

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Walker-Jones Education Campus
July 21, 2014

The President. Thank you, everybody. Give it up for Chris Paul. Everybody, have a seat. Chris was saying he was going to be nervous, but I'd seen all those State Farm ads, so I knew he could perform. [*Laughter*] Not to mention how he performs on the court. And I've gotten a chance to know Chris over the last several years, and his family, and he is just the kind of person that you want in a leadership position. We are very, very proud of him. And I'm so grateful that he agreed to participate in this.

Hello, everybody.

Audience members. Hello!

The President. How's all—how you all doing today?

Audience members. Doing good.

The President. Doing good? It is good to be at Walker-Jones. I want to thank all of you for being here. I want to thank the school for hosting us. I want to thank the outstanding Members of Congress who are here. And I want you all to know that I'm here for a simple reason, and that is, I want to hear from many of you, the young people who are here today.

I just had a chance to meet with a group of young people who are being mentored through a new program we started at the White House. In a few minutes, I'm going to have a chance to take some questions from some of the young people here today, give me a chance to hear from you about what your concerns are, what your dreams and hopes are, what your fears are, and how you think we may be able to help.

And the reason it's important for me to be here is because when I look out at some of the young men who are here, you're where I was 40—35 years ago. [*Laughter*] I was trying to do the math in my head. I'm not that old yet. And I've had a chance to talk to some young people in the past, and I always say that I see myself in the young men who are coming up now.

When I was in my teens, I didn't have a father in the house. It took me a while to realize that I was angry about that, and I acted out in some ways. I was raised by a single mom. We didn't have a lot in terms of wealth, although, we had a lot of love in the house, and my grandparents helped out. But despite their best efforts, sometimes, I made some bad choices. I didn't always take school as serious as I should have. I made excuses sometimes for misbehavior.

The only difference between me and extraordinarily talented young men that I see all across the country is, I was living in a pretty forgiving environment. So if I made a mistake, I often had a second chance, or I often had a third chance. And some of the costs of making mistakes, they weren't deadly. I wasn't going to end up shot. I wasn't going to end up in jail.

And as a consequence, for the last 5, 6, 10 years, I've constantly been thinking about, how can I make sure that I'm evening out the odds a little bit for other young men who could end up being a doctor or a lawyer or a Senator or an Attorney General or a Secretary of Education? What is it that we can do to create structures that give them support, that help them make

better choices, and that, when you do make a mistake, give you a hand up so you can recover and go ahead and move on to the next phase of your lives?

So that's why, earlier this year, we launched what we call "My Brother's Keepers." "My Brother's Keeper" isn't some new, big Government program. It's actually a team effort. It's all about a whole bunch of folks—educators, business leaders, faith leaders, foundations, government—all working together to give boys and young men of color the tools that they need to succeed and make sure that every young person can reach their potential. And so the reason that we're here today is to announce some of the pledges that have already been made, some of the commitments that have already been made by a series of institutions that just give you a sense of the kind of progress and excitement that we've seen since we launched this initiative.

Chris Paul was a hint of one of these big commitments. The NBA and its Players Association are joining others to recruit 25,000 new mentors and to work directly with educators and schools all across our countries. We are very proud of what the NBA is doing. And Adam Silver, the commissioner is here, as well as Chris, the Players Association president, and we want to thank them for their extraordinary involvement that they've made.

But it's not just the NBA that's already stepping up. Today we've got 60 of the country's largest school districts who are here today announcing new efforts to help boys and young men like you succeed. The Council of Great City Schools—these are some big city school superintendents—have done an extraordinary thing, pledging, making commitments to each other as well as their school districts and to their students and to parents that this is going to be a major focus for them. And we want to thank them for the great commitment that they are making.

We've got leaders from Silicon Valley and the Emerson Collective who are today launching a \$50 million competition to redesign high schools so that young people can learn in classrooms built for the 21st century and that—so that you know that the models that are out there of high schools that can help translate skills into successful careers, that we're going to be rebuilding those in some cases from the ground up. So we want to thank those leaders and Emerson Collective for the great work that they're doing. Give them a big round of applause.

