Daily Local News West Chester, Pa. May 30, 1980

Mailbag

Commencement speaker stirs scorn, support

WCSC graduate assesses mood of the audience at controversial commencement

Editor News: During World War II, someone whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, made an observation that I have never forgotten; he said that the United States of America needed a champion — one of the passion and loyal fervor that Great Britain so much enjoyed in the person of Winston Churchill. If that observation was appropriate in the early '40s it is, indeed, appropriate today.

On May 17, as a member of the graduating class, I attended WCSC's commencement exercises at Farrell Stadium where the remarks of Frances T. Farenthold were so unfavorably received. This letter is not to justify the boos and catcalls she had inflicted upon her. It is to deny that the hostile audience reaction singularly expressed an unwillingness to care about human suffering; the very existence in this country of a National Cambodian Crisis Committee, with such distinguished members as Farenthold herself, bears some testimony to the caring nature of the American people.

I saw significance in the fact that at one point during the commencement address, several graduates chose not to boo, but to join voices in the opening bars of "God Bless America." It seemed significant, too, that there was a rousing ovation for the two young men who were sworn into the Marine Corps Reserve on graduation day, and that those two men further received a standing ovation from the graduates. These particular actions may well have reflected the presence of an American mood of national support that has long been absent in this country.

Could it be that in these times of extreme frustration, everyday Americans are sick and tired of hearing their nation bear a relentless stream of abusive criticism — criticism that so eagerly maligns without recognizing any redeeming feature? Is it possible that West Chester's recent commencement audience heard "Cissy" Farenthold, and wearily added her name to the endless list of those who so impatiently strain to kick the United States in the teeth?

May the United States never see the day when its citizens fail to care about world suffering, and may we never know a time when they refuse to face American error that contributes to that suffering. But the fact is that our country is not always the villain, and maybe there is a need to stop screaming at her in criticism until there is no breath left for "God Bless America." It is possible that the commencement audience was feeling something like that this year.

As I sat among my fellow graduates, I did not boo our guest speaker — nor did I hoot at her. I would be less than candid, though, if I neglected to admit that, through no lack of humanity, but only through an awareness of my country's great need for support, I was powerfully tempted to join the men to the rear of me when they started to sing "God Bless America." This is the current mood of the people; I was truly sorry, for her sake and ours, that "Cissy" Farenthold had not taken that into consideration when she planned the tone of her address.

NORMA HENZIE
West Chester

Graduate's parent protests selection of speaker, topic

Editor's note: The following letter was submitted for publication.

Dr. Charles G. Mayo, President
West Chester State College
West Chester, Pa. 19380

Dear Dr. Mayo: Our son was a member of West Chester State's 1980 graduating class. It was with pride and anticipation that we embarked on a 1,400 mile round trip to be present at the commencement.

It is sad that the only blemish on the entire trip was the commencement address delivered by Wells College President Frances Farenthold. Her abuse of the honor to speak at our commencement so incensed me that I joined, for the first time in my life, the "booers" in a crowd. Finally, I found myself forced to leave the stadium as she droned on in her strident voice.

I, too, am a public speaker, and when invited to speak have never failed to submit an outline for prior review of content. On the assumption that President Farenthold had the courtesy to submit an outline, I am at a loss as to how you could have approved the subject of her address. It causes me to question the judgment of the college management in its entirety.

Her decision to speak on Cambodia histrionics was most inappropriate and a disservice to all in attendance, in my opinion.

Surely, her recent appointment to a federal committee on Cambodia so influenced and inflated her ego that she had the audacity to presume no one would object to her use of our commencement as a public forum to enhance her position on the committee.

Let the record show that I strongly object and urge you to use better judgment in the future selection of commencement speakers and subject matter.

MAURICE ST. GERMAIN
Milford, Michigan

CamScanner

Sissy not s c Cambodia

WE MUST Encourage private citizens to take a stand against man made holocaust

WE MUST Inform all Americans about the human devastation caused by hunger and malnutrition

WE MUST Stimulate large scale emergency support for Cambodian relief organization

CamScanner