

Black Dems gain convention influence but not numbers

By George E. Curry
NNPA Editor-in-Chief
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

Twenty years ago, Mississippi, a state where law enforcement officials routinely did nothing as African-Americans seeking access to the ballot were murdered in public, sent an all-White delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, N.J.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a former Mississippi sharecropper, challenged the seating of the lily-white delegation in 1964, saying that her Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was more representative of Mississippi voters. National Democratic Party officials hastily arranged a compromise that gave voting rights to two MFDP delegates and arranged for the others to sit as honored guests.

Now, two decades later, more than three-fifths of the

Mississippi delegation is made up of African-Americans. With 61 percent of its delegates to the Democratic National Convention being African-Americans, Mississippi is second only to the Alabama delegation, with 62.9 percent of its delegates African-Americans. South Carolina is third, with 45.5 percent.

Those figures are part of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies roster of delegates and alternates that it publishes before each presidential year political convention. According to the Joint Center tally, African-Americans comprise 20.1 percent of the delegates in Boston, the same as four years ago and slightly less than the 21 percent in 1996.

"Although the number of African-American delegates is unchanged from 2000, this report clearly indicates that they are increasingly holding

important decision-making positions at the convention," Eddie N. Williams, president of the center, says in a statement accompanying the report.

African-Americans serving in key convention slots include Ohio Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones, co-chair of the party and chair of the Platform Committee; Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, chair of the Credentials Committee; and New York Congressman Gregory Meeks, chair of the

Rules Committee. There are also six Black vice chairs of those committees. At the 2000 convention, only one African-American, Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, chaired a convention committee.

According to the Joint Center, the number of high-ranking African-Americans in state parties has reached 51, an increase of 54 percent. Six are state party chairs.

Pennsylvania showed the largest increase in Black delegates (27.6 percent), fol-

lowed by Georgia with 18.4 percent and New York, 10.1 percent. The greatest declines were in Virginia (58.1 percent), Louisiana (18.9 percent) and Ohio (14.6 percent).

The report makes clear that John Kerry cannot defeat George W. Bush without strong support from African-Americans.

"The significance of the Black vote for the Democratic Party cannot be overestimated," the report states. "In 2000, according to the exit polls, Black voters contrib-

uted 18.9 percent of Gore's total, up from 17.1 percent of Clinton's total in 1996. This means that one in 5.5 Gore voters in 2000 was an African-American."

African-Americans are also major players in the battleground states that can tilt either Democratic or Republican.

"Black voters represent a key bloc in many of the same states Gore either won or came close to winning in 2000," the Joint Center reports. (See *Convention*, Page 12)

Obama

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ters and negative ad peddlers" who want to divide America into liberal and conservative, Black and White.

"In the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism or a politics of hope?" Obama asked. "John Kerry calls on us to hope."

Obama said the people he meets around Illinois don't expect the government to solve all their problems. "They know they have to work hard to get ahead — and they want to," he said.

AME

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AME denomination, Reid said; rather, it is a love letter to raise consciousness of the church's bureaucratic pitfalls.

Reid said though he may be forced out of the church, he would continue to love and to be committed to the AME faith, as his ancestors were. "Up From Slavery" is Reid's second book. His first, "Restoring the House of God," swiftly made it on to

the best selling list in 2000, and his latest release is showing similar promise, said Reid.

"People have lined up to get a copy of this book and I think that it will be a success, and hopefully I will write more books that speak to the younger generation and the hip-hop generation as well."

Christopher Jack Hill writes for the *Baltimore Times*

Bush

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president that a million Blacks had been disenfranchised in the 2000 election and that it is of paramount concern to the Black community that this not be repeated.

From Detroit, Bush flew to his ranch in Texas, where he will spend the next five days while the Democratic National Convention takes place in Boston. After arriving at the Crawford ranch, the president went down the road a couple miles for a thank-you party for donors to the Republican National Committee's get-out-the-vote fund.

Kerry's campaign said the Republican Party has a lot of work to do when it comes to earning the votes of African-Americans and that Bush "hasn't done any of it."

"The challenge for the president is for this not to be a one-time conversation," said National Urban League President Marc Morial, who said it was important for Bush to have made a direct appeal.



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