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Rhetoric 2

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Graduation to Greatness

Caps and gowns whip back and forth in the wind, sunlight shooting off of the metallic colors. Perspiring hands shake, knees tremble, and hearts thump as each student leans forward, eagerly awaiting the final moments of their education. A name announced. A handshake. A diploma. This trio fulfills the dreams of every student in the audience. And, of course, one individual delivering a speech meant to summarize all the years of achievement, work, dedication, as well as inspiring graduates for the years to come. In 1990, Barbara Bush received the honor and responsibility of delivering the all-important commencement address to the graduating class of Wellesley College. The all-girls school that promoted diversity and individuality required an impressive speech for a group of ambitious women. Charged with the task of uniting the crowd and encouraging them to chase dreams, work hard, and love life, Bush delivered an emotionally charged speech colored with joyous language that satisfies the audience. Bush's casual, cheerful diction and warmhearted pathos combine to create a compelling and memorable commencement address.

Using an epideictic style, Bush inspires her audience. All epideictic pieces require a broad and general audience, and Bush speaks not only to the graduating class, but also to "President Keohane[,] Mrs. Gorbachev, Trustees, faculty, parents... Julia Porter, class president, and... Christine Bicknell" (1). Not only does she speak to a broad audience, but she gives a ceremonial address, honoring the graduating class and urging them to do great things with their

lives. With her words, Bush proves honor upon the whole Wellesley College, saying “I was struck by both the natural beauty of your campus and the spirit of this place” (3). She continues to rouse the students throughout the speech, finally saying “And may your future be worthy of your dreams” (18). These words remind the students that their dreams hold value and their future should hold equal or greater value. Complementing the success and soul of the college as well as encouraging the students, Bush’s epidictic oratory inspires and moves the audience.

As she begins her epidictic address, Bush connects with the audience through her engaging narrative introduction. Presenting a darling story of a stubborn little girl who demanded the right to display her own personality, Bush grabs the audience’s attention immediately, bringing smiles to the faces of all. The story Bush explains that this little girl wanted the roll of a mermaid in a game that only welcomed giants, wizards and dwarfs. “Now this little girl knew what she was, and she was not about to give up on either her identity or the game,” Bush says (5). These words carry the weight of more than just a strong introduction. With this sentence, Bush integrates her audience, showing the honor in standing true to identity and encouraging the graduating class to do the same. Thus, Bush powerfully introduces her speech with narration and inspiration.

Bush continues her successful persuasion through her thesis. “Wellesley, you see, is not just a place but an idea—an experiment in excellence in which diversity is not just tolerated but is embraced” (4). This sentence provides direction and force for her entire speech. Throughout the address, Bush continually praises Wellesley and diversity, along with the ideas backing the college and its concept. ““Diversity, like anything worth having, requires effort—effort to learn about and respect difference, to be compassionate with one another, to cherish our own identity, and to accept unconditionally the same in others,”” Bush quotes, reminding her audience of their

responsibility to work towards the precious gift of diversity (5). Progressing, Bush exhorts the students, saying, “You should all be very proud that this is the Wellesley spirit” (6). Exploring her proposition of diversity’s value and Wellesley’s support of that value, Bush furthers her argument with a well-supported thesis.

A strong focus on pathos, emotional appeal, drives the commencement address forward, evoking a positive response from the audience. Bush uses all sorts of different emotional appeals, especially humor. After quoting Ferris Buller, Bush jokes with her audience, saying, “I’m not going to tell George you clapped more for Ferris than you clapped for George” (11). Such interaction with her audience and a humorous approach to speaking about the President of the United States connects Bush with her audience, making everyone feel comfortable and amused. Another example of humorous pathos displays itself through a popular form of modern humor: self-deprecation. “Now I know your first choice today was Alice Walker...known for *The Color Purple*. Instead you got me—known for the color of my hair” (6). Using these jokes to keep the tone lighthearted, Bush easily interacts with her audience and creates a vibrant emotional appeal.

