

Obama to college graduates: “No room for excuses”

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US President Barack Obama delivered the commencement address Sunday at Morehouse College, an all-male historically black college that was the alma mater of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Obama’s message was simple: young people, particularly African Americans, facing unemployment, skyrocketing student debt, and falling wages have no “room for excuses.”

“One of the things that all of you have learned over the last four years is there’s no longer any room for excuses,” Obama said. “In today’s hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil—many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did—all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned.”

This comes from an administration that bailed out major US banks to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars, with the Federal Reserve handing Wall Street \$85 billion every month. Obama has presided over one of the greatest upwards redistributions of wealth in human history, yet insists that no one gets anything they have not “earned.”

Giving expression to his own personal sentiments, in a “tough love” passage Obama declared, “Nobody cares how tough your upbringing was. Nobody cares if you suffered some discrimination.” Whatever the troubles facing young people, the situation today “pales in comparison to the hardship previous generations endured—and they overcame them.” For good measure, the president assured the assembled graduates that they were entering an “improving job market.”

Obama made these remarks as nearly 25 million people in the country are either unemployed or underemployed. Graduates are burdened under a mountain of debt, even as wages for young adults are falling faster than any other part of the population,

down by 6 percent in the past four years. The Obama administration’s government-sponsored restructuring of the auto industry set the tone, with wages of new-hires be slashed in half.

For African-Americans, 37.4 percent lived below the official poverty line in 2010, and the official unemployment rate is 13.2 percent—with the official figures vastly underestimating the scale of the jobs crisis. Over one million African-Americans are in jail, and nearly one in ten are behind bars or are being monitored on parole.

Obama, proposing nothing to address this crisis, resorts to blaming those who suffer from this social catastrophe. “If you stay hungry, if you keep hustling, if you keep on your grind and get other folks to do the same—nobody can stop you,” the president intoned. All the social ills are, presumably, a consequence of a failure to “hustle” sufficiently.

Obama inadvertently revealed the real conditions of life for working people when he recounted the life story of one of the students in the audience, Frederick Anderson, who “started his college career in Ohio, only to find out that his high school sweetheart back in Georgia was pregnant. So he came back and enrolled in Morehouse to be closer to her. Pretty soon, helping raise a newborn and working night shifts became too much, so he started taking business classes at a technical college instead—doing everything from delivering newspapers to buffing hospital floors to support his family.”

“And then he enrolled at Morehouse a second time,” Obama continued. “But even with a job, he couldn’t keep up with the cost of tuition. So after getting his degree from that technical school, this father of three decided to come back to Morehouse for a third time.”

That a young person should be unable to afford a

decent education and work nights at low-wage jobs just to support a family is seen by the multi-millionaire Obama not only acceptable, but as the ideal.

In his remarks, Obama sought to present himself as an archetype of the African-American working class experience, claiming that he owed his wealth and success entirely to hard work. “I might have been in prison. I might have been unemployed. I might not have been able to support a family,” he said. “And that motivates me.”

In fact, Obama was from very early on coddled by powerful social forces. A ruthless representative of the banks and the state apparatus, Obama personifies the way in which identity politics has been used to develop a highly privileged section of the black population, which has seen a fantastic increase in its wealth even as conditions for the vast majority of the working class of all races have been driven relentlessly backward.

Alluding to this history, Obama told his audience, “Your generation is uniquely poised for success unlike any generation of African Americans that came before it. Over the last 50 years... new doors of opportunity have swung open, and laws and hearts and minds have been changed to the point where someone who looks just like you can somehow come to serve as President of these United States of America.”

The ruling class responded to the mass social struggles during the civil rights period, and the urban uprisings of the late 1960s and early 1970s, by cultivating a layer of black corporate executives, black professionals, black politicians. As Obama spoke, an African-American emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, is, with the support of the federal government and both political parties, carrying out a ruthless assault on the predominantly African-American population of Detroit in order to pay off the city’s wealthy bondholders.

Obama’s remarks echoed a similar speech by Michelle Obama on Saturday, in which the first lady told a graduating class of high school seniors in Tennessee—where wages are among the lowest of any state in the country—that, “When something doesn’t go your way, you’ve just got to adjust.”

“You’ve got to dig deep and work like crazy, and that’s when you’ll find out what you’re really made of during those hard times,” she said. “Oprah was demoted from her first job as a news anchor. Now she doesn’t even need a last name.”

Prior to becoming the first lady, Michelle Obama served as the University of Chicago Hospital’s executive director for community affairs, making a \$273,618 annual salary, in addition to her income from sitting on the board of directors of a major Walmart supplier.

It is altogether telling of the social outlook of Michelle Obama that, to the tens of millions of young working class people looking for a way out of poverty and joblessness, she replies, as it were, “let them become Oprah.”



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