We've got a bipartisan group of mayors today who are going to bring the ideas behind "My Brother's Keepers" to their cities. We've got the National Congress of American Indians who are going to do the same for young Native American boys and men. So we want to thank them for the outstanding work that they're doing.

And we've got organizations and companies like the College Board and AT&T, UBS, J.P. Morgan, City Foundation, and Discovery Communications who are making big commitments of their own to help like you—young people like you get ahead.

So these are just a few of the businesses and organizations and cities that are stepping up today. I'm confident that more and more are going to be joining. One of the things that we've discovered—a pleasant surprise—has been how invested and excited the folks who we've talked to have been about this initiative. People recognize that America will succeed if we are investing in our young people. And we also know that we've got to make sure that boys and young men of color are part of that success. We will not succeed unless you succeed. And we are so proud of the commitments that have already been made, but we're also very confident that we're going to see a lot more commitments in the weeks and months to come.

So thank you, everybody. And right now I want to take some questions. So—but first of all, give all the folks who are participating commitment, give them one last big round of applause. [Applause] All right.

Let's see if this mike is working. Testing, one, two three. Does that work? All right. And somebody is going to bring out my tea so that I don't get hoarse. Big Marvin. [Laughter]

White House Trip Director Marvin D. Nicholson, Jr. Yes, sir.

The President. Thank you. Marvin has the height for the NBA, but not the vertical. [Laughter] But he can hit a golf ball a long way.

So who wants to start off? What young person has got a question or a comment? What I really want to do is just have a conversation, because part of what we want the mayors who are here and the business leaders who are here, we want to give them a chance to hear directly from you. And I know it's kind of a public event and everybody is looking all serious, but try to pretend like there are no cameras here and that I'm not the President. [Laughter]

Yes, sir, this young man right here. But what we wanted you to do is stand up. We're going to bring a mike. I want you to introduce yourself, tell me where you're from, and then make your question or your comment.

President's Advice on Setting Goals

Q. Hello. Good afternoon. I'm Jamal Fripp. I'm from Central—[inaudible]. My question is, did you set goals for yourself when you were younger? Like—

The President. Well, did everybody hear the question? Did I set goals for myself when I was younger? Let me say, first of all, that I actually didn't set a lot of goals for myself when I was very young. As a—when I got to be about your age, a lot of my goals revolved around basketball, which were probably misplaced goals because I did not have Chris Paul's talent. [Laughter] But as I got older, so by the time I got to be a junior or senior in high school, I realized that I did need to go to college, and that required me to buckle down a little bit.

And then, when I got to college, my first 2 years, I was still kind of enjoying myself a little bit too much and was still a little too casual about my studies. And it wasn't probably until I was about 20 that something happened inside me where I really said, you know, if I want to be serious, if I want to make a contribution, if I want to be proud of myself looking back on my life, then I'm going to have to change how I do things.

And sometimes, initially, I didn't know how to do that. But that's where the goal-setting came in. Because you'd start small. I'd say to myself, all right, my goal is to read a certain number of books a month, or my goal is to boost my GPA in college this much, or my goal is to interact with my peers a little differently than I had been doing in terms of how often I went out, or—right? So it could just be simple goals initially, and over time, those goals became more ambitious.

And the truth is, I still set goals every day. Every morning, I've got a checklist of here are the things that I need to get done. And it starts off with big goals. So let's just take "My Brother's Keeper." My goal is to make sure that every young person in America, if they're putting in the effort, they can succeed, and they've got ladders of opportunity to take them where they want to go regardless of what their talents or interests are. So that's a big goal. That's a 40,000-foot goal.

