE AMERICAN CHARACTER THAT

HAS NEVER KNOWN THE MEANING OF THE WORD "RETREAT".

AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR, PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON

WAS ASKED WHY AMERICAN SOLDIERS HAD BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL

IN THE BATTLEFIELDS OF EUROPE. "I TELL YOU," HE SAID,

"THAT THE WAR WAS WON BY THE AMERICAN SPIRIT . . .

YOU KNOW WHAT ONE OF OUR AMERICAN WITS SAID, THAT IT ONLY

TOOK HALF AS LONG TO TRAIN AN AMERICAN ARMY AS ANY OTHER

BECAUSE YOU ONLY HAD TO TRAIN THEM TO GO ONE WAY."



THERE IS A SECOND LESSON TO BE LEARNED FROM THESE

LAST FEW YEARS AS WELL. IT HAS STRUCK ME WITH SPECIAL FORCE

SINCE I HAVE BECOME YOUR PRESIDENT. THE FACT IS THAT

EVERY PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN MODERN TIMES IS BESEIGED

WITH REQUESTS AND PLEAS TO INTERVENE AND SOLVE ALMOST

EVERY PROBLEM CONFRONTING OUR CITIZENRY.

AS SOON AS SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES ARISE, A CRY SEEMS TO GO UP

THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD RUSH TO THE RESCUE

WITH MORE PROGRAMS, MORE SPENDING, MORE REGULATIONS --

ANYTHING SO LONG AS THE PAIN IS EASED AND THE PROBLEMS

ARE POSTPONED TO ANOTHER DAY.

~~WELL,~~ I HAVE BEEN RAISED IN A DIFFERENT SCHOOL

A SCHOOL THAT HAS ITS HOME OUT HERE IN THE GREAT PLAINS.

IT'S A SCHOOL THAT SAYS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE BETTER EQUIPPED

TO SOLVE MANY OF THEIR OWN PROBLEMS THAN IS THE GOVERNMENT

IN WASHINGTON. IT'S A SCHOOL THAT SAYS GOVERNMENT

HAS ALREADY GROWN TO AN OMINOUS SIZE IN THE UNITED STATES

AND ALREADY INTERFERES TOO MUCH IN THE LIVES OF ITS CITIZENS.

AND IT'S A SCHOOL THAT SAYS WHEN PEOPLE GAIN THE BELIEF  
THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS EVERY ANSWER, THEY LOSE BELIEF  
IN THEMSELVES.

THERE IN WASHINGTON, AS INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT  
MOUNTED IN LATE 1974 AND EARLY 1975, THERE WERE RISING PRESSURES  
FOR THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONGRESS TO INTERVENE WITH  
MASSIVE NEW PROGRAMS.

START SPENDING MORE MONEY, WE WERE URGED.

LET'S HAVE HIGHER AND HIGHER BUDGETS, HIGHER AND HIGHER DEFICITS,

MORE AND MORE DEBT, AND THEN IF THAT ONLY PRODUCES MORE

INFLATION, WE CAN PUT THE ECONOMY IN A NEW STRAIGHT JACKET

OF WAGE AND PRICE CONTROLS.

BUT WE WEREN'T PREPARED TO GO DOWN THAT ROAD AGAIN.

WE HAD SEEN ITS RESULTS TOO MANY TIMES BEFORE. THIS TIME,

WITH THE STALWART HELP OF YOUR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

FROM NEBRASKA, WE RESISTED THE TEMPTATION TO LET THE GOVERNMENT

SOLVE OUR ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. INSTEAD WE ENTRUSTED PRIMARY

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES AND TO THE GREAT FREE

ENTERPRISE SYSTEM THAT IS THE MAINSPRING OF OUR ECONOMY.

TODAY, THE RESULTS ARE SELF EVIDENT:

THE AMERICAN ECONOMY IS RECOVERING MORE RAPIDLY

AND WITH GREATER VITALITY THAN ANY OTHER ECONOMY IN THE WORLD.

WHILE THE ECONOMIC THREATS HAVE CERTAINLY NOT DISAPPEARED,

WE NOW HAVE CONCRETE EVIDENCE THAT IF WASHINGTON WILL ONLY MAKE

THE RIGHT DECISIONS -- IF WASHINGTON WILL ONLY TRUST

THE PEOPLE -- THEN AMERICA CAN RETURN <sup>*stay on*</sup> ~~TO~~ THE PATH

TOWARD PROSPERITY.



THERE IS ONE FINAL LESSON TO BE DRAWN

FROM THESE YEARS THAT I HOPE YOU WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER.

MANY TIMES IN THE 1960s AND THE EARLY 1970s,

AS THE SKIES GREW DARK AND CLOUDY, THERE WAS A TEMPTATION

TO GIVE UP, TO YIELD TO THE VOICES OF DEFEAT OR THE VOICES

OF HYSTERIA. BUT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE NEVER DID.

THEY NEVER GAVE UP.

HERE IN NEBRASKA, PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN FULL

WELL WHAT IT IS TO ENDURE AND TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY.

