

President Barack Obama  
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But all these innovative programs and expanded opportunities will not, in and of themselves, make a difference if each of us, as parents and as community leaders, fail to do our part by encouraging excellence in our children. Government programs alone won't get our children to the Promised Land. We need a new mindset, a new set of attitudes - because one of the most durable and destructive legacies of discrimination is the way that we have internalized a sense of limitation; how so many in our community have come to expect so little from the world and from themselves.

We have to say to our children, Yes, if you're African American, the odds of growing up amid crime and gangs are higher. Yes, if you live in a poor neighborhood, you will face challenges that someone in a wealthy suburb does not have to face. But that's not a reason to get bad grades. That's not a reason to cut class. That's not a reason to give up on your education and drop out of school. No one has written your destiny for you. Your destiny is in your hands - you cannot forget that. That's what we have to teach all of our children. No excuses. No excuses.

You get that education, all those hardships will just make you stronger better able to compete.

To parents, we can't tell our kids to do well in school and then fail to support them when they get home. You can't just contract out parenting. For our kids to excel, we have to accept our own responsibility to help them learn. That means putting away the Xbox, putting our kids to bed at a reasonable hour. It means attending those parent-teacher conferences, and reading to our children, and helping them with their homework.

And, by the way, it means we need to be there for our neighbor's sons and daughters. We need to go back to the time, back to the day when parents saw somebody, saw some kid fooling around, and it wasn't your child, but they'll whoop you anyway. Or at least they'd tell your parents. That's the meaning of community. That's how we can reclaim the strength and the determination, the hopefulness that helped us come as far, helped us make a way out of no way.

It also means pushing our kids to set their sights higher. They might think they've got a pretty good jump shot or a pretty good flow, but our kids can't all aspire to be LeBron or Lil Wayne. I want them aspiring to be scientists and engineers, doctors and teachers, not just ballers and rappers. I want them aspiring to be a Supreme Court Justice. I want them aspiring to be President of the United States. I want their horizons to be limitless.

Don't tell them they can't do something. Don't feed our children with a sense of, that somehow, because of their race that they cannot achieve.