But if I just stay there, I'm not going to get it done, right? So then, I've got to break it down into, well, what are the component parts of that? Well, number one, I've got to make sure the school system works well. So then I'm going to talk to my Secretary of Education, and I'm going to say, what are our goals this year in terms of improving whether it's early childhood education, or making sure that young people can read at grade level by the time they're in third grade, or what have you.

But then it's also, there's a criminal justice component to it, because I'm trying to figure out how do we get more young men into college and fewer of them into jail, which means that I've then got to talk to the Attorney General, Eric Holder, and I've got to say, what are our goals for trying to revamp how we think about the interaction between law enforcement and young men of color?

So I'll break it down into those parts. But that's still not at the best level, because now I've got to say, what's our specific plan to do it and what am I going to be doing this week, what am I going to be doing this month, and what am I going to be doing this year to get that done? And so you keep on breaking it down from the very general down to the specific. And ideally, what I'm producing then is every day, when I wake up, I've got a checklist of here are the specific things I'm going to do today to achieve my goal.

Now—but you don't get there right away. So you can't—if you decide—what do you want to be?

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. You want to be a lawyer. Okay. And what year are you in now in school?

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. You graduate—you're a senior this—so you're a rising senior. Okay, so your first goal is, you got to go to college to be a lawyer. So that means right now your focus should just be on, what do I need to do to get into the best college with the least debt when I graduate from college as possible? Right? That's going to be your top priority. [*Applause*] Right?

But then you can start breaking into different goals. You can start saying, what lawyers do I know where I could maybe have a summer internship at a law firm and how do I talk to that—how do I meet somebody who's a lawyer who can give me a sense of what it's like to be a lawyer? And I've got to think about what kind of law do I want to practice and what kind of classes should I take once I get to college to prepare me for law school? So there are a whole range of things that you can start breaking down into their component parts.

But if you don't set a target, it's just like—I'll probably end up using a lot of NBA analogies here today just because I've got a lot of ballers here. You can't make a shot if you don't aim. I mean, it's pretty straightforward. The first goal is to know where it is that you're trying to put the ball. And if you don't have a clear sense of direction, a clear objective, then it doesn't matter how much talent you have, you're not going to get there. All right?

It's a great question, though. All right, who else? Young man, who already tried to invite himself to Camp David. [*Laughter*] We were talking—we were doing this mentorship program—and he said, well, when am I going to get to come to Camp David? [*Laughter*] That's a good goal. It's a little unrealistic right now. [*Laughter*] But who knows? You keep on working on it. Go ahead.

Fatherhood

Q. [*Inaudible*]—and you said when you were younger your father always wasn't around. How did you learn how to become a good father?

The President. Well, that's a good question. It wasn't just that my father wasn't always around. I only met him for a month my entire life. He wasn't there otherwise. So I didn't know him at all until I was 10. He came for a month, and then, I never saw him again.

But I had this mom who just loved me a lot, and I had grandparents who loved me a lot. And to all the heroic single moms out there, we appreciate you for what you accomplish and what you do. Because she was going to school, and she was working and having to raise me and my sister, and my grandparents gave us a lot of help, but it was hard. It was hard on her. And she was young when she had me; she was 18.

And now I—the other day I was in Minnesota, and I saw a group of young teenage moms—

Audience member. Yay!

The President. That was the Minnesota superintendent of schools who just—[*laughter*]—we got—and I just looked at them, and I thought, well, you're just children. And I thought about my mother and how she ever managed that. It's unbelievable.

But to your question, I think that two things happened. One is the values my mother taught me, I thought to myself, well, those are values that any parent should have. So it doesn't matter whether you're the dad or the mom, loving your child, being responsible for your child, teaching them how to be honest and how to be responsible themselves and how to treat other people with kindness and how to respect themselves, but respect others, how to work hard—those weren't values that were just for moms to teach, those were values for dads to teach as well, right?

