Title: PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA’S COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES: REVISING THE FUNCTIONS OF CEREMONIAL RHETORIC
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Abstract: Commencement speakers are typically expected to praise students for their achievements and motivate them for the path that is to come. When the commencement speaker is a President, however, the expectation is different. In times of rhetorical presidency, no presidential address is apolitical, and this project investigated the functions of ceremonial rhetoric in light of the rhetorical presidency doctrine. Close textual analysis of the three most controversial commencement speeches delivered by President Obama, revealed that the challenge of fulfilling the expectations of a commencement address, while also responding to rhetorical problems, required the President to adopt complex rhetorical strategies. The predominant strategies included humor, which was used in the process of minimizing controversies; strategic use of rhetorical presence when selecting the elements to be emphasized in the speech; and ideological interpellation.