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## Are Blacks Expecting Too Much From President Obama?

By Hazel Trice Edney  
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

"Hello. My Name is Freida. I am a 52 years young black female that had 3 strokes and [I am] doing fine right now. I am a full time stay at home artist. I have sent you a copy of my hero, Sir Barackster. I created him on Nov. 1st because I felt he would be the hero."

Those are the words of Freida Thompson of Manalapan, N.J., in a letter to the editor of the NNPA News Service.

"I really, really, really want him to take care of the health issue," Thompson said in a phone interview this week. "Medicaid, even social security, I don't think that's really enough money to live off of. I've got five prescriptions I've got to get. It's just not enough," says Thompson. If there was one thing she would ask of President Obama, it would be "free health care."

From health care to civil rights, jobs and equal justice, Thompson's sentiments reflect those of millions of Blacks and other Americans - around the nation who know that Obama - arguably America's most inspirational president - will be limited in his ability to do everything. Yet, many hope that because of his Black experience and identification with struggle, his priorities might distinguish him from White presidents of the past.

Are Blacks expecting too much of the new president? That depends on who's being asked:

"Expecting a lot from him is a good thing," says Hillary Shelton, director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP, who monitors and lobbies for Capitol Hill legislation on behalf of Black people. "The expectations should be high. A lot of promises were also made by the candidate and now the President. And holding him to that is important, but being realistic about that and understanding that you've not just hired a commander-in-chief, but we've elected a leader, which means we must all get engaged in helping to fix these problems," Shelton says.

Thomas Todd studied the question from a different direction.

"No where in the campaign did he really promise to handle the Black agenda - nowhere," says Todd, a Chicago-based retired U. S. attorney, known for his impassioned speeches. "I think Blacks have allowed themselves to get caught up in the euphoria and the celebration and that probably is not realistic. So, my attitude has been that Black people - once they get past the historic nature of what has happened, must hold this president as accountable as any other president."

The expectations are clearly very high for the new president, who, in his first two weeks in office has:

• Visited Capitol Hill in an attempt to win bi-partisan support for his economic stimulus package.

• Signed his first bill, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, enabling more employees to challenge unlawful pay discrimination based on gender, race, age and disability.

• Reversed a string of anti-union executive orders issued by the Bush Administration.

• Established a Middle Class Working Families Task Force.

• Ordered the closing of the controversial Guantanamo Bay lockup for alleged terrorists.

Across the board, there is the clear understanding that President Obama has simply inherited "a mess" from the previous administration, as described by Shelton.

But, Blacks in leadership positions around the country, many who interfaced with Obama's transition team to get their policy wish lists heard, say some of their proposals are race-specific and long-standing. "We have seen a complete degradation of our schools and a lack of investment in the public school



Students march during a celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday. Students marched from Hayti Heritage Center to NCCU's B.N. Duke Auditorium. See photos on pages 14 and 15. (Photo By Lawson)

system and a real focus on quality education beyond all of the platitudes and praises and causes and catch phrases and 'Leave No Child Behind'. That does not do it," says Albert E. Dotson, Jr., chairman of the board of the 100 Black Men of America, which primarily mentors Black youth. "We've got to see a real investment in our public school system."

Leslie Baskerville, president and CEO of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, says that in an appeal to Obama's then transition team, she made a plea for the restoration of Title 3 funding for historically Black Colleges and Universities.

"Title 3 funding is the life-blood of HBCUs. It keeps their doors open," Baskerville said, noting how the Bush Administration recommended "a whopping cut of Title 3 dollars that would be tantamount to a million dollar loss per institution that's eligible. Ninety-seven HBCUs are participating in the Title 3 Program," she said. "So we have to reverse that."

H. Alexander Robinson, president and CEO of the National Black Justice Coalition points to HIV/AIDS disparities in the Black community.

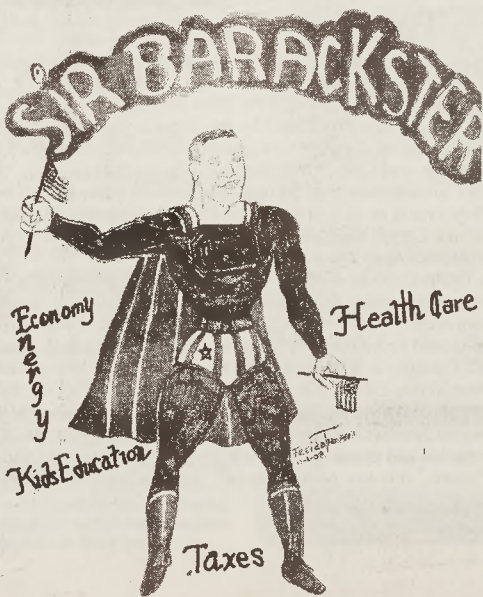
"The office of National AIDS Policy has to be reinvigorated. There hasn't been a director in that office for almost two years," says Robinson. "During that entire administration, it has been left to languish. With urgency with health care reform on the table, with the economic downturn that's facing all of the AIDS service providers, there needs to be leadership from the White House that in fact addresses HIV and AIDS."

