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NNPA Award Winners Exhort Black Press to Hold Friends and Enemies Accountable

By Hazel Trice Edney
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The National Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation, giving four top awards during its annual Newsmaker of the Year Awards Gala, was told by those same honorees that its contributions to justice in America is yet untold.

"We have not adequately evaluated the stature of the Black Press and what it has meant to this country," said civil rights dean the Rev. Joseph Lowery, who was honored as the Black Press of America's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient in the March 19 gala.

He recalled how "immediately following the 1963 march on Washington, the White press' initial report was that we had about 50,000 people. But Black radio and other Black media personalities challenged that and talked about a half million people. And then the White Press then came back with 250,000 people," he recounted. "But, had it not been for Black media, I'm certain they never would have reported the truth. We have yet to uncover all the ways that we have been served all the ways that we have been positively impacted by the Black Press."

Lowery was introduced by Harry Alford, president of the National Black Chamber of Commerce as a "giant" among giants, who during the pains of Jim Crow and segregation, "didn't kneel to Pharaoh; they didn't bend over to Caesar, they made the world change for the better." Furthermore, because of the election of President Barack Obama as a result of the work of those like Lowery, "Today, African-Americans are the envy of the world," he said.

Lowery received a standing ovation as he made his way to the podium. His 87-year-old frame appeared strong despite a brief illness that caused him to pass out after a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church March 15.

Like Lowery, the Rev. Al Sharpton and Xermona Clayton, also responded to their NorthStar Community Service Awards with praise and encouragement for the Black Press.

"I am honored beyond words to receive this award because of who it comes from," said Sharpton. "If it had not been for your work and your newspapers, so many of the things that we fought and so many of the battles that were won would not have happened."

The threat is now beyond the civil rights movement as some claim America is now in a "post racial" society after the election of President Barack Obama, Sharpton pointed out.

"If they can make us buy into this whole rhetoric of 'post-racial America,' they will say we no longer need civil rights, they will say we no longer need Black Press."

Sharpton, initially a New York-based Black activist, whose popularity and influence is now entrenched across America, listed issues that are reflective of a lack of racial growth.

"The reason we need Black Press in 2009 is the same reason we needed it in 1889," he said. "Tonight Blacks are still doubly unemployed to Whites in America, tonight we still have health disparities, tonight one of the reasons we're dealing with educational inequities is because the achievement gaps between Blacks and Whites today is the same as it was during 1954 when we had Brown versus Board of Education. If we do not have the vehicles to talk about that, it will not address itself."

Clayton, founder, president and CEO of the Trumpet Awards, says her respect for the Black Press is entrenched in the every day running of her business and personal life.

"Every time I go into the airport or I go into the news store, I ask for the Black paper of that community," she told the audience. "And I do it because I kind of know they don't have it, but I have to do it for me ... I want to let them know that I'm expecting to see the Black paper. I have enormous respect, indescribable respect for the Black Press," said Clayton. She added that she once fired a public relations person who eliminated the Black Press from top coverage of the Trumpet Awards.

The petite Clayton is a powerhouse among civil rights leaders.

In his introduction of her, Los Angeles Sentinel Publisher Danny Bakewell said she had distinguished herself in so many ways that when he first met her, he expected her to "come flying in or walking on water or doing something that has been described to me about this little five-foot woman who has uncharacteristically done things that most people wouldn't even dream of, let alone do."

Among those things, he said, was her successfully campaign to reverse deep segregation within hospitals in Atlanta and once convincing a grand dragon to denounce the Ku Klux Klan.

But, her life has been spent given accolades to others. Bakewell described the Trumpet awards as "one of the most magnificent and one of the most acclaimed awards presentations in this country, really in the world."

The audience of publishers, civil rights stalwarts and other friends of the Black Press cheered and applauded each award winner. They also included a special "Political Leadership" award to U. S. Rep. Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.), now majority whip of the U. S. House of Representatives, the highest ranking African-American in Congress.

Political issues on the horizon are crucial to be addressed by the Black Press, said NAACP President Benjamin Todd Jealous, who also attended the dinner.

"There are some big fights coming up in this town," said Jealous. He listed the Employee Choice Act pertaining to the advantages of Unions to Black people; the No Child Left Behind, legislation and whether it will demand higher "standards without money" as just a couple of battles before Congress that will need Black Press input. He also listed the Anti-Racial Profiling Act and the Law Enforcement Integrity Act as needed legislations against the epidemic of controversial police shootings of Black people around the nation.

In obvious reference to Black Press support of Clyburn and NNPA Newsmaker award winner President Barack Obama, Jealous warned the Black Press to not lose sight of the fourth estate's (media's) job to hold government accountable.

He said, "These are times to be vigilant, to be supportive of friends, but also to hold them to account."

Norfolk State receives \$3.5 million gift

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) - An anonymous donor has bequeathed \$3.5 million to Norfolk State University - the largest gift in the school's history.

The university says it must use \$3 million of the donation to provide financial assistance to NSU students. The remaining \$500,000 must be spent on faculty support, research and equipment.

The university announced the donation on Friday.

Norfolk State is a historically black college founded in 1935. Nearly 90 percent of its 6,300 students receive some type of financial aid.



Civil Rights Dean the Rev. Joseph Lowery, right, receives lifetime achievement award from NNPA Chair John B. Smith Sr., at the Black Press Awards Gala held in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Roy Lewis)

Black Publishers Give and Receive Honors During White House Celebration of Black Press Week

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - A historic delegation of 50 Black publishers and their guests, who convened at the White House last week for a Black Press Week award to President Barack Obama and his family, received equal praise from the First Family for the work of the Black Press of America.

