

Mark Jbeily, Senior Class President Speech

May, 2011 Graduation/Westwood High School

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Courtney!

Faculty, administration, family, friends, and graduates: it is my distinct honor to stand before you today on behalf of the senior class.

As I sat contemplating my remarks, I knew that our class deserved a subject that was equal in grandeur to the scale of the achievement we celebrate today. The one thing that kept popping into my head was a trip my family and I took to visit the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota the summer of my sophomore year.

Though we have all seen this monument in pictures, it is only when you stand before it that you understand the awesome scale of these 60-foot edifices carved into the mountainside. While the tourists excitedly snapped pictures, our Park Ranger Bill, explained the history of the monument.

The four Presidents depicted: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt, were all chosen because they were the men who led and embodied the values of our nation during eras of great change. These were the men who carried us through our most formative years, who stood up and answered the call amidst gathering clouds and RAY-ging storms.

Four men, four eras, four years.

Our time at Westwood has had equal significance in forming and shaping who we are. What these men have done for our country, Westwood has also done for us.

George Washington

Because, you see, the birthing of the nation that George Washington presided over is not very different from our Freshman year. Like our forefathers, we entered the world of Westwood wide eyed and confused. For Washington and his colleagues, the key was to show the world, most notably the British, that the United States was strong and ready for the challenges before her. For us, it was avoiding being stuffed into a football locker room and successfully negotiating the labyrinth of hallways to find our classrooms. Just like a young nation, we young freshman were insecure of our place, but ready to meet the challenge.

Thomas Jefferson

Then Sophomore year rolled around, and there Thomas Jefferson stood ready. This, like America's, was an awkward moment in our history. For Thomas Jefferson, his defining moment was the Louisiana Purchase.

Manifest Destiny: the belief that

this people, this system, this nation

deserved a full continent to achieve its true potential.

We, like a rapidly expanding America, now had legitimacy in the school, and enough knowledge of the system to make it through the day. But more importantly, this was the moment where we, as Jefferson did for America, defined who we were, and more importantly, who we would be. This was the moment where the hesitancy of youth was replaced by a resolute confidence in our abilities and in ourselves.

Abe Lincoln

Yet as is true of all great parables, soon came conflict that would rock our nation to its core. Brothers fighting brothers, and Abe Lincoln stuck in between. For us, Junior year was far less dramatic but no less significant.

At times, the studies felt like we were fighting a constant war of attrition that would make even the most backward WWI General grimace. But when it came down to May, the annual marathon of exams, we found strength in each other through frantic 2 AM chat sessions,

through midnight what-a-burger runs,

and most importantly, through the calm and reassuring voice of a friend telling you "you can do it."

Just like Lincoln's America, the friendship and community that kept us together- made us greater than the challenge before us.

Teddy Roosevelt

Finally came Senior year with Teddy Roosevelt at the helm. This was the key time of transition for our country. The time when we as a nation, completed our transformation from a motivated group of rebels to a benevolent world power. The time when we as students shed the cloth of childhood and donned the cloak of adulthood. Our time, to take the next step.

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TEACHERS

To the teachers who have prepared us to take the next step, thank you for your service, and tireless effort. To Mrs. Saenz especially, your wisdom, guidance, and essay revisions have been invaluable, I kept your red pen busy and for that you have my gratitude. I hope that wasn't too trite.

But to all the teachers present today, I have one humble request.

Coming from a student proud of his school's and his program's rigor, do not compromise your standards.

I know you work too hard, too long, for too little, but only you can hold students accountable. This nation needs you to demand excellence from every student you teach, because in the words of Henry Kissinger "A diamond is a chunk of coal that is made good under pressure." And we need diamonds more than ever.

IB

To my IB family: you cheered my successes, and cushioned my failures. And though I am an immigrant of sorts amongst your ranks, thank you for always making me feel at home.

To my dear friend Rishi Goel: your friendship brought me strength, your laughter brought me joy, and your tireless dedication to Westwood through Student Council has taught me the meaning of true leadership.

To my special friend Vivian Shaw: you have been a wise advisor, a trustworthy confidant, one of my strongest advocates, a tireless competitor, and most of all, a loyal and steadfast friend. Thanks for the little things.

FAMILY

To my younger sisters, Laura and Stephanie: thank you for filling up my bottle late at night, packing me a lunch in the morning, and everything else along the way. You are both extraordinarily beautiful and have potentials beyond belief. Though suitors beware, hell hath no fury like an older brother scorned.

To my father: thank you for having the courage to dream of a better life and coming all the way from Lebanon, so that I may reap the benefits of opportunities you never had.

To my mommy: you carried me, you cried for me, and you always cooked for me. You raised me to be a man, and I hope I have done well so far. I am sorry I dodged your kisses when you dropped me off at school, but after today, you can have all the kisses you want.

Oh yeah, and thanks for that trip to Mount Rushmore.

CONCLUSION

To this day, I still remember Ranger Bills parting words to the tour group. With all the poise and theatre of Shakespeare himself, he boldly proclaimed "Ladies and Gentlemen, there is room on Mount Rushmore for one more." As his eyes panned across the small crowd, he continued,

"That will be the place reserved for the person who steps up and leads with character and strength."

Then, in a hushed tone he said to us, "and that person could be among us today!"

Graduates, as you prepare to take your walk across this stage, remember what Ranger Bill said. There is room on Mount Rushmore for one more. No matter what your calling is in life, be it medicine, service, business, or government.... There is room on Mount Rushmore for one more. The task before you is by no means easy; but just as Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt did, we each have it within ourselves to choose unity over division, excellence over mediocrity, and tenacity over impotence to earn our spot on Mount Rushmore.

Thank you. It is now my pleasure to introduce to you a thoughtful classmate, exceptional thinker, and the second member of the Skinner Physics Trio, your salutatorian Mr. Aaron Hui.