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HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
HENDRIX COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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At these ceremonies it is customary, it is part of the ritual for those of us who are on this side of the aisle looking at this graduating class to offer some perspective on the life journey you are about to embark upon. Yesterday I was at the college from which I graduated twenty-three years ago, Wellesley College in Massachusetts, where I delivered the commencement address for the second time in twenty-three years because back in 1969 I was the student speaker for that ceremony. And it gave me a remarkable opportunity to look back over the years between the words of that young woman and the perspective that I now bring to my life.

1969 was a turbulent year for those of us who can remember that. It was the end of a decade that had been dominated by dreams and disillusionments. On the one hand we felt the energy and excitement of the Peace Corps, of the Space Program. We saw the progress being made on the human front as we attempted to come to terms with the civil rights that all of our fellow Americans were entitled to by their birthright. But we also lived through times that were dominated by disillusioning, disappointing tragedy. Starting with the Presidential assassination, moving through a divisive war, culminating in explosions of anger and despair, as once again toward the end of that decade we saw more assassinations.

And yet at the end of that decade, despite the tumult, there was an energy. There was commitment that if we only kept trying somehow we could overcome, somehow we could make sense of the American dream and make it really be what we had been raised to believe it could be.

I spoke then with the kind of impatience that is typical for people who are 21. But 23 years later I look back on what I said and what my classmates felt, and realize that our dreams still are the ones that I value the most. We still need a political system that reflects the best of America. We still need the kind of commitment that can only come from people who cross all kinds of boundaries, race, and gender and age and region and income - to be joined in a common enterprise.

And one of the feelings I had so strongly yesterday, is how much I owed in 1969, how much the honored graduates of this year in this college owe to all who came before. And how in effect what each of us is called upon to do is to keep faith with the sacrifices and commitments of those who did walk this journey before.

The hard work of our parents, many of whom in this audience, are seeing the first in their families to graduate from college. Grandparents who lived through a depression, who fought in a war, who came home and gave this country a level of stability that many of us yearned for and which gives very high television ratings to the sitcoms I grew up with. Because you turn on those channels and you see a kind of stability that you just don't feel in America today.

I would like to congratulate all of these graduates, but also I would like to congratulate their parents and their grandparents. Because all of us whether we reject some of our past or not, embody it.

And now I'd like to speak directly to today's graduating class. This ceremony as you have been told endlessly, does mark a beginning. It marks a time when each of you carry with you this education which you have obtained.

I spoke yesterday of the young woman in that class and I will say the same to the young men and women of this class. You have done all you could do to be prepared, because you have worked to achieve the best possible education available to you. But I know because I talked with the friends and children of these friends who are facing what you are facing and I know that for many of you the world seems an uncertain place as you leave Hendrix.

Part of what I hope you bring with you whether or not you are a Methodist as I am, but because you have spent four years in this institution is something of the teachings of the Methodist Church, teachings that I have fallen back on and relied on through good times and bad. Because as you may know the Methodist tradition is particularly conscience of the relationships, not only between each of us and our God, but between each of us and our community. Because we believe it is in how we treat each other that we uphold the commandments of our Creator.

Our tradition as you know was founded by John Westley. As a member of the British Parliament he spoke out for the poor at a time when their lives were being transformed by far reaching industrial and economic changes. He spent the rest of his life evangelizing among the same people he had spoken up for in Parliament. He preached a gospel of social justice, demanding as determinable as ever that society do right by all of it's people. But he also preached a gospel of personal responsibility, asking every man and woman to take responsibility for their own lives and to cultivate the habits that would make them productive and contributing and respected members of that society. And he coupled that call for personal responsibility with a call for social responsibility so that those of us who have been especially blessed by good-fortune would give something back to their society.

I carry around with me an address book which gets thicker and thicker as I put miles and miles on my personal odometer. In that address book I have sayings and teachings and scriptures that are

very important to me and sometimes late at night after a particularly long and maybe rough day I'll sit there and go through and read what some of the people whom I admire most have had to say that are still relevant to me. There's a wonderful little exhortation John Westley used to his followers, which goes like this, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, and all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can".

Those simple words about trying as hard as you can, to do what you can do are ones that often pick my spirits up. I first learned about social and personal responsibility as a young girl growing up, I learned it from my parents, I learned it from my church. And then as I grew older I saw with my own eyes all of the work that was there to be done. And I remembered often the kind of lessons that preachers and teachers and parents gave in the abstract that needed to be applied in a very concrete way. It is not that one shouldn't strive to be as successful and even as wealthy as you may wish to be. It is just that if that is all that guides your life in these years to come then this education that your parents and your grandparents and this institution has provided will not be as broad or as deep as it could have been. It will not give you the kind of opportunities to grow that will in the end be the most satisfying.

There is a wonderful line in one of the books by Rabbi Kushner that starts, "no one on their death bed ever regreted not spending more time at the office". Each of you will have choices to make in the next years. Each of you will be forging your adult identity. It'll be rooted in your own values which you've got to work out for yourself. It will be rooted in this education and it will be rooted in a society that will determine day after day how it is treating people and will be calling upon you whether you listen or not to do your part.

