

# Cornel West Speaks on Politics, Education, Life

Contributed by Breanna Paul -- Black College Wire  
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"Look beyond the words in the book."

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Students, faculty, staff and citizens of Baton Rouge and surrounding areas gathered recently in the Royal Cotillion Ballroom of the Smith-Brown Memorial Union on Southern University's campus hear Dr. Cornel West speak as a part of the 2009-2010 Chancellor's Lecture Series. West is a professor at Princeton University in the Center for African-American Studies and the department of religion. Not many people in the audience knew that West was kicked out of school in third grade. He refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. "My uncle was lynched and then wrapped in the flag," West recalled. He credits the power of love in the West family. "They provided a positive outlook for the rage instilled in me."

West spoke of Jim Crow laws and their negative effects on the African-American community. "Jim Crow laws are a form of American terrorism," West said. "This made Black people feel less beautiful and intelligent and eventually we disrespected ourselves."

Throughout his lecture, West spoke of paideia. Paideia is Greek for education and instruction. "Students go to school and are still not educated," West said. He also called for soul transformation. "Students need to look beyond the words in the book and understand the true philosophy behind them."

West challenged each generation to "Lift Every Voice." "People need to find their own voice and not be an echo and be original," West said. He related this back to modern music and how some artists are copying from the greats such as Duke Ellington and Nina Simone.

West also spoke on the rise of greed in the United States since the presidency of Ronald Reagan, even in churches. "In some churches, you see an ATM before you see a cross," West said. He also mentioned how the election of Barack Obama has ended the era of Ronald Reagan. "The era of Barack Obama has brought on empowerment of the everyday and ordinary person."

West also talked about the national healthcare plan proposed by President Obama. "This should not even be negotiable, since it is a public option. The pharmacists and insurance companies would actually benefit from the plan," West said. He also noted the hypocrisy of the Reagan era.

"They want individuals to help themselves but they are not offered the means, due to the 'rich get richer' mindset that the United States government runs by. This makes welfare seemed frowned upon," West said.

In order to make the appearance, West took time out from his book tour for "Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, a Memoir." West is author of numerous other books including the popular "Race Matters" (1994).

The podcast of West's lecture will be available on [www.southerndigest.com](http://www.southerndigest.com).

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Breanna Paul writes for The Southern Digest, the Southern University Baton Rouge student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.