



Preface

Representative American Speeches 2017-2018 reflects the many controversies surrounding and inspired by the current administration. Separate yet related ripples of debate, disagreement, and activism that surround and permeate current American popular culture and its oratory reflect dominantly in America's artistic, political, and social environments.

The Trump election and administration has inspired passionate discourse primarily in four broad avenues: gender equality, racial violence, immigration policy, and the role of science in policy. Current trends in American thought are seen by national figures through commencement speeches, by protestors who speak out on school gun violence and the #MeToo movement, and by the presidential administration. All of this, and more, is covered in this issue of *Representative American Speeches*.

In a year characterized by partisanship, political speeches—both by the current presidential administration and its opponents—dominate the year in review—and tell the story of a country divided.

Commencement Speeches

Businessman and philanthropist Michael Bloomberg starts off the section by reminding graduates that the “Honor Code” that has been such a part of their education at Rice University must continue to be an important part of their lives. Oprah Winfrey encourages students to stand up for truth in the media by being “editorial gatekeepers,” speaking to graduates at USC Annenberg. At Brandeis University International Business School, economist Kaushik Basu talks about the need for economic innovation as well as compassion and kindness in the face of growing inequality.

The commencement address at Liberty University by former president Jimmy Carter addresses the increasing disparity in wealth as one of the major issues the world faces today, as well as discrimination against women and girls, much of it taking the form of human trafficking. One of the nation's leading female executives, Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg, cautions MIT graduates to carefully consider the consequences of game-changing technology, as it can empower those who seek to do harm, and Harvard University professor Danielle Allen revisits the true nature of democracy and citizenship, holding out to graduates the vision of what it should be as defined in the Declaration of Independence. The last speech in this section is by President Donald Trump, delivered at the U.S. Naval Academy, in which he speaks of the importance of the military and his belief that America has rediscovered its identity as a nation during the first two years of his presidency.





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Presidential & Political Speeches

The president's first state-of-the-union address details what he considers the success of his administration's economic and immigration policies. Trump's 2018 speech at the United Nations stresses the idea of American sovereignty, rejecting the idea of globalism and foreign interference, including a global compact on migration. U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' speech on immigration policy discusses the "zero tolerance" policy for illegal entry at the Southwest border, including the controversial policy of separating children from parents. President Trump's mid-term campaign speech, delivered at a "Make America Great Again" rally in Charleston, West Virginia, in August 2018 discusses his victories and reiterates his promise to support West Virginia's coal workers. First Lady Melania Trump introduces her Be Best program, designed to help children navigate issues specific to their generation, such as social media use, bullying, and opioid abuse. In a joint press conference, both President Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin stress the need for continued cooperation. In the last speech of this section, Vice President Mike Pence discusses the development of a military "Space Force" to protect the interests of the United States.

Speeches That Oppose Trump's Policies

Senator Bernie Sanders responds to the 2018 state-of-the-union address, describing several points of the president's claims of success as inaccurate. Former president Barack Obama delivers an impassioned speech detailing how the current administration, backed by a Republican congressional majority, is threatening democracy itself and fueling the bi-partisanship of the nation. Senator Elizabeth Warren discusses corruption in Washington and the lack of trust that most Americans feel toward their government and its institutions. Finally, Congressman Jeff Flake comments on what he considers President Trump's manipulation of the media to mislead the American public.

Outsiders & Activists

American high school student and activist Emma Gonzalez, in a press conference following the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school, talks about governmental failures to address gun violence. Viola Davis stresses the importance of speaking out, at the 2018 Women's March in Los Angeles, using the #MeToo movement. Oprah Winfrey makes a similar point in her speech at the Golden Globe Award show, talking about identity, gender and politics. Twelve-year-old Leah Cayasso, the daughter of an undocumented migrant, at the Washington, D.C., "Families Belong Together" protest event, speaks to her fear of losing her mother to deportation. Discussing yet another national form of protest, Beto O'Rourke weighs in on NFL players kneeling during the national anthem at football games, believing





that the right to protest in such a manner is fundamental to what it means to be American. In a related speech, former NFL professional Colin Kaepernick delivers a speech at Amnesty International, discussing violence against African Americans and the anthem protests. This section closes with a speech by Ximena Cid at the Los Angeles March for Science at which she talks about the involvement of minorities in science and the importance of diversity in helping to provide different perspectives.

The speeches collected in this volume represent words of wisdom, caution, and inspiration. Some are about the future as much as the present, signifying the perpetual change in power that occurs with transition or power or student bodies. And other speeches in this work represent the various political and social movements that have been most active in the year.