Passionate emotional appeal, however, appears at every turn of the discourse through inspiration and nostalgia in addition to humor. “[A]s important as your obligations as a doctor, a lawyer, a business leader will be, you are a human being first. And those human connections—with spouses, with children, with friends—are the most important investments you will ever make,” Bush says, urging her audience to remember the value in appreciating the humanity of existence instead of just success and achievement (12). This statement calls to natural human emotions by naming off close relationships that stir humanity’s hearts with warmth and love. “At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a

friend, or a parent” (13). Bush enforces her call to nostalgia and love, emphasizing the power of human relationships and creating a fond determination in her audience to follow her good advice.

Clearly focusing on pathos, as appropriate in a commencement address, Bush adds little ethos or logos, furthering her argument. In an address given to a graduating class, speakers ought to strive to inspire and give the students something to remember. Filling such a speech with statistics or an extensive backing of character detracts the attention from the students and their achievements, making Bush’s choice to promote mainly pathos an excellent one. Her title as First Lady provides the necessary ethos, as well as her mention of her involvement with literacy movements (8). Logically, Bush offers little to no appeal as well as including no strong fallacies to detract from her point. Needing no strong ethos or logos, Bush chooses to fill her speech with proper appeals, creating a strong argument.

Casual, upbeat diction connects Bush to her audience and inspires the crowd, adding to her successful persuasion. Faced with a young audience, Bush utilized casual wording to connect with those significantly younger than her, appropriately interacting with the crowd and her message. “Whether you are talking about education, career, or service, you’re talking about life—and life really must have joy. It’s supposed to be fun,” Bush claims (9). The laid-back tone creates a raw feeling and allows the audience to easily grasp her words. Earlier in her speech, Bush uses her diction to create imagery in a simplistic way by referring to a lifestyle as an elementary art style: “[Y]ou need not, probably cannot, live a ‘paint-by-numbers’ life” (7). Easy wording impacts Bush’s speech positively, making it accessible to everyone and memorable, as well as constructing a jubilant tone.

Despite her success in diction and other rhetorical areas, Bush presents poor delivery, although the disappointment does not detract from the power of her message. Instead of standing

firmly and speaking confidently, Bush stumbles over a few sentences, fails with some inflection, creates little eye contact, and has a poor memory of her speech. Nevertheless, Bush speaks loudly enough at a proper speed. Even with the unfortunate delivery, however, Bush still conveys her message with strength. Lack of eye contact utterly fails to detract from the passion of her diction or the emotion in her words. The inspiration behind her message boosts the address' goal, making the underwhelming delivery nearly irrelevant.

Finally, Bush successfully concludes with Aristotelian methodology. Needing to rouse the proper emotions and leave her audience inspired and called to action, Bush forms a compelling conclusion, potent with motivation. "Well, the controversy ends here. But our conversation is only beginning," Bush says, calling students to embrace diversity and possibility as they start a new journey outside of their school (18). "And may your future be worthy of your dreams," she says in parting, pulling on the students' emotions. Graduates long for their dreams of career or grad school to work out. Bush puts the responsibility of success on their shoulders, but also gives them the necessary inspiration to bear such a burden. Thus, Bush concludes masterfully, bringing her oratory to a satisfying close.

Passionate yet humorous, Bush delivers a moving commencement address that successfully inspires the audience. Moving forward from their past four years of dedication to education, students can grasp Bush's words and feel the fulfillment but also the demand to go out and do more. Diploma in hand, knees no longer shaking, hands confidently hurling a cap into the open air, hearts still pounding with anticipation, smiles line the graduates faces as they travel into their future. Elated and burning with youth and possibility, each student-turned-graduate can leave satisfied. Given an impressive education that cherished diversity and uniqueness, each student holds the tools to create the future that fulfills their dreams and gives honor to their

education and passions, answering the Bush's call and the call of success and happiness.