

**Jesse Williams Acceptance Speech for the  
BET Awards Humanitarian Award  
June 26, 2016**



Image: Black Entertainment Television

“Peace. Peace. Thank you Debra. Thank you, Nate Parker. Thank you, Harry and Debbie Allen, for participating in that. Before we get into it, I just want to say I brought my parents out tonight — I just want to thank them for being here and teaching me to focus on comprehension over career. They made sure I learned what the schools were afraid to teach us. And also, thank you to my amazing wife for changing my life.”

“Now, this award, this is not for me. This is for the real organizers all over the country. The activists, the civil rights attorneys, the struggling parents, the families, the teachers, the students that are realizing that a system built to divide and impoverish and destroy us cannot stand if we do. All right? It’s kind of basic mathematics. The more we learn about who we are and how we got here, the more we will mobilize.”

“Now, this is also in particular for the black women in particular who have spent their lifetimes dedicated to nurturing everyone before themselves. We can and will do better for you.”

“Now, what we’ve been doing is looking at the data and we know that police somehow manage to deescalate, disarm and not kill white people every day. So what’s going to happen is we’re going to have equal rights and justice in our own country or we will restructure their function in ours.

“Now, [standing ovation] I got more, y’all.”

“Yesterday would have been young Tamir Rice’s 14th birthday. So, I don’t want to hear any more about how far we’ve come when paid public servants can pull a drive-by on a 12-year-old playing alone in a park in broad daylight, killing him on television and then going home to make a sandwich.”

“Tell Rekia Boyd how it’s so much better to live in 2012, than it is to live in 1612 or 1712. Tell that to Eric Garner. Tell that to Sandra Bland. Tell that to Darrien Hunt.”

“Now, the thing is, though, all of us in here getting money that alone isn’t going to stop this. All right? Now dedicating our lives to getting money just to give it right back. To put someone’s brand on our body

when we spent centuries praying with brands on our bodies and now we pray to get paid with brands for our bodies. There has been no war that we have not fought and died on the front lines of. There has been no job we haven't done. There's no tax they haven't levied against us. And we pay all of them. But freedom is somehow always conditional here. You're free, they keep telling us, but she would have been alive if she hadn't acted so free."

"Now, freedom is always coming in the hereafter but, you know what, though, the hereafter is a hustle. We want it now. And let's get a couple of things straight here, just a little side note. The burden of the brutalized is not to comfort the bystander. That's not our job. All right, stop with all that. If you have a critique for the resistance, for our resistance, then you better have an established record of critique of our oppression. If you have no interest in equal rights for black people, then do not make suggestions to those who do. Sit down."

"We've been floating this country on credit for centuries, yo. And we're done watching, and waiting while this invention called whiteness uses and abuses us. Burying black people out of sight and out of mind, while extracting our culture, our dollars, our entertainment like oil — black gold. Ghettoizing and demeaning our creations then stealing them. Gentrifying our genius and then trying us on like costumes before discarding our bodies like rinds of strange fruit. The thing is, though, the thing is, that just because we're magic doesn't mean we're not real. Thank you."