I know that there are many of you in this graduating class who feel that the America that waits for you is a much less certain and anxious place than the one that waited for your parents and even your grandparents. I often thought that when I saw a lot of the discontent of the 1960's that there was the good part of that because it was challenging us. And to some extent the call of that challenge has been muted by the very real and continuing problems that have taken over the economic lives and the personal lives, not just in the big cities like Los Angeles, but even in the countryside here not far from Conway.

But if you believe that life can have some transcendent meaning, if you believe that your identity will be formed by your attempt

to lead a balanced life, that includes family, work and service, then you will leave this institution at least with a frame work of belief that will give you the opportunity to grow and mature into the person you can be.

Walk out of here today and make a pact with whatever neighborhood you choose to live in, whatever business you work in, with your family, your church, your community, your country and your world. Do it anyway you know how and what is right for you. As a teacher, a social worker, a doctor, or a lawyer, an engineer or a computer programmer, a husband, wife, father, mother, make that pact. Make a pact not to give into selfishness or cynicism or hate. Cling to the enduring values you have been exposed to. Cling especially to the value that is given to all people and that is premised on their equal worth. Respect and trust individuals of all races, creeds and colors. Work toward the achievement of a universal human dignity not just your own personal security.

But really Hillary, some of you may be thinking, I've got to pay off my student loans. I've got to get through graduate school. I can't even find a good job let alone someone to love and spend the rest of my life with. I want to have children one day but I don't even know if the world will be a place I want to raise them in. Some of you may be saying to yourselves, how am I going to worry about the world, it's hard enough figuring out how I'm going to get by myself. Am I going to achieve some reasonable balance in my own life?

And you know my response to your thoughts are that you're right. You do have to worry about that. You do have to be concerned about your next steps. Because each of us does have to take responsibility for ourselves. We have to start there. But at the same time you have to recognize that only focusing on who you are and your next steps is not enough either for you or for society a that desperately needs your talents.

In times of disillusionments like 1992 or 1969, we tend to forget that there are steps we can take and actions we can pursue together to give you more hope in your own future. We can do better economically, we can provide more jobs in this globally economy for people with your talents. We can do better to solve our social problems so that we don't have live through it over and over again seeing those problems burst into flames. And we can make a new compact in America that calls upon us to be as John Westley would have said, both socially and personally responsible.

You are stepping into a future for which there is no roadmap. If there were I would have given it to you today and then franchised it and retired. But there isn't one, there never is for any generation. All that we can do, those of us of your parents generation, and your grandparents generation is to give you the opportunities we've tried too. But we also have an additional responsibility, because the American dream is an inter-generational compact.

So at the same time I exhort you to do what you can not even to take care of your own futures and your own lives, but to recognize how intertwined those are with what happens to the least among us. I also ask your parents and grandparents who are here to recognize that America we are providing for this generation of graduates truly is for the first time not like what we took for granted.

It is the first time that any generation of young Americans may not do as well as their parents did before them. The economic statistics that you live in your individual lives are played out in lives all over America. The census figures for 1990 confirm what those of us with eyes to see, ears to hear have known that we are breaking into two societies. Those at the top who are getting richer and richer and all the rest of us, but particularly those at the very bottom whose ranks are growing and who are primarily the children of the poor. So it is not enough to tell these people to go forth and to make a life.

We as Americans have to go forth and give them again a country in which the dreams they bring this celebration today; the dreams we hold for them individually can be acted out on a scale that not only assures them the opportunities they've worked to achieve and deserve to have but assure that this country once again hold out a true promise to all of it's young people. That if you play by the rules, you are personally responsible, you do what you need to do to prepare for the future. We will give you a future worthy of you and of this country.

God's speed to each of you and to America. Thank you very much.

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HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
REMARKS FROM HENDRIX COLLEGE

MAY 30, 1992

This is a very special morning for me. I am honored greatly by this faculty's nomination, and this colleges bestowing of this honorary degree on me. Because I view Hendrix as an institution of excellence devoted to the kind of broad reaching educational inquiry that we need so desperately in our country in these times. To be honored by an institution whom I respect so greatly is very rewarding to me. It is also very significant to me that this is an institution rooted in the traditions of the Methodist Church which has played a major role in my life, and whose principles and values I seek to be guided by on a daily basis. It is also special because there are students in this graduating class, whose parents I know, whose parents I have worked with, whose families I have followed and respected as they have nurtured and guided these graduates to this point. And finally it is very special for me to be here in our state on this glorious morning. On a personal note I just want to thank all of you in this audience who through your words and prayers and acts of support and love over the last months have sustained my husband and me and our family. I don't think I have ever been gladder or prouder in the last months as I have been of any decision I ever made than the one that I did eighteen years ago now when I moved to this state. And I want on behalf of all my family to express publicly our gratitude and deep, deep appreciation for what so many of you have done in big and small ways have done to spread your love around us.

Thank you all very, very much.