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Here on this beautiful campus so rich in history and tradition, you have gained the time-honored strengths that enable the sons and daughters of the south to survive, to succeed and to lead. Those deeply engrained southern traits strengthened a generation of southerners to face floods and hurricanes, the great depression and two world wars. They made our region a leader in growth, and a voice of hope for America's future.

History attends this ceremony today, as much as faculty members or the parents who invest their love and their confidence in you, the graduates. On a magnificent spring day in the South, I recall the beautiful Mississippi plantation home of Jefferson Davis' brother -- Joseph. It was a home whose library was stacked with books written by the great thinkers of Western civilization, a library that in its time, mirrored the riches of thought and deed which you have been studying for the last four years.

All too often, the references to Jefferson Davis' life have focused on the Civil War. We tend to overlook the range of vision this man achieved from his own studies. As Secretary of War in the Cabinet of President Franklin Pierce in the 1850s, he zealously sought to advance this nation's economic interest with a window on the Pacific. He promoted a great scheme for a transcontinental railroad that would move through the south to the California coast. He dispatched an expedition of engineers, scientists and artists who prepared a monumental report on the Southwestern country which the government published in ten volumes. He revolutionized the armed forces; he even imported a herd of camels to supplement the conventional cavalry. This is the same brand of vision that captures our minds and harnesses our energies this very hour.

And then my thoughts reach out to William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Walker Percy and others who, in our own century, have given America a richer insight into the glory and grandeur of human courage and wisdom. This is  
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your heritage and mine. It is a legacy of excellence that fills this campus and will spread out to touch the lives of all with whom you come in contact.

It was another Southerner, Thomas Jefferson, who in his first inaugural address raised the issue of individual rights and moral responsibilities. "Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself," he told the infant Republic. "Can he, then, be trusted with government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question."

I believe America has answered this question, and I'm sure Mr. Jefferson would agree, if he could speak to us today. For the system of government Jefferson envisioned in the Declaration of Independence has stood the test of time and has made the United States the strongest bastion of freedom on the face of the earth.

Two hundred years ago this week, 55 men gathered in what was then known as the Pennsylvania State House to consider alternatives to the existing Articles of Confederation. History tells us that what we know as the Constitutional Convention didn't get under way on time. In fact, it started two weeks late -- because the roads to Philadelphia were so bad! It took George Washington four days to travel by carriage from Mt. Vernon to Philadelphia. Today, that same trip on the metroliner takes one hour and thirty seven minutes. Of course, if the convention were held today, there'd not only be men representing the colonies, but also women!

Two hundred years later, we pause to remember the men of Philadelphia. Yet it isn't their daily debates that we recall, nor even the individual signers, most of whom are lost in the pages of time. No: it's the idea behind the document -- the idea that America was different because here, we the people would rule ourselves.

The document whose bicentennial we observe this year was tailored to fit the changing needs of a dynamic and fluid society. It was a coat woven to fit an infant republic of three million souls, and which now clothes 240 million Americans in opportunity and freedom. The framers wrote for the ages. They embraced timeless beliefs in self-government and shared responsibility. For they believed in the ability of seemingly ordinary people -- people like you and me -- to accomplish extraordinary things. To make their own decisions. To realize their own destinies.

The drafters of the constitution drew up a challenge as well as a charter. They fashioned a popular government, knowing that the only way it could survive was to enlist the energies and devotion of the people themselves.

They crafted a government strong enough to protect our liberties -- but limited enough to keep from crushing them in its embrace. Thomas Jefferson said it well: "That government is best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves."



Recently, I happened to come across a speech on citizenship and democracy which I gave in 1978, when I was a member of the Federal Trade Commission. In that speech, I indicated my concern that many citizens seemed to have lost the sense of pride and commitment to the ideal of America that once prevailed among our people. I spoke of a decline in national confidence, and the rise of public apathy in its place. Sadly, many Americans no longer felt that as individuals they could make a difference. And if they stopped believing in themselves, then how could they believe in the American dream of individual effort and national service? As our citizens turned inward, we were in danger of turning out the lights in America. Little wonder that writer Tom Wolfe dubbed the 1970's the "Me Decade."

Happily, I stand before you nine years later to report what you already know -- all that has changed. The "Me Decade" has been replaced by the "We Decade," as citizens all across America have regained confidence in themselves and in the mission of their country to serve as a beacon of hope to an oppressed planet.

Today, we are witnessing nothing less than an American renaissance, a grassroots revival of those fundamental principles that give character to our land and reality to our dreams. We are renewing the ancient ideals of hard work, pride of family, love of freedom and trust in God. We have rediscovered our roots -- and we are reaching for the stars.

President Ronald Reagan came to office sensing this thirst in Americans for a return to basic principles. He has helped restore faith and confidence in our institutions and in ourselves. He has reminded us that we can strengthen the land we love by meeting three important challenges. These challenges go to the heart of who we are and who we want to be .

First, there is the economy. Few doubt the strength of the American economy today. For 53 consecutive months we have enjoyed the benefits of economic growth. During that time, productivity has risen. Inflation had declined to the lowest levels since the early 1960's. Unemployment is at a seven-year low, and over 13 million new jobs have been created.

Simultaneously, we are called on to meet the challenge of defending freedom in a dangerous, sometimes desperate era. We have made significant headway in rebuilding our defenses and making America more secure. But now is no time to rest on our laurels, or let down our guard. Skimping on defense now could undo all we have achieved since 1980. It could undermine not only our own security, but that of our closest friends.

