

**Journal #3031**

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**1.21.14**

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**In the steps of ancestors: Eagle Wings dancers keep Great Basin tribal traditions alive** **RGJ**

Tradition runs deep for Lois Kane and her dancers, singers and drummers. It's in the songs of their people, the dances, the close family ties and the honoring of ancestors. And it's the continuation of those lifelines that give shape and purpose to the Eagle Wings Pageant Dance Group, an American Indian dance troupe Kane directs, dedicated to the culture of Great Basin tribes. The group's motto is 'Dancing in the steps of our ancestors.'

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**Joseph Galata**

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THE WHITE HOUSE Office of the Press Secretary January 16, 2014  
**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY AT COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY SUMMIT**  
South Court Auditorium \*Eisenhower Executive Office Building

MRS. OBAMA: Good morning. Thank you, everyone. (Applause.) Thank you so much. Thank you. You guys rest yourselves. Thank you so much.

It is really great to be here today with all of you. We have with us today college and university presidents; we have experts and advocates, and civic and business leaders. And I want to thank all of you for taking the time to be here today and for working every day to help young people pursue their education and build brighter futures for themselves and for our country.

And I'd also like us to give a really big hand to Troy for sharing that story. (Applause.) That's pretty powerful stuff, and presented so eloquently. I know yesterday I met Troy -- he was nervous. (Laughter.) I don't really know why you were nervous. You're pretty awesome.

MR. SIMON: Thank you.

MRS. OBAMA: Troy's story reminds us all of the limitless capacity that lies within all of our young people no matter where they come from or how much money they have. Troy is an example of why we all should care deeply about this issue.

And Troy, and millions of others like him, are why I care so much about this issue, and why in the coming years I'm going to be spending more and more of my time focusing on education. Because as everyone here knows, education is the key to success for so many kids. And my goal specifically is to reach out directly to young people and encourage them to take charge of their futures and complete an education beyond high school. And I'm doing this because so often when we talk about education, we talk about our young people and what we need to do for them. We talk about the programs we need to create for them, about the resources we need to devote to them.

But we must remember that education is a two-way bargain. And while there is so much more we must do for our kids, at the end of the day, as Troy described, the person who has the most say over whether or not a student succeeds is the student him or herself. Ultimately, they are the ones sitting in that classroom. They're the ones who have to set goals for themselves and work hard to achieve those goals every single day.

So my hope is that with this new effort, that instead of talking about our kids, we talk with our kids. I want to hear what's going on in

their lives. I want to inspire them to step up and commit to their education so they can have opportunities they never even dreamed of. I'm doing this because that story of opportunity through education is the story of my life, and I want them to know that it can be their story, too -- but only if they devote themselves to continuing their education past high school.

And for many students, that might mean attending a college or university like the ones many of you represent. For others, it might mean choosing a community college. It might mean pursuing short-term professional training. But no matter what they do, I want to make sure that students believe that they have what it takes to succeed beyond high school. That's going to be my message to young people.

But here's the thing: I know that that message alone isn't enough. Like I said, this is a two-way street, and that means we all have to step up. Because make no mistake about it, these kids are smart. They will notice if we're not holding up our end of the bargain. They will notice if we tell them about applying for college or financial aid, but then no one is there to help them choose the right school or fill out the right forms. They will notice if we tell them that they're good enough to graduate from college, but then no college asks them to apply, no college invites them to visit their campus.

And so we've got to re-commit ourselves to helping these kids pursue their education. And as you discussed in your first panel today, one of the first steps is getting more underserved young people onto college campuses. The fact is that right now we are missing out on so much potential because so many promising young people -- young people like Troy who have the talent it takes to succeed -- simply don't believe that college can be a reality for them. Too many of them are falling through the cracks, and all of you know that all too well.

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And that's why so many of you are already finding new ways to reach out to the underserved students in your communities. You're helping them navigate the financial aid and college admissions process, and you're helping them find schools that match their abilities and interests. And I know from my own experience just how important all of that work is that you're doing.

See, the truth is that if Princeton hadn't found my brother as a basketball recruit, and if I hadn't seen that he could succeed on a campus like that, it never would have occurred to me to apply to that school -- never. And I know that there are so many kids out there just like me -- kids who have a world of potential, but maybe their parents never went to college or maybe they've never been encouraged to believe they could succeed there.

