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## Cradle-To-Power: From the Talented Tenth to My Brothers' Keeper

This past weekend, I was proud to graduate hundreds of African-American men. But earlier last week, I had to do what no college president should ever have to do. I helped to memorialize one of our students, Clay Cross, who simply traveled home to south Georgia for Mother's Day, and was killed as an innocent bystander when one group shot at another. Then, while we tried to absorb and understand that loss, news broke in Atlanta about a police search for two assailants who apparently shot and killed nine-month-old Kendarius Edwards, as part of a retaliatory plan. In both instances, the victims and key suspects are African-American and male.

By far, this nation's most pressing human resource crisis is the worsening condition of African-American boys and men. For too many of them, the statistics tell a mind-numbing, often tragic story that ends in powerlessness and often includes prison time.

To be sure, many contributory factors have delivered us to this sad state of affairs. They range from dysfunctional families where educational achievement is neither valued nor encouraged; misguided social policies that include few preventive or corrective measures; and a criminal justice system wherein the mass incarceration of men of color is embraced as if it is an inevitable "final solution."

I considered the data and circumstances driving this deficit narrative and I have concluded that Morehouse College and other purpose-driven institutions can play a new, more significant role, if we let history be our guide.

I recall the words of Henry Lyman Morehouse, the white Christian educator for whom our College is named. In 1896, he wrote, "an ordinary education may answer for nine men of mediocrity, but if this is all we offer the talented tenth man, we make a prodigious mistake." W.E.B. DuBois would later popularize this theory of the "talented tenth" as an imperative for black college graduates. Both men placed implicit faith in a rigorously trained and well-motivated corps of committed graduates, poised to uplift others and challenge the discriminatory barriers to American progress.

A century after Dr. Morehouse sought the best pathways for young black men, President Obama was compelled to formally address that very same dilemma. Earlier this year, he launched My Brother's Keeper, a broad-based collaboration designed to help young men of color to develop the competence and character to succeed in life.

At that announcement, President Obama was channeling Drs. Morehouse and DuBois when he called it an "effort to improve measurably the expected educational and life outcomes for and address the persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color." Obama then echoed strategies that have driven the work at Morehouse College for decades when he later emphasized mentoring, support networks, promoting deeper skills and knowledge, and launching new partnerships with the philanthropic community.

I believe that institutions like Morehouse College can play a decisive role in advancing a new cradle-to-power pipeline, thereby dismantling the so-called "cradle-to-prison" pipeline that currently plagues our society, and relegates so many African-American males to lives of hopeless marginality.

We must develop committed servant leaders who want to uplift others as authentic forces for good in the world. We must converge a larger army of informed change agents who are driven less by their narrow self-interests than by the prospect of empowering others.

Morehouse College must be the epicenter for teaching, training, research and policy reforms designed to systemically benefit the broader society. We can all help redirect the life trajectories of those who are too often helpless in the face of ignorance, violence and restricted opportunities.

The lost lives of Clay Cross and Kendarius Edwards underscore how our nation's safety, security and competitiveness are compromised with every instance of wasted potential and every senseless death.

And as Dr. Morehouse warned over a century ago, our failure to advance a meaningful educational response would be "a prodigious mistake."