So some of it is me trying to remember what did my mom do for me and how can I do that for my daughters. And then, the second thing was just a commitment to being there, which is why part of the reason why this mentorship program is so important. Some of you have dads in your lives even if your parents are divorced, and that's great, because it's hard to replace a dad, and fathers can make this unbelievable contribution. For those who don't have that, having an adult in your life—and then for boys, especially, an adult male in their lives—just to talk to and to have an interaction with and to kind of model off of, even if sometimes, it's not that explicit but you're kind of watching folks and seeing, all right, how do they carry themselves, how do they treat other people, that makes a difference.

For me, though, it was just really important to be there. And one of the things you discover being a father is, you get out of it at least as much as you are putting into it. When I talk to young people who are thinking about parenthood or thinking about families, I try to describe, there is no greater joy than being in your children's lives and then seeing them turn out well, seeing them happy and succeeding and focused and just being good people. It's the single most important thing you do in your life. And I was lucky to—I think precisely because I didn't have that—to say to myself, I'm going to make sure that I experience that.

It also helps marrying a good woman. I should add that. [*Laughter*] So that always helps. So—[*applause*].

All right, who else? Just because that green is something, I've got to call on you. [*Laughter*] Just because that's an outfit right there. That looks sharp. [*Laughter*] All right, what's your name?

President's Advice on Dealing With Criticism/Building Self-Esteem

Q. My name is Corray Smith, and I'm from DC. And my question is, how do you cope with, like, judgment and, like, how people see you?

The President. Well, that's an interesting question. Because people do have a lot of judgment about me, don't they? [*Laughter*] That's a great question, yes. When you grow up, when you're young, it is natural to care a lot about what your peers think of you. That's just human. And there's nothing wrong with that. That's part of how young people get socialized, is they are looking at how people are responding to them and taking it in. And when they get positive reinforcement, they do more of that. And when they get negative reinforcement, they do less of that. And that's just how we are. We're social animals.

But I do think that as you get older, part of what you have to determine is what's important to you—who are you, how do you want to live, what are the principles that you abide by, what are the kind of fixed foundations, what's the north star that steers you—so that when things happen that aren't always according to plan and when you have tough times and when you are struggling, what is it that's going to keep you going and keep your bearings.

And I think through trial and error and mistakes and self-reflection, over time, I've sort of figured out who I am and what's important to me and what I care about. And I try to stay focused on that. And that can come about in a lot of different ways. Some people come at it through their faith and God centers them. And some people come at it through their work, and they determine, this is what I think is important in terms of my work. There are different paths to it, but at some point, to be a man or a woman, to be an adult, to be a full-grown person, you have to move beyond just what other people think and you have to make a determination about what do you believe in.

Not just what's your opinion any given day—because folks have opinions about everything, and I change my mind about issues. There's times where I think one way, and then I get more evidence, new information comes in, and I say, oh, maybe I wasn't right about that, let me rethink this. So there's nothing wrong with changing your mind. But that's different from losing your sense of who you are and what's important or just changing your mind because it's easier or expedient.

And what I try to do is be open minded to new facts, but stay pretty fixed in terms of what I think is important. I think, for example, it is really—this sounds corny—but I think it's really important to treat other people with kindness. So that's a basic principle that I've got. Now, I've got to translate that sometimes in very abstract ways. All right, well, what does that mean if you've got suffering children halfway across the world? What are my responsibilities to them and what—how does that translate into policy?

And sometimes, I've got tough choices because, on the one hand, I may want to help those children; on the other hand, I've got a bunch of young people I need to help here. And if I want to help those children, I may need to then deal with bad people who are hurting those kids, but that may involve the United States in the kind of conflicts that ultimately hurt some of our young men and women who I might have to send there. So there are complexities to it. It's hard. But I don't lose track of the fact that I think treating somebody with kindness, that's a core value of mine.

And then, I just don't watch TV. That's the other thing. [*Laughter*] That's—that also helps. That's not entirely true; I'm—I was teasing about that.

