



"A New Beginning," or a Revised Past?: Barack Obama's Cairo Speech (Volume 1)

Mary Grabar

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On June 4, 2009, President Barack Obama delivered a much-anticipated speech at Cairo University in Egypt. Coming on the heels of Obama's worldwide "Apology Tour," the speech signaled not only how Obama viewed his country, but how he would set himself apart in "a new beginning" that would change America's course from what he presented as a dangerous and belligerent approach by his predecessor, President George W. Bush. The version of history that Obama presented, however, cast the Middle East and Islam in a more favorable light than the facts would warrant. The President's Cairo Speech carries great historical and political significance because it set out Obama's Middle East policy and his vision of the United States in the international arena. It also presents insights into the character of the president. Like George Washington's Farewell Address and John F. Kennedy's Inauguration Speech, the Cairo Speech will likely be studied as an important document in American history. Obama's promise of "a new beginning" cannot yet be evaluated critically. Unfolding events – and the outcome of the promises made -- will determine the greatness of the speech. This happens only in retrospect, with the benefit of historical reflection. Unfortunately, the Cairo Speech is already being reprinted in anthologies and textbooks, and is taught to students as a hallmark of rhetorical brilliance and as an unalloyed diplomatic victory. The cult of personality that has sprung up around President Obama is carried into classrooms where educators "teaching the speech" encourage students to unquestioningly accept the President's calls for action and support. Such directives stand opposite to American traditions and ideals of independent thinking and self-government, as well as to standards of excellence in scholarship. This Dissident Prof Guide offers resources for critical thinking to students who are being asked to admire, not analyze, Obama's Cairo Speech. The Guide includes a handy point-by-point analysis of the speech, a bibliography of trusted historical sources, and an account of the numerous errors of historical fact, including those pointed out by commentators and historians in the days following the speech's delivery. It will serve as a handy reference for all who might wish to understand and analyze this pivotal moment in our nation's history. The Dissident Prof Guide includes: Summary of the purpose and strategies of political speeches, going back to Aristotle and Cicero; Analysis of rhetorical strategies employed in this speech; An overview of American foreign policy since the founding of the United States Comparisons to other speeches by Presidents Lincoln, Kennedy, and Reagan; A summary of the reactions to the speech by historians, political commentators, and American Muslims; Information about events in the Middle East since the speech was delivered; Strategies for dealing with biased assignments. Whether for the American citizen wanting a refresher on current events, history, and rhetoric, or the student faced with a biased assignment, this Guide Book will provide fair and knowledgeable information. This book will: Help the student write an A paper without compromising his principles; Help the concerned citizen make informed and reasoned arguments. Dissident Prof Guide Books are written by professors in the field and are designed to give reader-friendly advice in a succinct and lively style. Both authors, Mary Grabar and Brian Birdnow, hold Ph.D.'s (in English and history, respectively) and have each taught at the college level for decades. Both are widely published authors of articles and commentaries in general interest publications as well.

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