And so that means it's our job to find those kids. It's our job to help them understand their potential and then get them enrolled in a college that can help them meet their needs. But then we all know that just getting into school is only half the story, because once students are there, they have got to graduate. And that's not always easy, especially given what many of these kids are dealing with when they get to campus.

Just think about it. You just heard a snippet from Troy. Just to make it to college, these kids have already overcome so much -- neighborhoods riddled with crime and drugs, moms and dads who weren't around, too many nights when they had to go to bed hungry. But as I tell these kids when I talk to them, we can't think about those experiences that they've had as weaknesses -- just the opposite. They're actually strengths.

In facing and overcoming these challenges, these kids have developed skills like grit and resilience that many of their peers will never be able to compete with -- never. And when they get out in the world, those are the exact skills they will need to succeed. And they will succeed.

But imagine how hard it is to realize that when you first get to college. You're in a whole new world. You might have trouble making friends because you don't see any peers who come from a background like yours. You might be worried about paying for classes, and food, and room and board because you have never had to set your own budget before. You might be feeling guilty when you call home because Mom and Dad are wondering why you didn't get a job so you could help support their family. Those are the kinds of obstacles these kids are facing right from day one.

But let's be clear -- all of that isn't just a challenge for them. It's a challenge for folks like us, who are committed to helping them succeed. And make no mistake about it, that is our mission -- not simply giving speeches or raising money or hosting conferences, but to take real, meaningful action that will help our young people get into college, and more importantly, actually get their degree.

And here's the good news: Time and again you all have shown that you have the experience, the passion and the resources to help these young people thrive. For example, in recent decades, you've realized that students from across the socioeconomic spectrum have been coming to campus with more and more issues like eating disorders and learning disabilities, emotional challenges like depression and anxiety, and so much more. And luckily, you all have not shied away from these issues. I've seen it. I worked at a university. And you haven't said, these aren't our problems; we're a university, not a hospital or a counseling center. No, you've stepped up.

And while there's still work left to do on these issues, you're working every day to support these kids through treatment programs and outreach initiatives and support groups, because you know that these issues have a huge impact on whether students can learn and succeed at your school. So now, as you begin to see more and more underserved students on your campuses, we need you to direct that same energy and determination toward helping these kids face their unique challenges.

Now, fortunately, you've already got the expertise you need to address these issues. And simply by building on what you're already doing best, you can make real differences for these kids. And that's what so many of you are doing with commitments you've made here at this summit.

For example, every school offers financial aid services, but listen to what the University of Minnesota is doing. They're committing to expand those services to include financial literacy programs to help students and their families manage the costs of college. And every school has advisors who desperately want their students to succeed. Oregon Tech is committing to set up a text message program so that these advisors can connect more easily with students who need some extra encouragement or academic support.

And every college has orientation programs or learning communities to help students transition to college. And many of the schools here today are supplementing those programs by partnering with organizations like the Posse Foundation so that underserved students can connect and build a social network before they even step foot on campus. And those were the types of resources that helped a kid like me not just survive but thrive at a school like Princeton.

When I first arrived at school as a first-generation college student, I didn't know anyone on campus except my brother. I didn't know how to pick the right classes or find the right buildings. I didn't even bring the right size sheets for my dorm room bed. (Laughter.) I didn't realize those beds were so long. (Laughter.) So I was a little overwhelmed and a little isolated.

But then I had an opportunity to participate in a three-week, on-campus orientation program that helped me get a feel for the rhythm of college life. And once school started, I discovered the campus cultural center, the Third World Center, where I found students and staff who came from families and communities that were similar to my own. And they understood what I was going through. They were there to listen when I was feeling frustrated. They were there to answer the questions I was too embarrassed to ask anyone else.

And if it weren't for those resources and the friends and the mentors, I honestly don't know how I would have made it through college. But instead, I graduated at the top of my class, I went to law school -- and you know the rest. (Laughter.) So whether it's aligning with an organization like Posse or offering a new advising or mentoring program, or creating a central space where students can connect with one another, you all can take simple steps that can determine whether these kids give up and drop out, or step up and thrive.

And that's not just good for these young people, it's good for your schools -- because if you embrace and empower these students, and if you make sure they have good campus experiences, then they're going to stay engaged with your school for decades after they graduate. They will be dressed up in

school colors at homecoming games. They'll be asking to serve on your committees and advisory boards. And they'll be doing their part when fundraising season rolls around. (Laughter.)