It was a delegation of the more than 200-member National Newspaper Publishers Association, honoring America's first Black President for his NNPA Newsmaker of the Year selection by awarding him with a book of front pages of Black newspaper from his historic Nov. 4, 2008 election.

"The reason that I've been able and Michelle has been able to do what we're doing is because of the extraordinary support and thoughtfulness with which you've covered our campaigns and our activities and so I am very thankful to you," President Obama told the publishers during the ceremony in the State Dining Room March 20. "You are welcome in this house, the people's house, and we are looking forward to continuing to spread, not just our stories, but the stories of struggle and hope and hardships that so many people are going through right now, making those stories real and putting a face to the numbers and statistics because that's how we end up being able to inspire the country as a whole to make the kind of forward progress that we need."

It was a light-hearted atmosphere for the president and First Lady Michelle Obama, dealing with dire issues, as well as for the publishers whose daily lives are focused on the long-held mission of equal justice for African-American people. In remarks interrupted several times with cheers and applause, Obama and First Lady Michelle appeared genuinely touched by the magazine-styled book awarded to them, by NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy R. Leavey, publisher of the Chicago and Gary Crusader newspapers. NNPA's Newsmaker of the Year is the highest annual honor bestowed during Black Press Week.

the March 16, 1827, birthday of the Black Press, now in its 182nd year.

"We are so happy to be here and to also congratulate you - and to let you know that we've got your back," said Leavey as the room erupted with cheers and applause from the publishers. Leavey then gave the President and First Lady the 80-page document titled, "The Black Press Committed to the Cause".

On the back of the book of Black Press front pages are the words of Richard Hatcher's song, "Feelin' Good" as a reflection of how musical themes flowed throughout the campaign.

"We want to honor you. We hope you will enjoy looking at them," Leavey said.

"Well, that's beautiful," the President responded, flipping through the book as he asked First Lady Michelle to speak first.

"This is such a special award," she began. "When you're in the middle of the news making, you don't realize how much news you made until it's over. But, this is very special coming from this organization, this membership because you've followed us through this journey. And to honor us as a family is what makes it special because you recognize that we have been going through this as a family, as a community and all of you know the ins and outs that come along with this."

This is the third Newsmaker award for President Obama. In 2005, he received it as a junior U. S. senator and rising star in Black America. He received it again last year as a leading presidential candidate, poised to make history. Because he could not attend the annual gala due to Senate votes last year, he promised to receive the award at the White House if he won (Continued On Page 15)



The Rev. Al Sharpton, right, receives the NorthStar community Service Award from NNPA John B. Smith, Jr., (Photo by Roy Lewis)

First lady tells students to aim their goals high

By Darlene Superville

WASHINGTON (AP) - First lady Michelle Obama promoted the value of a college education and hard work March 19, telling high school students that the people who doubted her when she was younger only encouraged her to aim higher.

"That never stopped me. That always made me push harder," she said.

Mrs. Obama's appearance at Anacostia High School was part of a day in which she put an array of talented, accomplished women in front of area high school students as an example of the types of success they, too, can achieve if they are willing to work hard for it.

The group included Grammy Award-winning singers Alicia Keys and Sheryl Crow, actresses and sisters Debbie Allen and Phylicia Rashad, actress Fran Drescher, Olympic gymnast Dominique Dawes, basketball star Lisa Leslie Lockwood and Mae Jemison, the first black woman to travel into space. Also participating were Gen. Ann Dunwoody, the first woman to achieve the four-star rank; actresses Alfre Woodard, Kerry Washington and Tracee Ellis Ross; and Debra Lee, president and CEO of the parent company of the BET (Black Entertainment Television) cable network.

The first lady invited that group back to a White House dinner with local high school students as part of her celebration of March as Women's History Month.

"You guys are future leaders of this nation," Mrs. Obama told her guests in the East Room. "And we're counting on you. In so many ways, we're counting on you. So the question is: Are you ready?"

She told the young women they must respect themselves and each other, and that each of them is special and could learn from the female leaders. She was joined by her mother, Marian Robinson, and her two daughters who "never want to do anything with me," Obama joked.

Her message was simple: "Go for it. Don't hesitate. Don't act in fear. Just go for it."

During her earlier visit to Anacostia, one of the city's lowest-performing schools, 13 students chosen by their teachers asked Mrs. Obama whether her life is still normal, why daughters Malia and Sasha didn't come, what does the family do for fun, and whether she does her own makeup and picks out what she wears. They also asked about her transition from high school to college, and how she got to be the first lady.

Life is still normal, despite living in the White House with Secret Service agents. Her daughters were at school. The family does a lot of "kids stuff" for fun. She chooses her own outfits and does her own makeup, except for special events like the one on March 19, she said.

Mrs. Obama told them she always worked really hard and that they should, too.

"I wanted an A ... I wanted to be smart. I wanted to be the person who had the right answer," said Mrs. Obama, a lawyer and former hospital executive in Chicago. "I ran into people in my life who told me, 'You can't do it, you're not as smart as that person.' And that never stopped me. That always made me push harder, because I was like, 'I'm going to prove you wrong.'"

She encouraged the students to pursue a college education because of the doors it will open. There's no need for them to know what they want to be before they get to college, she said, emphasizing that the goal is simply to get there and that it begins with hard work.

Some of the students have already been accepted to college.

"College is being able to get up and discipline yourself and get (Continued On Page 15)