



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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Michelle Obama Speaks Her Mind

More than any other first lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama continues to stand above those who would attempt to distort her leadership. First Lady Obama's recent commencement address at the Tuskegee University in Alabama exemplified her courage to speak truth to the world without fear of repercussions.

Michelle Obama's resilient optimism is refreshing as well as sobering. I am certain the class of 2015 at Tuskegee will always remember the strong and poignant words of wisdom that they were given during their graduation ceremonies. But we all can learn from her timely remarks.

We live today in an increased atmosphere of racial polarization in America since the election and re-election of President Barack Obama. We, therefore, should welcome public utterances that transcend the prevalent negativity surrounding any attempt to address the question of race in the United States.

Michele Obama is perfectly qualified and strategically positioned to use her leadership in a constructive manner to advance the interests of Black America and all those who struggle and cry out for freedom, justice and equality. As a talented Harvard Law School graduate, devoted mother, and loyal spouse to the president, the first lady has risen to become one of the most admired persons in the world.



NNPA
COLUMNIST

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

The first lady eloquently stated, “But here’s the thing – our history provides us with a better story, a better blueprint for how we can win. It teaches us that when we pull ourselves out of those lowest emotional depths, and we channel

throughout the world proves our ability to overcome the hardships of oppression and injustice. It was also good to hear Michelle Obama call for Black American unity and “banding together.”

Our families and communities across the nation are certainly in critical need of greater unity and collective resolve to stand up together to provide leadership and direction in particular for our youth and young emerging leaders. We cannot afford to permit the evolution of an ahistorical generation of young people who have not

pushing forward to demand greater access to wealth-building careers with the intent on giving more back to the communities from which they have emerged. Like the first lady, I am optimistic about the future to the extent to which we continue to stand up to injustice while at the same time pressing forth to economically empower our families and communities.

Education and empowerment are both goals that must be attained and each generation has to rise to the occasion with persistence and focus. There will be setbacks and sometimes disappointments in everyone's life. Yet, the enduring lesson from Michelle Obama's magnificent address was that when those life challenges happen, do not let your problems or critics define who you are. We have to have faith in our own capacity to rebound and to stand for truth even when it might not be the popular or politically expedient.

We are a resilient people. We resist oppression. We are against inequality and injustice. We stand for liberation and freedom for ourselves and for all people. The more we stand together, the more we make progress. We are grateful that in our lifetime we are privileged to witness how the first lady epitomizes what it means to be a freedom fighter with courage and grace, but most of all, with a glowing resilience that motivates and inspires others to excel.

“When we pull ourselves out of those lowest emotional depths, and we channel our frustrations into studying and organizing and banding together – then we can build ourselves and our communities up”

Michelle Obama

our frustrations into studying and organizing and banding together – then we can build ourselves and our communities up. We can take on those deep-rooted problems, and together – together – we can overcome anything that stands in our way.”

In other words, we should strive to avoid complacency and the cynicism of hopelessness. The history and the centuries-old legacy of African people in America and

been given the truth of our history nor given the encouragement that they need to excel and make their mark on history today.

In fact, over the next weeks we will witness numerous graduation ceremonies in particular at other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The good news is that thousands of Black American college graduates from HBCUs and from other institutions of higher learning will be

The Case for Student Loan Forgiveness

By the time you read this article, millions of college students will have graduated and be looking for jobs, many will be going on to grad school and millions will suddenly be faced with paying off college loans or contemplating obtaining a loan for graduate studies. Neither option is attractive.

Even if students are fortunate enough to have a job when they graduate, if they are laden with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, it will be very difficult to save money for their future, pay living expenses and costs associated with the job they accept, and make \$300-\$600 in monthly payments for college loans.

For those moving on to grad school, unless they have a fellowship or some other kind of grant, they will have a tough decision to make when the loan officer at their school or the bank says, “No problem, here's a \$30,000 check to pay for your degree.” I hate to think what it costs for a medical degree these days.

At more than \$1 trillion, having surpassed credit card debt, college loan debt is an albatross around the necks of students, some of whom had no idea of what they were getting into and some who did know but refused to do anything about it until now, when it's too late.

With the job market the way it is and has been for Black people for decades, some graduates will have an overpriced college degree without a commensurate job prospect.



ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT

James Clingman

They will be faced with the challenge of paying back their loans while looking for a job that does not exist. Or, they will have to accept the prospect of joining the ranks of the “underemployed.”

With the job market the way it is and has been for Black people for decades, some graduates will have an overpriced college degree without a commensurate job prospect

This is indeed a sad state of affairs for our best and brightest, the grandchildren of the baby boomers. It is said that “millennials,” as they are called, are the first generation that will be worse off than their parents. Most parents want their children to do better than they did, and most parents participate in that aspiration by putting a little money aside to help their children get off to a reasonable start in life. However, in today's economic climate, there is very little of that kind of help available from parents who are

struggling just to pay the rent and keep the lights on.

What can we do?

High on our agenda should be a demand made, to Congress and whoever is running for president, for student loan debt forgiveness. A strong, independent bloc of voters must go to candidates in both parties and make this demand. Keep in mind, however, as I have said before, a demand without power backing it up is just rhetoric. I think we have heard enough and had enough of empty words by some of our leaders to know

were told, lending was curtailed rather than expanded, and hundreds of thousands of folks are still homeless because there was no real bailout program for them.

The so-called American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, as of January 1, 2014, had paid out \$816.3 billion in tax benefits, grants, contracts, loans; and entitlements. Who got that money? In my neck of the woods, the folks who got the most were those who worked on the roads and expressways; of those contractors and workers, few if any were Black.

Georgia recently embarked on a \$1 billion-plus road improvement project, and even with 3.2 million Black folks in that state, the fourth highest in the nation, Black contractors and workers will not benefit as much as they should. Department of Transportation inclusion rules are based on Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Programs, in which White female businesses get a significant share of the contracts, and “front” companies rule the day.

So with all of the barriers facing our 2015 graduates, and the bleak outlook for improvement of their lot, the least we could do is bail them out of their student loans. Politicians said the banks were “too big to fail,” and I guess the bankers were “too big to jail.” They caught a huge break from George W. Bush and Obama. It's time for a break for Black and poor people now. Hey politicians, forgive student loans.