

Védrine's speech

The Haitian Multi-Service Center 19th graduation

Speech by guest speaker, E. W. Védrine*

(Boston, Massachusetts- June 9, 2007)

*Distinguished guests,
Administrators,
Teachers,
Staff of Haitian Multi-Service Center,
Parents,
Friends of the graduates,
And graduates*

It is quite an honor for me today for having chosen me as the guest speaker of the 19th graduation of Haitian Multi-Service Center. Immediately after Mr. Dulson Brunace contacted me to see if I could volunteer to be your guest speaker of today's commencement, my answer to him was, "yes" without scratching my head.

To the graduates, I want to say congratulations for having crossed one of the bridges in your life, and one that deals with education. I want to congratulate you for your perseverance and hard work enabling you to reach one of the most important goals on your list.

Here, in the United States, often times at graduation we hear the word "commencement" or *kòmansman* in our Creole language. So, we don't have problem understanding these cognates or related words. In this sense, the certificate that you are going to receive today should not mean the "end" of education to you, but rather the beginning. So, you still have more miles to go since knowledge is infinite; there is no end to it. Every day, we learn something new at the University of life where all of us are both students and teachers.

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I take this great opportunity to congratulate the graduates and everyone who was supporting them in reaching today's goal; first I would like to mention the teachers of the center. When saying "graduation is commencement", we can also see it as a form of *renaissance* (something new, a rebirth) or a new step that one has climbed in life. So, we already imagine the joy in your heart today for such an accomplishment, a whole reward for your hard work at this center and that you are now ready to move on, ready to climb a higher step.

In moving on to this higher step, some of us may see it as a key to open works' doors; some may see it as an opportunity to move forward intellectually. But regardless of the interpretation of your certificate today, I want to congratulate you again for this great achievement in life. I am also taking this opportunity to remind you not to forget about your duty *vis-à-vis* your community here in the Greater Boston and Haiti. Yes, it is important to remind you of your community in terms of your responsibility to try to bring your own contribution because the certificate you will soon receive is like a torch (or what we call in Creole, *flanbo*) in your hand. When having a torch, it's purpose is to light. So, each graduate is going to have a torch in their hand.

People use a torch when it is dark; they use it for lighting. And first of all, we see Haitian Multi-Service Center as the main center that distributes these lighting tools because its role is to prepare people of the community and today, you are among those people who have benefited from the work it has been doing over twenty years in our community of the Greater Boston. So,

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with this torch in your hand today, besides your main goal to find a better job, to move forward in school and to live better in the American Society don't forget to think about your contribution to help your community here, other Haitians in need (one way or another) and also, don't forget to continue supporting Haitian Multi-Service Center the way you can. This educational center is your house, so always make yourself comfortable at home. Don't abandon it after receiving your diploma today. Keep in touch with its administrators, teachers, and staffs because the center has also become part of your family in life.

I urge you to think about all the problems that our community has been facing and of the help you can provide for some improvement. Because today, you have a torch in your hand, one that is lit to shine. People who are in the dark will benefit from its illumination. That is, the knowledge you have acquired from the Haitian Multi-Service Center will always find a spot or place somehow in our community.

I also want to tell you that it is the moment to think about Haiti – your native country. Think about what you can do with your knowledge to help Haiti. Our mother land needs a piece of it. So, think of all possible ways that Haiti can benefit from that knowledge (it can be through some of your advice, your participation in the regional organizations in Diaspora to help Haiti /or the organizations of your local region in terms of what you can do while in here, a country where you have so many opportunities).

We should be also proud of our accomplishment. Nothing wrong with that. But on top of it, we should be more proud when doing something that our

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community in Diaspora and the mother country, Haiti can benefit from. So, in all that you can do in your capacity, forget not Haiti's needs and her suffering, forget not millions of Haitians in need not only in Haiti but as well as in her Diaspora.

In closing, we have the privilege of living in today's greatest country of the world (the United States) and in the two greatest centuries: the 20th and 21st. So far, we have seen it all, but at the same time our community is need. We still have many problems going on in our native land and because of all the opportunities that many of us are enjoying here, we tend to forget those in need (whether they are part of our local community or back home in Haiti). So, hold on tight (*kenbe la!*).

Again, I congratulate you and the teachers, administrators and staff who were always there supporting to enable you to cross one of the major hurdles in life. Your real challenge to share with your community the knowledge that you have acquired from the Haitian Multi-Service Center starts today and with the help of God and the wisdom you'll be asking from him, certainly you will be able to move forward in crossing more important bridges in your life in order to meet your goals and also to help your community in return.

Thank you! May God bless you. God, bless America!

*Emmanuel W. Védrine: Haitian-American author and educator. Founder of *E. W. Védrine Creole Project* and *Haiti's Super Web Directory*.