But I do think that one of the things, as you grow up, you start trying to figure out is who gives you constructive criticism because they're invested in the same things you are, but maybe can see some things you can't, versus folks who are just—what did somebody say—hating, somebody just hating, just haters. I won't go there, but—[laughter]—but people who maybe are providing less constructive criticism, where I can't really use it because no matter what I do, there may be something else that they're criticizing. The object of it is not to advance a goal.

And so one thing you should learn is, if somebody is being constructive in their criticism, usually they're not criticizing you, they're criticizing your actions and what you do and are giving you something specific. So if a coach is coaching Chris and just says, you're a buster, you can't play, that's not constructive criticism. If they say, Chris, right now you're dribbling too much, and you need to move the ball around because then five guys are going to touch it and we'll have more motion, that becomes constructive criticism. Right?

Well, that's true in your lives as well. So you can usually tell—if somebody is being constructive, they're telling you something specific that you can change, that you can test to see if it's going to make things better. And if they can't, if all they're saying is, you're not worth nothing, then that's probably not something that you want to pay a lot of attention to. Does that make sense? All right.

Young man right here.

White House Iftar Dinner

Q. Hi. My name is Wayne Rucker, and I'm assistant crew leader at PowerCorps PHL, and I'm from Philadelphia. And my question is, I heard about the iftar that you have at the White House. Any of our members—all of our members, we've got some of our members who are working in the sun, and they're fasting, and they're pushing through to—one of the initiatives is to make the city greener. We wanted to know if—I wanted to know if we could come out, if we were invited to the iftar at the White House.

The President. Well, maybe next year. I only do it once a year.

Q. Oh, okay.

The President. But we appreciate you. What we try to do—for those of you who aren't familiar, the iftar is the breaking of fast during the month of Ramadan, which is a holy time for those of the Muslim faith. In the same way that we do Christmas celebrations and Hanukkah celebrations, every faith, what we try to do is to recognize that what makes this country great is we may have different faiths, but we all come together as one American family.

And so we hosted a dinner just—was it last week? It was last week. I lose track of time these days, because this is what happens when you get older, young men, so—[laughter]. But next year, we'll see if we can have somebody from your organization. It was a wonderful dinner. The only problem is, is that in most areas where the Muslim faiths evolved, sunset is a lot earlier. When you start getting up north, these poor folks, it's 9 o'clock, they're starving. [Laughter] So it gets dark late.

But—yes, young man right here. Yes.

Q. My name is Vance—[inaudible]—I'm from the great State of Montana.

The President. It's a beautiful State.

Native American Culture/U.S. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Q. My question for you, Mr. President, is how is the United States Government helping American Indian people revitalize their language and culture? Because so many of our young men and boys don't know who they are because they've lost their culture and language, and the United States Government has tried so hard for the past 200 years to destroy that.

The President. Look, it's a great question. I—as you may be aware, I was at an Indian reservation in South Dakota recently. And I met with a group of young people—this is young men and women—wonderful young men and women. Just extraordinary. And I won't share with you exactly what they told me about their lives because it was private, and they really opened up. But I can tell you that it was heartbreaking to hear some of the stories, in part because you got a sense of what the history of the interaction between the United States Government and Native American peoples had done to the culture.

The Bible says, without vision, a people will perish. And what happens when you start losing your language and you start losing your culture and you don't have a sense of connections to ancestors and those memories that date back generations is, you start feeling adrift. And if you're living in a society that devalues that, then you start maybe devaluing yourself and internalizing some of those doubts.

Now, the good news is, what we started seeing—for example, at the powwow that existed at the reservation, there was a Lakota language school for little kids, starting very early. They were learning math and science and all the subjects, but they were also in an immersion school, essentially, in their own language to empower them.

And part of what I've been talking to Secretary Duncan about and Sally Jewell, who is the head of the Department of Interior, about is, how do we incorporate more effectively into the school curriculums, into social programs, et cetera, a recognition of the distinct cultures of these native peoples? Because if young people come up proud of their past, then they'll have a more powerful sense of direction going forward.