So believe me, these will be some of the best alumni you could possibly ask for, because after everything these kids will have overcome to get into college and get through college, believe me, they will have all the skills they need to run our businesses and our labs, and to teach in our classrooms, and to lead our communities.

Just look at me, and look at Troy and the countless success stories from the organizations and schools represented here in this room. That's how we will win, this country. We will win by tapping the full potential of all of our young people so that we can grow our economy and move this country forward. And let me tell you that is something that my husband understands deeply, because his life story, just like mine, is rooted in education as well. And as President, that is what drives him every single day -- his goal of expanding opportunity to millions of Americans who are striving to build better futures for themselves, for their families and for our country, as well.

So now it is my pleasure to introduce my husband, the President of the United States, Barack Obama. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Welcome to the White House, everybody. And let me begin by thanking Troy and sharing his remarkable story. I could not be more inspired by what he's accomplished and can't wait to see what he's going to accomplish in the future.

My wife -- it's hard to speak after her. (Laughter and applause.) We were in the back, and Gene Sperling, who did extraordinary work putting this whole summit together, said, "Everybody is so excited that Michelle is here." (Laughter.) And I said, well, what about me? (Laughter.) But you should be excited, her being here, because she brings a passion and a body of experience and a passion to this issue that is extraordinary. And I couldn't be prouder of the work she's already done and the work I know that she's going to keep on doing around these issues.

She did leave one thing out of her speech, and that is it's her birthday tomorrow. (Applause.) So I want everybody to just keep that in mind.

Now, we are here for one purpose: We want to make sure more young people have the chance to earn a higher education. And in the 21st century economy, we all understand it's never been more important.

The good news is, is that our economy is steadily growing and strengthening after the worst recession in a generation. So we've created more than 8 million new jobs. Manufacturing is growing, led by a booming auto industry. Thanks to some key public investments in advances like affordable energy and research and development, what we've seen is not only an energy revolution in this country that bodes well for our future, but in areas like health care, for example, we've slowed the growth of health care costs in ways that a lot of people wouldn't have anticipated as recently as five or ten years ago.

So there are a lot of good things going on in the economy. And businesses are starting to invest. In fact, what we're seeing are businesses overseas starting to say, instead of outsourcing, let's insource back into the U.S.

All that bodes well for our future. Here's the thing, though: We don't grow just for the sake of growth. We grow so that it translates into a growing middle class, people getting jobs, people being able to support their families, and people being able to pass something on to the next generation. We want to restore the essential promise of opportunity and upward mobility that's at the heart of America -- the notion that if you work hard, you can get ahead, you can improve your situation in life, you can make something of yourself. The same essential story that Troy so eloquently told about himself.

And the fact is it's been getting harder to do that for a lot of people. It is harder for folks to start in one place and move up that ladder -- and that was true long before the recession hit. And that's why I've said that in 2014, we have to consider this a year of action, not just to grow the economy, not just to increase GDP, not just to make sure that corporations are profitable and the stock market is doing well and the financial system is stable. We've also got to make sure that that growth is broad-based and that everybody has a chance to access that growth and take advantage of it. We've got to make sure that we're creating new jobs and that the wages and benefits that go along with those jobs can support a family. We have to make sure that there are new ladders of opportunity into the middle class, and that those ladders -- the rungs on those ladders are solid and accessible for more people.

Now, I'm going to be working with Congress where I can to accomplish this, but I'm also going to act on my own if Congress is deadlocked. I've got a pen to take executive actions where Congress won't, and I've got a telephone to rally folks around the country on this mission.

And today is a great example of how, without a whole bunch of new legislation, we can advance this agenda. We've got philanthropists and business leaders here; we've got leaders of innovative non-for-profits; we've got college presidents -- from state universities and historically black colleges to Ivy League universities and community colleges. And today, more than 100 colleges and 40 organizations are announcing new commitments to help more young people not only go to, but graduate from college. And that's an extraordinary accomplishment, and we didn't pass a bill to do it.

Everybody here is participating, I believe, because you know that college graduation has never been more valuable than it is today. Unemployment for Americans with a college degree is more than a third lower than the national average. Incomes -- twice as high as those without a high school diploma. College is not the only path to success. We've got to make sure that more Americans of all age are getting the skills that they need to access the jobs that are out there right now. But more than ever, a college degree is the surest path to a stable, middle-class life.