There is nothing new to the cries for less defense and more domestic spending. During one debate in the Constitutional Convention, a delegate rose to his feet and moved that "the standing army be restricted to 5,000 at any time." This prompted George Washington, as presiding officer to suggest an amendment of his own -- to prohibit any foreign enemy from invading the American soil with more than 3,000 troops.



But what are we defending? We defend more than factories -- more than shopping malls -- more than territory. We defend the values that have blessed this land and set it apart in the family of nations. The record of the Constitutional Convention leaves no doubt that our nation's founders were sustained by their faith in God. As George Washington once said, "of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

This afternoon, I am looking at America's first and ultimate line of defense. For surely we share the belief that the source of all our national strength lies in that inner strength that forms our attitudes, shapes our ambitions, and turns our aspirations into achievements.

To meet these three challenges is to be reminded every day of what it is that distinguishes this constitutional republic from the rest of mankind. Today, I would like to add a fourth. For each of us, in our own way, is called to service. The constitution does not merely grant rights to the people. It reminds us of our responsibilities to each other and to America. Benjamin Franklin, who could have written America's first manual on public service, once said, "the most important task we are undertaking as a nation is to solve the magnificent challenge of being a free people." Two centuries later, his words have not lost their resonance. They still shine forth, from the red brick State House of colonial Philadelphia, to guide our steps along the narrow path of duty.

There's a famous story about Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once found himself on a train, but couldn't locate his ticket.

While the conductor watched, smiling, the 88-year old Justice Holmes searched through all of his pockets without success. Of course, the conductor recognized the distinguished Justice, so he said, "Mr. Holmes, don't worry. You don't need your ticket. You will probably find it when you get off the train and I'm sure the Pennsylvania railroad will trust you to mail it back later."

The Justice looked up at the conductor with some irritation and said, "my dear man, that is not the problem at all. The problem is not, where, is my ticket. The problem is, where am I going?"

Where, indeed, that's a good question for you who are graduating to ask yourselves as you prepare for the next chapter in your lives. It's a question every American should constantly ask himself. This bicentennial year of the constitution offers a special opportunity to ponder the meaning of that sacred document, and the challenge it poses to your generation and to mine -- for the decisions we make today can affect the lives of other people as dramatically as the founding fathers have affected us.

Daniel Webster was not in Philadelphia in 1787. But no one studied the handiwork of Madison, Washington and Franklin with greater care. And the result of Webster's lifelong study was a warning to those who would come after him. "We may be tossed upon an ocean where we can see no land -- nor



perhaps, the sun or stars," he said. "But there is a chart and a compass for us to study, to consult, and to obey. The chart is the constitution."

As a people who have lives with freedom under the guidance of the constitution for two centuries, we can forget how precious and rare that freedom is. All of us have an obligation to participate actively in the system of self-government the constitution establishes. It is an obligation we owe not only to ourselves, but to the framers of our government -- men and women who risked everything for freedom, brave men and women who have bonded this nation with their blood and their toil and their sacrifice. And graduates, you, are now being given the opportunity to help shape the character of your country and your times. The inheritance into which you are entering includes a land in the throes of national renewal -- an America born again, yet, as never before, in need of leaders whose character is matched by their commitment. In the words of another great Southerner, Woodrow Wilson, "We should not only use all the brains we have, but all that we can borrow."

Today, America herself applies for a very special loan -- borrowing not only the brains assembled here, but the character, the sensitivity and the courage that guides them. To be sure, as a nation we require all the breakthroughs of which modern thought is capable. We need inventive thinkers to guide our economy, protect our environment, secure our rights and establish our place in the world. But most of all, we need individuals -- committed men and women, for whom conscience is the north star by which they guide their steps -- and those of the nation they love.

I invite each of you to make your own contribution, in your own special way, to the land and its people. I especially hope you will consider the life of public service. For while you may not get rich, you will enrich the lives of millions of your countrymen. Your rewards may not be material, but rather the satisfaction of service -- making a difference -- a positive difference in people's lives.

In closing, let me share with you an experience that Bob and I had when we visited the Soviet Union a few years ago for the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Trade Conference -- an experience I will never forget.

At our embassy in Moscow, I talked to members of two families from Siberia, who had sought asylum from the religious persecution they had encountered in their own mother country.

In attempting to reach our embassy's gates, one of the young sons was caught by Russian guards, beaten in full sight of the two families, and then dragged away. Not until three weeks later did they learn that he had been thrown on a train back to Siberia. It was nearly five years -- separated from their friends and family and living in the basement of that embassy -- before the Soviet government allowed those families to emigrate to Israel.

As we drove up to the airport to begin our long trip home and I looked at that airplane sitting on the runway with "United States of America"

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emblazoned on its side, I just thanked God I could come home to a country where freedom and democracy are more than just hollow spaces.

Every citizen has a stake in government that lives up to its noblest promises. Each one of us is obliged to pass on to our children the freedoms that Thomas Jefferson and the rest of the men of Philadelphia entrusted to us. They created something unique in the annals of history. Let us not only preserve the past -- let us make certain that the present is worthy of preservation, so that in another 200 years, our descendants can say as proudly as we do today, "I am an American."

Congratulations, and God bless each and every one of you.

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