Now, one thing I have to just say about all this, though, is the world is what it is. It is a global world. We live in the 21st century. When I was up at the reservation, everybody had a cell phone. Everybody was—wanted to take selfies, like they always do. People were texting. And so you can't ignore what's happened. You can't just live in the past; you also have to look to the future, which means that all the young Native Americans are also going to have to learn math, science, computer sciences, engineering. There has to be an adaptation to what is increasingly a world culture, even as you are also then connecting it back to your roots. And sometimes, that's hard. Right?

And part of what's great about America is the way that we all take these different cultures and we make one culture out of it. And we shouldn't lose that. That is—we're not just a collection of Jews and Irish and Native American and Black, we're also Americans, so we have a common culture that binds us together. There's no contradiction between knowing your culture—the traditional cultures out of which your families come—but also being part of the larger culture.

And I think that one of the things—this is true not just for Native Americans, but it's also true for African Americans. Sometimes, African Americans, in communities where I've worked, there's the notion of "acting White," which sometimes is overstated, but there's an element of truth to it, where, okay, if boys are reading too much, then, well, why are you doing that? Or why are you speaking so properly? [*Laughter*] And the notion that there's some authentic way

of being Black, that if you're going to be Black, you have to act a certain way and wear a certain kind of clothes, that has to go. Because there are a whole bunch of different ways for African American men to be authentic.

Michelle, you look at Michelle, she grew up South Side. And her mom still lives in a neighborhood where gunshots go off, and it can be rough in—where Michelle grew up. But she'll talk proper when she needs to. Now, you also don't want to get on her wrong side, because she can translate that into a different vernacular. [*Laughter*]

But my point is, is that you don't have to act a certain way to be authentic. You just have to be who you are and to go back to the values that you care about: Are you kind? Are you responsible? Do you work hard? Can you delay gratification? Well, the same is true in the Native Americans' context. Right? We want to get past the idea that there's a certain way of being Native American. You need to know your culture, but you can also be part of this larger world.

And there are some cultures, frankly, who've done this better than others. I mean, I do think, for example, Jewish culture has been very powerful. If you look in this—in our society, the ability to transmit traditions through synagogues and the Torah and bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs so that people have a sense of 2,000 years of history, but everybody is still part of today and America and the world.

In many Asian American cultures, when they are part of—first-generation immigrant, they might have a whole separate set of classes on weekends or after school where they're learning their native tongues, the mother tongue, but they're still focused, when you're in school, this is how you're doing things.

So I think this is something that we have to spend some time thinking about: making sure that we understand there's a way of knowing your history, knowing your culture, being proud of it, using it as a strength, but not thinking that there's just one way of you then having to act. I think that's very important. All right.

Let me take a look here. How many more questions can I take, by the way? We got one or two? All right, the—one or two. Let's see, I'm just looking around. You all look good; everybody looks good. I just want to make sure that everybody gets a chance here. This young man in the corner here with the glasses.

Washington, DC, Statehood

Q. Hi. My name is—[*inaudible*]. I'm representing the Asian American League today. And my question, what is your opinion on DC statehood?

The President. On DC statehood? [*Laughter*]

Q. Yes.

The President. Well, that's—I'm in DC, so I'm for it. [*Laughter*] No, look, I think I've long believed that DC pays taxes—folks in DC pay taxes like everybody else. They contribute to the overall well-being of the country like everybody else. They should be represented like everybody else. And it's not as if Washington, DC, is not big enough compared to other States. There has been a long movement to get DC statehood, and I've been for it for quite some time. The politics of it end up being difficult to get it through Congress, but I think it's absolutely the right thing to do.

All right, that was an easy one. Who else has got something? Let's see here. Oh, see, I know that—it's tempting for me to call on a young woman. You know what, I'm going to call on just—maybe she has a perspective that nobody else has. This young lady right here. Didn't you have your hand up? Okay, I wanted to make sure. Go ahead.