Coming back to what the nation has said is Obama's number one issue, Julie Cunningham, president and CEO of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials, says "Putting America back to work," is crucial, but it must be done such that African-American contractors get a piece of the pie and that "there is accountability and compliance tied to those dollars."

Public policy issues notwithstanding, Freida Thompson, the artist, says her friends are discussing a historic concern that they doubt will be changed by the Obama presidency, but they hope he will at least try: That is racism.

"People are saying it's going to be the Whites against the Blacks. They're saying it's not going to get any better just because he's in the office. I really want him to say something about that. I really want us all to get along," Thompson says.

Illustrating the depth of the problem, Thompson recalls something that her 7-year-old grandson, Angelo, said: "Grandma, now you're going to need security for Sir Barackster."



SIR BARACKSTER - Freida Thompson's drawing of President Barack Obama as "Sir Barackster". Her "hero" But on that

### Carter draws huge church crowd for Baptist message

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) - Former President Jimmy Carter addressed a packed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church with his New Baptist Covenant message of racial reconciliation and cooperation on social issues.

Some 1,200 people filled the historic Birmingham church Jan. 31 where four black girls died in a 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing.

Carter told the Southeast regional meeting of the new Baptist organization he helped found last year in Atlanta that there's "no way for us to ignore Jesus' emphasis on the poor, the brokenhearted."

He said the evolution of the New Baptist Covenant is the "highlight of my religious life." He spoke at a worship service that was followed by workshops on poverty and racism.

"It's not an accident that God led us to Birmingham and this institute," Carter said during a breakfast at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Carter recalled a time when racial prejudice was rampant in Baptist churches, and theologians defended separate worship.

"The Baptist church was a stalwart defender of segregation," he said. "It was ingrained in our conscience."

Carter said the meeting will help churches work better together.

"We don't know whether we have a meeting or a movement," said the Rev. Jimmy Allen, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention and co-organizer of the New Baptist Covenant. "What we're after is a movement."

The Rev. Arthur Price, pastor at Sixteenth Street Baptist, said, "Can you imagine that 45 years ago, people used to gather here to strategize on how to put an end to racial inequality?"

Recalling the church bombing, he said, "Imagine that 45 years ago this window to my left where Jesus is knocking on the door, the face of Christ was blown out. I believe that God was telling us back then, as he is telling us now, that we are more united than we are divided."

### Norfolk 17 survivors revisits history

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) - Gov. Tim Kaine apologized for state actions 50 years ago that closed public schools rather than accept black students.

The governor issued the apology Feb. 2 in Norfolk, where six all-white public schools were closed during Virginia's "Massive Resistance" to school integration.

Members of the Norfolk 17 visited those schools Feb. 2. The 17 were the first black students who attended the all-white schools after a federal judge ordered them reopened to all.

Kaine said Virginia was a "backward state" when it instituted its own brand of racial segregation.

Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim also expressed his regret.

### Madame Tussauds to include US first lady in wax

WASHINGTON (AP) - Madame Tussauds wax museum is adding Michelle Obama to its collection of famous figures in its Washington branch.

Museum officials released pictures of the design process and said the Mrs. Obama's depiction will be unveiled in March. Designers will have spent six months on the figure, studying photographs and video footage of the first lady.

Janine DiGiacchino, general manager of the London-based attraction's Washington branch, says having an image of Mrs. Obama is an honor, because "as our nation's first African-American first lady, a proud working mom and budding style icon, Mrs. Obama is a role model to women around the corner and around the globe."

The figure was designed at Merlin Studios in London and will be placed alongside President Barack Obama's figure in the museum's Oval Office replica.

After Jacqueline Kennedy and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Obama will be the third first lady to be included in the collection.

### Fayetteville State investigates frat beating complaints

FAYETTEVILLE (AP) - Officials at a North Carolina university are investigating complaints that a century-old fraternity, whose past ranks included Martin Luther King Jr., took potential members off campus and beat them, a newspaper reported Jan. 30.

Police and administrators at Fayetteville State University were looking into activities by the local chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.

Dr. Janice Haynie, the university's vice chancellor for student affairs, said her office was looking into complaints from concerned parents who called and sent e-mails.

"At this point, all we have are allegations," said Haynie. "But we certainly don't condone hazing."

Dean of Students Landon Hadley met with several of the students who wanted to join the fraternity this week to discuss the allegations.

The newspaper said fraternity leaders allegedly took a group of students off campus, blindfolded them and beat them with a wooden paddle.

University spokesman Jeff Womble also is the fraternity's adviser and would not talk about the allegations.

"There is an investigation going on, and it would be too premature to comment at this point," Womble said.

Alpha Phi Alpha was founded in 1906 at Cornell University and is one of the oldest black fraternal organizations in existence. Besides King, who joined the fraternity at Morehouse College, famous members at a number of university chapters have included Olympian Jesse Owens, former ambassador and Atlanta mayor Andrew Young and former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Fayetteville State is a historically black institution.