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Commencement Address - Dianne Feinstein

Dianne Feinstein

San Francisco Board of Supervisors

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MEMBER
Board of Supervisors



DIANNE FEINSTEIN

COMMENCEMENT REMARKS - GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY
SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 1977 - MASONIC AUDITORIUM

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 SURBURBIA 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
DISAPPOINTED. 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.