While it is unlikely that any of the speeches of 2018 will be remembered to the degree as some of the nation's most famous examples of public speaking, they each serve as a historical record of America's ideological evolution. Speeches are not simply a record of the physical march of history, but of the way that ideas shaped and reflected the present as it became history.

Examining the ideas, hopes, fears, and debates reflected in public speaking therefore provides the opportunity to see how the evolution of ideas proceeds surrounding the series of victories, losses, triumphs, and tragedies, that occur in each year and collectively shape America's future.

Micah L. Issitt



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To the Graduating Class



Michael Bloomberg, via Wikimedia

Former New York City mayor and philanthropist Michael Bloomberg asked students at Rice University to remember the university's honor code as they step out into their careers.





Editorial Gatekeepers

By Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey is an American actor, author, and media personality. Winfrey got her start in talk show television in 1976, hosting the Baltimore, Maryland, series “People are Talking,” and she later transitioned into mainstream film. In 1985, she was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance in Steven Spielberg’s The Color Purple. Winfrey began hosting her own syndicated talk show The Oprah Winfrey Show in 1986, eventually gaining full ownership over the program and producing the show under her production company Harpo Productions. Winfrey’s television program expanded with the introduction of Oprah’s Book Club and the publication of O Magazine. As of 2018, Winfrey is one of the world’s wealthiest celebrities with a net worth of at least \$4 billion and has become known for her political activism in addition to her various media projects. In this 2018 commencement address at USC Annenberg, one of the nation’s premier schools for journalism and media studies, Winfrey discusses the importance of truth in media and encourages students to become “editorial gatekeepers” for the media of the future.

Thank you, Wallis Annenberg and a special thank you to Dean Willow Bay for inviting me here today. And to the parents, again I say, and to the faculty, friends, graduates, good morning.

I want to give a special shout out because I was happy that Dean Bay invited me but I was going to be here anyway because one of my lovely daughter girls attends the Annenberg School of Journalism and is getting her masters today, so I was coming whether I was speaking or not. So a special shoutout to a young woman who I met when she was in the seventh grade and it was the first year that I was looking for smart, bright, giving, resilient, kind, open-hearted girls who had “it”—that factor that means you keep going no matter what. And this was the year that I chose everybody individually. And I remember her walking into the office in a little township where we were doing interviews all over South Africa and she came in and recited a poem about her teacher and when she walked out the door I go, “That’s an ‘it’ girl.” Thando Dlomo, I’m here to say I am so proud of you. Long way from the township in South Africa and her Aunt has flown 30 hours to be here for this celebration today. Thank you so much.

Today I come bearing some good news and some bad news for anybody who intends to build their life around your ability to communicate. So, I want to get the bad news out first so you can be clear. I always like to get the bad stuff upfront,

Delivered on May 4, 2018, at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Los Angeles, CA.





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so here it is: Everything around us, including—and in particular the internet and social media—is now being used to erode trust in our institutions, interfere in our elections, and wreak havoc on our infrastructure. It hands advertisers a map to our deepest desires, it enables misinformation to run rampant, attention spans to run short and false stories from phony sites to run circles around major news outlets. We have literally walked into traffic while staring at our phones.

Now the good news: Many of your parents are probably taking you somewhere really special for dinner tonight. I heard. I can do a little better than that. Now that I have presented some of the bad news, the good news is that there really is a solution. And the solution is each and every one of you. Because you will become the new editorial gatekeepers, an ambitious army of truth seekers who will arm yourselves with the intelligence, with the insight and the facts necessary to strike down deceit. You're in a position to keep all of those who now disparage real news, you all are the ones that are going to keep those people in check. Why? Because you can push back and you can answer false narratives with real information and you can set the record straight. And you also have the ability and the power to give voice, as Dean Bay was saying, to people who desperately now need to tell their stories and have their stories told.

And this is what I do know for sure because I've been doing it a long time: If you can just capture the humanity of the people of the stories you're telling, you then get that much closer to your own humanity. And you can confront your bias and you can build your credibility and hone your instincts and compound your compassion. You can use your gifts, that's what you're really here to do, to illuminate the darkness in our world.