And higher education speaks to something more than that. The premise that we're all created equal is the opening line in our American story. And we don't promise equal outcomes; we've strived to deliver equal opportunity -- the idea that success does not depend on being born into wealth or privilege, it depends on effort and merit. You can be born into nothing and work your way into something extraordinary. And to a kid that goes to

college, maybe like Michelle, the first in his or her family, that means everything.



And the fact is, is if we hadn't made a commitment as a country to send more of our people to college, Michelle, me, maybe a few of you would not be here today. My grandfather wasn't rich, but when he came home from the war he got the chance to study on the GI Bill. I grew up with a single mom. She had me when she was 18 years old. There are a lot of circumstances where that might have waylaid her education for good. But there were structures in place that allowed her then to go on and get a PhD. Michelle's dad was a shift worker at the city water plant; mom worked as a secretary. They didn't go to college. But there were structures in place that allowed Michelle to take advantage of those opportunities.

As Michelle mentioned, our parents and grandparents made sure we knew that we'd have to work for it, that nobody was going to hand us something, that education was not a passive enterprise -- you just tip your head over and somebody pours education into your ear.

(Laughter.) You've got to work for it. And I've told the story of my mother -- when I was living overseas, she'd wake me up before dawn to do correspondence courses in English before I went to the other school. I wasn't that happy about it. (Laughter.) But with that hard work -- but also with scholarships, also with student loans, and with support programs in place -- we were able to go to some of the best colleges in the country even though we didn't have a lot of money. Every child in America should have the same chance.

So over the last five years, we've worked hard in a variety of ways to improve these mechanisms to get young people where they need to be and to knock down barriers that are preventing them from getting better prepared for the economies that they're going to face. We've called for clearer, higher standards in our schools -- and 45 states and the District of Columbia have answered that call so far. We've set a goal of training 100,000 new math and science teachers over the next 10 years, and the private sector has already



committed to help train 40,000. We've taken new steps to help students stay in school, and today the high school dropout rate is the lowest it has been in 40 years -- something that's rarely advertised. The dropout rate among Hispanic students, by the way, has been cut in half over the last decade.

But we still have to hire more good teachers and pay them better. We still have to do more training and development, and ensure that the curriculums are ones that maximize the chances for student success. When young people are properly prepared in high school, we've got to make sure that they can afford to go to college, so we took on a student loan system that was giving billions of dollars of taxpayer dollars to big banks and we said, let's give that money directly to students. As a consequence, we were able to double the grant aid that goes to millions of students. And today, more young people are earning college degrees than ever before.

So we've made progress there, but as I've discussed with some of you, we're still going to have to make sure that rising tuition doesn't price the middle class out of a college education. The government is not going to be able to continually subsidize a system in which higher education inflation is going up faster than health care inflation. So I've laid out a plan to bring down costs and make sure that students are not saddled with debt before they even start out in life.

Even after all these steps that we've taken over the last five years, we still have a long way to go to unlock the doors of higher education to more Americans and especially lower-income Americans. We're going to have to make sure they're ready to walk through those doors. The added value of a college diploma has nearly doubled since Michelle and I were undergraduates. Unfortunately, today only 30 percent of low-income students enroll in college right after high school and, far worse, by their mid-twenties only 9 percent earn a bachelor's degree.

So if we as a nation can expand opportunity and reach out to those young people and help them not just go to college but graduate from college or university, it could have a transformative effect. There is this huge cohort of talent that we're not tapping.

Now, what this meeting today tells me is we've got dedicated citizens across the country who are ready to stand up and meet this challenge. And what I want to really do is highlight some of the commitments that have been made here today. So we know that not enough low-income students are taking the steps required to prepare for college. That's why I'm glad the University of Chicago, my neighbor, and the place where Michelle and I both worked in the past, is announcing a \$10 million College Success Initiative that will reach 10,000 high schools over the next five years. It's why iMentor, a mentoring program that began 15 years ago with just 49 students in the South Bronx, has committed to matching 20,000 new students with mentoring in more than 20 states over the next five years.

We also know that too many students don't apply to the schools that are right for them. They may sometimes underestimate where they could succeed, where they could go. There may be a mismatch in terms of what their aspirations are and the nature of what's offered at the school that's close by. And they kind of assume, well, that's my only option. So UVA, for example, is going experiment with new ways to contact high-achieving, low-income students directly and encourage them to apply. Organizations like the College Board are going to work with colleges to make it easier for students to apply to more schools for free.

