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Commencement Address - Dianne Feinstein

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San Francisco Board of Supervisors

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WHAT IS YOUR DEGREE WORTH IN TODAY'S WORLD?

Is your degree worth the paper it's printed on? I wonder.

Consider that we live in the most educationally oriented country in the world today, that we have tremendous expectations of what America owes us, and that today the average college graduate joins a treadmill for status, a search for his or her place in the sun.

Consider the competition in the job market. The fact that today the prototype of the general assistance welfare
recipient in The City and County of San Francisco is white,
in his early thirties, able to work, but unable to find
a job. 17% of our welfare recipients have college degrees
or some college but cannot find a job.

Consider that we live in the most technologically developed
country in the world, and have been conditioned that "happiness"
means the latest large screen color television with remote
control. I wonder. Is a college degree worth anything
in today's society?

Consider this City for example. We are a City of approximately
six hundred and seventy thousand people. Only one hundred and
fifty thousand of our people are employed. We have
approximately three hundred thousand commuters a day.
About one out of seven of every San Franciscans is on some form of aid. One hundred and fifty thousand of our citizens are above the age of sixty. We are forty-two per cent non-white.

Recent population projections from the Association of Bay Area Governments project that the San Francisco in the 1990s will lose an additional thirty thousand residents, gain ninety thousand additional jobs (largely commuter therefore), build eight to nine thousand additional housing units (which will be small and largely for the elderly).

These population projections show The City as further tilting or tipping, because once again, the working middle class - the backbone of The City - has left The City for greener pastures.
A city without its children, without its working middle class cannot survive. And so, my plea to you today is to consider life's path. And wither that path take us - who knows?

I would like to address the remainder of my remarks to those of you that will live in the troubled urban centers - the cities of America - for this is my quest and the cities hold most of the problems that face the United States.

Cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco, and others have become increasingly commuter oriented. The middle class family has exited to suburbia where that family can afford a bigger house for less money, a less complicated lifestyle, and a "better" school environment for their children. But the cities remain where the action is.

And as cities begin to "tilt" or "tip", so goes the value
OF YOUR DIPLOMA. For the City of America is today, the
great heartland or backbone of the Country. If the cities
fall of their own weight, and, because of poor public policy
and social trends that they are unable to reverse,
then the value of your diploma will as well.

If you look at your degree as a sinecure, you’re going to be
dischoninted. If you look at your degree and say,

"Now that I’ve got it, the world owes me something,"

- you’re going to be disappointed. If you feel that your
degree guarantees anything - you’re going to be disappointed.

But, if you look at your degree as a statement that you have
disciplined yourself so that if you need knowledge
you know how and where to find it - you won’t be disappointed.

If you view your degree as the beginning of the learning
PROCESS - you won't be disappointed. If you look at your degree as providing that crutch which may help in a job interview, or at least get you the interview, - you won't be disappointed. If the degree represents the beginning of the quest - and you have completed that beginning - you won't be disappointed.

Many of you have specific areas of interest and expertise.

Many have civic and social concerns. Many of you will want to raise a family, earn a living - or one or the other of these - and be left along. And all of this is fine.

We live in a time where we are allowed many courses of action.

And we are on earth for but an instant in an eternity of time, so our choices are very important: which job, what spouse, how many children are but a part.
We all naturally look to our place in the sun. Instant success, a good car, a good home.

But more importantly the world goes on around us. Do we really participate? People are shot and fall in the streets and few halt their cars. An accident takes place on a freeway and the cars continue tight by the accident site, with victims pinned in the wreckage. Everyone is an instant critic. Most know what's wrong with government - but few have constructive workable solutions or put them forward if they do.

My mother once said to me, "Enjoy your four years in college. After that you come into the real world and see how life functions out of a textbook".
Your are now emerging into that 'real world',

And I can tell you, no textbook has ever been accurately
written about government or medicine or art or business or
any trade or profession which truly reflects the way
decisions are made or even who makes them - and why.

And so, I urge you today, not only to use a city as
your place of work - the place where you make your money
- but as a major commitment. A commitment of family, time,
business, school, culture, and to quality of life
in general.

I ask that you not be a taker from the cities of America
but a giver of life.