Q. My name is Jakesha Gray, and my question was——

The President. Why don't you give her the mike because it's hard for her to reach—but now you're promising you'll give it up.

Q. I promise. [*Laughter*]

The President. Okay.

President Serving as Mentor

Q. Because you don't have any biological sons, what is the likelihood of you mentoring one of the young men in the programs?

The President. Well, it's not just one of the young men, we've got a whole mentor program that we're bringing—I'm going to be spending time with all of them because I'm going to spread myself a little thin with all of them.

The problem for just me taking one is, obviously, then all the other guys who are part of the program would be like, man, how did you get the President? [*Laughter*] So that would not be fair. Right? So I'm going to be spending time with all the guys who are mentoring in the White House.

I've got—these have both been short questions so I'm going to take a couple more. This young man in the blue shirt right here. This is one of our soon-to-be mentees at the White House.

President's Advice on Achieving Goals

Q. My name is Jonathan Loraine. I'm from Burke, Virginia. My question is, what advice can you give us so that we can achieve our goals?

The President. Well, I'm going to be giving you a whole bunch of advice, so this won't be an exhaustive list, but I'll just start with a couple of things. Number one is: Work. It's a pretty simple concept. There is nothing worthwhile where it just falls in your lap. I mean, maybe once in a while, somebody wins the lottery, but for the most part, everything you do that's worthwhile requires work.

And we've got—you guys are all too young to remember, but we've got—Otis Birdsong here used to have one of the best jumpers in the NBA. He looks like he could still play. Otis, how many shots, when you were playing, how many shots would you take just, I don't know—thousands of shots, right? I mean, if you talk to Chris or Steph Curry or Ray Allen or any great shooter, they are taking thousands of shots a day, so that when the time comes to make a big shot, it is just muscle memory. It's all burned in. They had talent already, but they've worked.

Now, it's interesting, you talk to young people about basketball and they kind of understand that. They get that when it comes to sports. But for some reason, you think the same doesn't apply to school. There is no reason why you should think that you will be a good reader if you don't read a lot, and read books that are hard, as opposed to just books that are easy. There is no reason to think that you will be good at mathematics if you are not doing math problems and pushing yourself and trying math problems that are hard, not just ones that are

easy. There's no reason why you think—you should think that you'll be well informed about world events if you aren't actually taking the time to read a newspaper once in a while and study what's happening around the world. So nothing you will do, if it's going to be worthwhile, doesn't involve some work.

And that includes, by the way, being good parents. Because I've got some friends who have still got young kids, and I'd forgotten—I was watching—my brother-in-law has got a—my nephews—I've got a 2-year-old and a 5-year-old. We call him Chairman of the Old Dads Club. He started again. And I'm watching them run around, and it's just exhausting. *[Laughter]* No, it's—small children are tiring. And being loving and attentive and staying focused on what's good for them and disciplining them when necessary and—that's hard work.

So work is number one. Number two is figure out what it is that you care about passionately, something that you think is important to you. Because if nothing is important to you, you're not going to put in the work.

Now, everybody has got different talents, and everybody has got different passions. And sometimes—part of the goal of "My Brother's Keeper" is to expose you to more things so that you don't think that the only thing you can be passionate about is what you're seeing on TV. And part of the problem with young men of color is oftentimes, the only thing they see to be passionate about is basketball or rap. And we want to make sure you get exposed to graphic design or you're exposed to engineering or you're exposed to being a lawyer so that maybe you will be passionate about that.

But the point is, those two things go hand in hand. If you find something you really care about, then that's also what you're going to really be willing to put a lot of work into, and that's what you'll end up being good at. So that's goal number two.

