

Written by Kam Williams
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The NAACP's Annual Convention, which convened at the Hilton Hotel in New York July 11-16, was marked by many inspirational and uplifting speeches delivered by left-leaning luminaries like Speaker of the House US Rep. Nancy Pelosi; New York Gov. David Patterson; New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Harlem Congressman Charles Rangel; former Congressman Kweisi Mfume; New York Sens. Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand; New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine; US Reps. Gregory Meeks (NY) and John Conyers (MI), Senegal President Abdoulaye Wade; and Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack. Yes, there was even a token Republican in attendance, Party Chairman Michael Steele, who joked with the crowd that he had only been invited "to protect your tax-exempt status."

But the highlight of the 100-year-old civil rights organization's centennial celebration came on Thursday evening when Barack Obama arrived to address the appreciative audience. And the President did not disappoint, adopting more of a minister's than a politician's air during his half-hour sermon, eliciting such an enthusiastic response that at one point he departed from his prepared remarks to acknowledge that, "I got an 'Amen Corner' back there."

He began by paying tribute to the trailblazers who had paved the way for him, conceding "I stand here on the shoulders of giants," adding "I'm here to say thank you to those pioneers and thank you to the NAACP." He then reaffirmed that "Prejudice has no place in the U.S." before shifting to a self-help tone which sounded more like Booker T. Washington than the NAACP's founder W.E.B. Du Bois. For he said, "There's never been less discrimination in the United States than at any time in our history," as he focused on a good education as the means of making it in America.

"Our kids can't all aspire to be LeBron or Lil' Wayne," he warned. "They can't all be ballers and rappers." He said that their horizons should be limitless, offering as alternatives the hope that they might see themselves as growing up to become a doctor, a lawyer, or even the President of the United States.

President Obama addresses NAACP Convention: Well-received speech stresses education and no excuse

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Obama further indicated that there's "no better weapon than an education which can unlock a child's God-given potential." Bemoaning the fact that "over one-half of African American children are dropping out of school," he proceeded to build momentum via such familiar catchphrases as "No one has written your destiny for you" and "No excuses!" before closing with the ever-reliable "Yes we can!" which the satisfied congregation continued to chant in unison long after he had left the stage.

Perhaps American society has arrived at a post-racial point in our history, if we have elected a Black President who gets a standing ovation from members of the nation's leading civil rights organization for a fairly conservative speech essentially calling upon the Black community to pull itself up by its own bootstraps.

To see an excerpt of Obama's speech, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcir6VRq7P4>