So this is what I also know: This moment in time, this is your time to rise. It is. Even though you can't go anywhere, you can't stand in line at Starbucks, you can't go to a party, you can't go any place where anywhere you turn people are talking about how bad things are, how terrible it is. And this is what I know: The problem is everybody is meeting hysteria with more hysteria and then we're all becoming hysterical and it's getting worse. What I've learned all these years is that we're not supposed to match it or even get locked into resisting or pushing against it. We're supposed to see this moment in time for what it is. We're supposed to see through it and then transcend it. That is how you overcome hysteria. And that is how you overcome the sniping at one another, the trolling, the mean-spirited partisanship on both sides of the aisle, the divisiveness, the injustices, and the out-and-out hatred. You use it. Use this moment to encourage you, to embolden you, and to literally push you into the rising of your life. And to borrow a phrase from my beloved mentor Maya Angelou: Just like moons and like suns, with the certainty of tides, just like hopes springing high, you will rise.

So your job now, let me tell you, is to take everything you've learned here and use what you learned to challenge the left, to challenge the right, and the center. When you see something, you say something, and you say it with the facts and the reporting to back it up. Here's what you have to do: You make the choice every day, every single day, to exemplify honesty because the truth, let me tell you something about





the truth, the truth exonerates and it convicts. It disinfects and it galvanizes. The truth has always been and will always be our shield against corruption, our shield against greed and despair. The truth is our saving grace. And not only are you here, USC Annenberg, to tell it, to write it, to proclaim it, to speak it, but to be it. Be the truth. Be the truth.

So I want to get down to the real reason we're here today. In about an hour and a half, you're going to be catapulted into a world that appears to have gone off its rocker. And I can tell you I've hosted the Oprah show for 25 years, number one show. Never missed a day. Never missed a day. Twenty-five years, 4,561 shows. So I know how to talk, I can tell you that, but I was a little intimidated coming here because graduations, it's tough, it's hard trying to come up with something to share with you that you haven't already heard. Any information or guidance I can offer is nothing that your parents or your deans or professors or Siri haven't already provided. So I'm here to really tell you: I don't have any new lessons. I don't have any new lessons. But I often think that it's not the new lessons so much as it is really learning the old ones again and again.

So here are variations on a few grand themes beginning with this: Pick a problem, any problem, the list is long. Here are just a few that are at the top of my list. There's gun violence and there's climate change, there's systemic racism, economic inequality, media bias. The homeless need opportunity, the addicted need treatment, the Dreamers need protection, the prison system needs reforming, the LG-BTQ community needs acceptance, the social safety net needs saving, and the misogyny needs to stop. Needs to stop. But you can't fix everything and you can't save every soul. But what can you do? Here and now I believe you have to declare war on one of our most dangerous enemies, and that is cynicism. Because when that little creature sinks its hooks into you, it'll cloud your clarity, it'll compromise your integrity, it'll lower your standards, it'll choke your empathy. And sooner or later, cynicism shatters your faith. When you hear yourself saying, "Ah, it doesn't matter what one person says, oh well, so what, it doesn't matter what I do, who cares?" When you hear yourself saying that, know that you're on a collision course for our culture. And I understand how it's so easy to become disillusioned, so tempting to allow apathy to set in, because anxiety is being broadcast on 157 channels, 24 hours a day, all night long. And everyone I know is feeling it. But these times, these times, are here to let us know that we need to take a stand for our right to have hope and we need to take a stand with every ounce of wit and courage we can muster.

The question is: What are you willing to stand for? That question is going to follow you throughout your life. And here's how you answer it. You put your honor where your mouth is. Put your honor where your mouth is. When you give your word, keep it. Show up. Do the work. Get your hands dirty. And then you'll begin to draw strength from the understanding that history is still being written. You're writing it every day. The wheels still in spin. And what you do or what you don't do will be a part of it. You build a legacy not from one thing but from everything. I remember when I just opened my school in 2007, I came back and I had the great joy of sitting at Maya Angelou's table. She hadn't been able to attend the opening in South



Africa. And I said to her, “Oh Maya, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy, that’s going to be my greatest legacy.” I remember she was standing at the counter making biscuits, and she turned, she put the dough down, and she looked at me and she said, “You have no idea what your legacy will be.” I said, “Excuse me? I just opened this school and these girls, and it’s going to be...” And she said, “You have no idea what your legacy will be, because your legacy is every life you touch. Every life you touch.” That changed me.