AS STUDENTS HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY, YOU MUST HAVE READ ABOUT

THE HARDSHIPS OF 19th CENTURY PRAIRIE LIFE IN THE NOVELS OF ONE

OF NEBRASKA'S AND ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST BELOVED WRITERS,

WILLA CATHER.

YOU MUST HAVE TALKED WITH YOUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

ABOUT THE GREAT FARM DEPRESSION AND THE DROUGHTS OF THE 1930s•

YOU KNOW THAT LIFE ON THE GREAT PLAINS CAN BE TOUGH,

AND THAT THE ONE THING YOU CAN NEVER AFFORD TO DO IS QUIT•

BY INSTINCT, AMERICANS MOVE IN ~~ONLY~~ ONE DIRECTION -- FORWARD•

~~BACK EAST~~

THE STORY IS SOMETIMES TOLD

OF HOW THOMAS EDISON INVENTED THE ELECTRIC LIGHT BULB.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE TRIED TO FIND THE RIGHT FILAMENT

BUT HE COULD NOT UNLOCK THE SECRETS OF SCIENCE.

FINALLY, HIS YOUNG ASSISTANT SAID, "MR. EDISON,

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD GIVE UP. YOU HAVE TRIED YOUR

EXPERIMENTS 586 TIMES, AND EVERY TIME YOU HAVE FAILED."

"NO," REPLIED EDISON, "WE HAVE ONLY FOUND 586 WAYS

THAT WON'T WORK AND WON'T HAVE TO BE TRIED AGAIN.

SOON WE WILL FIND ONE THAT DOES."

~~AND~~ HE DID.

EDISON WAS NEVER A QUITTER. TO HIM,

AS HE ONCE SAID, "GENIUS IS ONE PERCENT INSPIRATION,

AND 99 PERCENT PERSPIRATION."

MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS ~~OF 1976~~:

I JOIN YOUR PARENTS AND FRIENDS THIS MORNING

IN SALUTING YOU FOR YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

BY YOUR STUDIES HERE, YOU HAVE EARNED ONE

OF THE MOST CHERISHED DOCUMENTS THAT ANYONE CAN POSSESS:

A COLLEGE DEGREE. YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY BEGUN YOUR CAREERS

DURING ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING AND POTENTIALLY ONE

OF THE MOST REWARDING PERIODS IN ALL OF HISTORY.



IN THE YEARS AHEAD, WHEN NEW CHALLENGES ARISE

AS THEY SURELY WILL - I URGE THAT YOU BEAR IN MIND

THE LESSONS OF THE PAST.

-- REMEMBER THAT AMERICA IS A GREAT AND GOOD NATION

WITH AN ENORMOUS RESERVOIR OF MATERIAL AND PERSONAL RESOURCES.

-- REMEMBER THAT THE SECRET OF AMERICA

LIES NOT IN THE POWER OF ITS GOVERNMENT BUT IN THE POWER,

THE FREEDOM, AND THE GOODNESS OF ITS PEOPLE.

-- AND REMEMBER, TOO, THAT AMERICA IS ALWAYS

AT THE HEIGHT OF HER GLORY WHEN SHE HAS TO CLIMB

THE TALLEST MOUNTAINS.

A FEW YEARS AGO, WHEN WE CELEBRATED

THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTH,

THE BIOGRAPHER AND POET, CARL SANDBURG, WENT TO THE

FIELDS OF GETTYSBURG TO REFLECT FOR A FEW MOMENTS ABOUT

THE NATION HE LOVED.

HE SPOKE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF AMERICA AND

THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA.

'THE WILL AND VISION THAT MOTIVATED PEOPLE

IN PLYMOUTH SEEKING FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE,

THIS MOVED ON ~~ALIVE~~ AND WAS WRITTEN ON FACES AT VALLEY FORGE.

IT WAS ON THE FACES OF MEN WHO MARCHED FROM HOME

TO THE CAMPAIGN THAT BROUGHT THEM TO GETTYSBURG.

"LONG BEFORE THIS TIME OF OURS," HE SAID,

"AMERICA SAW THE FACES OF MEN AND WOMEN TORN AND SHAKEN

IN TURMOIL, CHAOS AND STORM. ALWAYS THE PATH OF AMERICAN

DESTINY HAS BEEN INTO THE UNKNOWN. AND ALWAYS THERE AROSE

ENOUGH OF RESERVES OF STRENGTH, BALANCES OF SANITY,

PORTIONS OF WISDOM TO CARRY THE NATION THROUGH

TO A FRESH START WITH AN EVER RENEWING VITALITY."

TODAY YOU BEGIN YOUR OWN JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN.

YOU CARRY WITH YOU OUR BEST WISHES AND FONDEST HOPES.

YOU CARRY THE WISDOM OF ONE OF OUR FINEST UNIVERSITIES.

AND YOU CARRY, TOO, A GREAT HERITAGE --

OF NEBRASKA, OF THE PLAINS, AND OF AMERICA.

CONGRATULATIONS AND GOD SPEED.

END OF TEXT