I know sometimes for those of you in university administrations, the perception may be that \$100 application fees is not a big deal. But for a lot of these students, that's enough of a barrier that they just don't end up applying.

Number three, we know that when it comes to college advising, and preparing for tests like the ACT and the SAT, low-income kids are not on a level playing field. We call these standardized tests -- they're not standardized. Malia and Sasha, by the time they're in seventh grade at Sidwell School here, are already getting all kinds of advice and this and that and the other. The degree of preparation that many of our kids here are getting in advance of actually taking this test tilts the playing field. It's not fair. And it's gotten worse.

I was telling Michelle, when I was taking the SAT I just barely remembered to bring a pencil. I mean, that's how much preparation I did. (Laughter.) But the truth of the matter is, is that we don't have a level playing field when it comes to so-called standardized tests. So we've got a young man here today named Lawrence Harris who knows this better than most. Lawrence went to the University of Georgia, and like a lot of first-generation college students it wasn't easy for him. He had to take remedial classes. He had to work two part-time jobs to make ends meet. At one point, he had to leave school for a year while he helped support his mom and his baby brother. Those are the kinds of just day-to-day challenges that a lot of these young people with enormous talent are having to overcome. Now, he stuck with it. He graduated.

But now he's giving back. He's made it his mission to help other young people like him graduate, as a college advisor at Clarke Central High School in Athens, Georgia. And today the National College Advising Corps, the program that placed Lawrence in Clarke Central, is announcing plans to add 129 more advisors who will serve more than 80,000 students over the next three years.

Finally, we know that once low-income students arrive on campus -- Michelle I think spoke eloquently to her own personal experience on this -- they often learn that even if they were at the top of their high school class, they still have a lot of catching up to do with respect to some of their peers in the classroom. Bunker Hill Community College is addressing this by giving more incoming students the chance to start catching up over the summer before their freshman year. And we've got 22 states and the District of Columbia who have joined together in a commitment to dramatically increase the number of students who complete college-level math and English their first year.

So these are just a sampling of the more than 100 commitments that your organizations and colleges are making here today. And that's an extraordinary first step. But we've got more colleges and universities than this around the country. We've got more business leaders around the country and philanthropies around the country. And so we have to think of this as just the beginning; we want to do something like this again, and we want even more colleges and universities and businesses and non-for-profits to take part.

For folks who are watching this who were not able be here today, we want you here next time. Start thinking about your commitments now. We want you to join us. For those who were able to make commitments today, I want to

thank you for doing your part to make better the life of our country -- because what you're doing here today means that there are a bunch of young people, like Troy and like Michelle and like me, who suddenly may be able to see a whole new world open up before -- that they didn't realize was there.

So I'll end with a great story that I think speaks to this. There's a former teacher here today named Nick Ehrmann. Where's Nick? So here's Nick right here. Five years ago, Nick founded a New York City nonprofit called Blue Engine, and they recruit recent college graduates to work as teaching assistants in public high schools that serve low-income communities, teaming up to help students build the skills they need to enter college ready for college.

The first group of students to work with those teaching assistants are seniors now. One of them, Estiven Rodriguez, who also is here today -- where is he? There he is -- good-looking, young guy right here. (Laughter.) Could not speak a word of English when he moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic at the age of nine. Didn't speak much more English by the time he entered sixth grade.

Today, with the support of a tightly knit school community, he's one of the top students in his senior class at Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School, or WHEELS. Last month, he and his classmates put on their WHEELS sweatshirts, unfurled a banner, waved flags and marched down the streets of Washington Heights in New York City through cheering crowds. You would have thought it was the Macy's parade. (Laughter.) But the crowds on the sidewalk were parents and teachers and neighbors. The flags were college pennants. The march was to the post office, where they mailed in their college applications. (Applause.) And Estiven just heard back -- this son of a factory worker who didn't speak much English just six years ago won a competitive scholarship to attend Dickinson College this fall. (Applause.)

So everywhere you go you've got stories like Estiven's and you've got stories like Troy's. But we don't want these to be the exceptions. We want these to be the rule. That's what we owe our young people and that's what we owe this country. We all have a stake in restoring that fundamental American idea that says: It doesn't matter where you start, what matters is where you end up. And as parents and as teachers, and as business and philanthropic and political leaders -- and as citizens -- we've all got a role to play.

So I'm going to spend the next three years as President playing mine. And I look forward to working with you on the same team to make this happen. Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

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***Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shores, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles of racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or to feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it." ~MLK***