And it’s true, you can’t personally stop anybody from walking into a school with an assault rifle, nor can you singlehandedly ensure that the rights that your mothers and grandmothers fought so hard for will be preserved for the daughters you may someday have. And it’ll take more than you alone to pull more than 40 million Americans out of poverty, but who will you be if you don’t care enough to try? And what mountains could we move, I think, what gridlock could we eradicate if we were to join forces and work together in service of something greater than ourselves? You know my deepest satisfactions and my biggest rewards have come from exactly that. Pick a problem, any problem, and do something about it. Because to somebody who’s hurting, something is everything. So, I hesitate to say this, because the rumors from my last big speech have finally died down, but here it is. Vote. Vote. Vote. Pay attention to what the people who claim to represent you are doing and saying in your name and on your behalf. They represent you and if they’ve not done right by you or if their policies are at odds with your core beliefs, then you have a responsibility to send them packing. If they go low, thank you Michelle Obama, if they go low, we go to the polls. People died for that right, they died for that right. I think about it every time I vote. So don’t let their sacrifices be in vain.

A couple other thoughts before I go. Eat a good breakfast. It really pays off. Pay your bills on time. Recycle. Make your bed. Aim high. Say thank you to people and actually really mean it. Ask for help when you need it, and put your phone away at the dinner table. Just sit on it, really. And know that what you tweet and post and Instagram today might be asked about at a job interview tomorrow, or 20 years from tomorrow. Be nice to little kids, be nice to your elders, be nice to animals, and know that it’s better to be interested than interesting. Invest in a quality mattress. I’m telling you, your back will thank you later. And don’t cheap out on your shoes. And if you’re fighting with somebody you really love, for god’s sakes find your way back to them because life is short, even on our longest days. And another thing, another thing you already definitely know that definitely bears repeating, don’t ever confuse what is legal with what is moral because they are entirely different animals. You see, in a court of law, there are loopholes and technicalities and bargains to be struck, but in life, you’re either principled or you’re not. So do the right thing, especially when nobody’s looking. And while I’m at it, do not equate money and fame with accomplishment and character, because I can assure you based on the thousands of people I’ve interviewed, one does not automatically follow the other.

Something else, something else. You need to know this. Your job is not always going to fulfill you. There will be some days that you just might be bored. Other days, you may not feel like going to work at all. Go anyway, and remember that your job



is not who you are, it's just what you are doing on the way to who you will become. Every remedial chore, every boss who takes credit for your ideas—that is going to happen—look for the lessons, because the lessons are always there. And the number one lesson I could offer you where your work is concerned is this: Become so skilled, so vigilant, so flat-out fantastic at what you do that your talent cannot be dismissed.

And finally, this: This will save you. Stop comparing yourself to other people. You're only on this planet to be you, not someone else's imitation of you. I had to learn that the hard way, on the air, live, anchoring the news. One night in my twenties, when I first started broadcasting, I was 19, moved to an anchor by the time I was 20. I was just pretending to be Barbara Walters. I was trying to talk like Barbara, act like Barbara, hold my legs like Barbara. And I was on the air, I hadn't read the copy fully, and I called Canada, Canahdah. I cracked myself up, because I thought, Barbara would never call Canada Canahdah. And that little breakthrough, that little crack, that little moment that I stopped pretending allowed the real me to come through. Your life journey is about learning to become more of who you are and fulfilling the highest, truest expression of yourself as a human being. That's why you're here. You will do that through your work and your art, through your relationships and love.

And to quote Albert Einstein, "Education is what remains after we forget what we're taught." You've learned a lot here at USC. And when all that you've been taught begins to fade into the fabric of your life, I hope that what remains is your ability to analyze, to make distinctions, to be creative, and to wander down that road less traveled whenever you have the opportunity. And I hope that when you go, you go all in, and that your education helps you to walk that road with an open, discerning mind. Discernment is what we're missing. And a kind heart. You know, there are 7 billion people on the planet right now. And here you are. Your degree from the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism: This degree you're about to get is a privilege. It's a privilege. And that privilege obligates you to use what you've learned to lend a hand to somebody who doesn't get to be here. Somebody who's never had a ceremony like the one you're having this morning.

So I hold you in the light, and I wish you curiosity and confidence. And I wish you ethics and enlightenment. I wish you guts. Every great decision I've ever made I trusted my gut. And goodness. I wish you purpose and the passion that goes along with that purpose. And here's what I really hope: I hope that every one of you contributes to the conversation of our culture and our time. And to some genuine communication, which means, you have to connect to people exactly where they are; not where you are, but where they are. And I hope you shake things up. And when the time comes to bet on yourself, I hope you double down. Bet on yourself. I hope you always know how happy and how incredibly relieved everybody is in this room is that you've made it to this place, at this time, on this gorgeous day. Congratulations USC Annenberg Class of 2018!