And goal number three—or third thing—and I've got a longer list, but here's the third thing that's pretty important: Understand that you will not achieve by yourself, which means that you've got to be able to invest in relationships with other people who you can learn from, who will support you, who you will support in turn. And if you learn how to be somebody who is a good teammate, who is connected and is thinking not just about yourself, but about others as well, and they then respond to that by wanting to help you because you've shown yourself to be reliable or trustworthy or having somebody else's back, you then build a network for yourself. And that increases your capacity to get things done.

There are a handful of people who can do things on their own. But even geniuses, even folks who are the best of the best at whatever they do, generally speaking, there—when you look at it you find out there's a whole bunch of people behind them that have allowed them to succeed the way that they have. And that's part of what "My Brother's Keeper" needs to be, is just one more tool that you have to expand your network of people who can support you, give you ideas, buck you up when you're down, open doors for you.

Of course, the flip side is, though, you can't just take, you've also got to give. So you've got to show enthusiasm. You've got to want to be involved. You've got to be curious. You're going to have to ask questions. If you have a mentor, you've got to show up on time. If somebody is putting time into you, you've got to show appreciation for it and do your hardest to achieve.

Same thing with teachers. I don't care how bad your school is, there's a teacher in there somewhere who, if you went up to her or him and said, I really want to learn, can you help me, that teacher would snatch you up in a second, because they want to feel like they're doing a good job. But if you're just sitting in the back of the class slouching and complaining about how

bad the school is, well, then you may be right to be angry that you don't have enough school supplies or the building is bad or what have you, but it's not going to help you. You're not going to learn.

So you've got to be able to give as well as to take. And if you learn that, those three things—work, have a passion about something, and learn how to give and take with people so that you're part of a broader team—that's a good place to start. Then I'll give you the other 20 things you've got to do. [*Laughter*] All right?

Everybody, I've got to get going. I want to say to everybody who's been involved—the school administrators who are here, the mayors who are here, the NBA, the companies, the mentors and businesses who have already set up mentorship programs, and most of all, the young people—I am very excited about this. I am proud of this. This is not something that is just a one-off that's going to happen one time and then we're done. This is a movement that we're trying to build over the next year, 5 years, 10 years, so that we can look back and say we were part of something that reversed some trends that we don't want to see.

We want fewer young men in jail, we want more of them in college. We want fewer young men on the streets, we want more in the boardrooms. We want everybody to have a chance to succeed in America. And it's possible if we've got the kind of team that we've set up today.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Christopher E. Paul, point guard, National Basketball Association's Los Angeles Clippers; Bernadeia H. Johnson, superintendent, Minneapolis Public Schools; Otis L. Birdsong, former shooting guard, NBA's Kansas City Kings; Wardell S. Curry II, point guard, NBA's Golden State Warriors; Walter R. Allen, Jr., shooting guard, NBA's Miami Heat. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng, brother-in-law Craig M. Robinson, and nephews Aaron L. and Austin Robinson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : "My Brother's Keeper" initiative, town hall meeting and question-and-answer session at Walker-Jones Education Campus.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Allen, Walter R., Jr.; Birdsong, Otis L.; Curry, Wardell S., II; Duncan, Arne; Holder, Eric H., Jr.; Jewell, Sarah M.R. "Sally"; Johnson, Bernadeia H.; Nicholson, Marvin D., Jr.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Paul, Christopher E.; Robinson, Aaron L.; Robinson, Austin; Robinson, Craig M.; Robinson, Marian; Silver, Adam; Soetoro-Ng, Maya.

Subjects: American Indians and Alaska Natives : Native language and culture education, strengthening efforts; Children and youth : Fathers, influence; District of Columbia : Statehood movement and political representation; District of Columbia : Walker-Jones Education Campus; Education : Science and math programs; Education : Teachers; Education : Technology and innovation, expansion efforts; Education, Department of : Secretary; Holidays and special observances : Ramadan; Immigration and naturalization : American "melting pot"; Interior, Department of : Secretary; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Sports : Basketball; White House Office : "My Brother's Keeper" initiative; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Trip Director.

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