

# NAACP exec: Black Press facing challenge ahead

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
LOUISVILLE (NNPA) — NAACP President-elect Benjamin Todd Jealous, applauded by members of the National Newspaper Publishers Association for whom he once served as executive director, says Black organizations must work hand-in-hand in order to increase the NAACP membership and fight the ills of racism still pervasive in America.

"The NAACP is a house, it's a big house, it's a mighty house; it's a house that our people will never see again if we don't keep it strong," he told the more than 200 publishers, journalists and supporters during the NNPA's annual Merit Awards Dinner on June 27. "It's built with at least four pillars — the Black church, the Black Press, the Black business community and the membership who pay their dues."

Jealous, named the new NAACP CEO last month, worked for NNPA from 2000-2003. He led the construction of the organization's Black Press USA network as well as the NNPA News Service's partnership through the Converged Media Lab at Howard University.

"We did great things together," Jealous told the



NAACP President-elect Benjamin Todd Jealous vows to work with the Black Press of America to fight injustices.

audience. But, he said that the partnership is not nearly over. He said the 274,000 members which the NAACP now claims must be increased to at least the 500,000 once claimed by Walter White, who served as NAACP executive director for nearly a quarter of a century, 1931-1955.

"We need to do it because while the evil of de jour segregation is gone, while the evil of out-and-out lynching is gone and while the evil of slavery and the slave trade is gone, our people are still finding their dreams squashed, their families torn apart, their young men thrown in the bars of prisons far too frequently," Jealous said to applause. "The school

house-to-prison pipeline has to be dismantled. And the only way for that to happen is for our two great institutions, three great institutions, four great institutions — the NAACP, the Black church, the Black Press, and the community to establish it as a priority."

The NAACP-Black Press connection is historic. Jealous, former managing editor of the *Jackson Advocate* and protégé of its late publisher, the legendary Charles Tisdale, pointed out the connections:

Roy Wilkins, an executive secretary of the NAACP, starting in 1955, had also worked as editor (See Jealous, Page 5)

# For Black America, July 4th recalls promises not kept

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As flags fly in special commemoration and fireworks boom in the streets this week, many people across the nation — including Black newspaper publishers — will not only reflect on the freedoms that have been gained since the July 4, 1776, signing of the Declaration of Independence — but also on the promises that are yet unfulfilled.

"We've always been a day late and a dollar short in terms of how we relate to how this country has treated us," said Denise Rolark Barnes, publisher of the *Washington Informer*, reflecting on a question posed by the NNPA News Service. "It's a good family time, but we really haven't — I don't think necessarily bought into the celebration."

Abolitionist newspaper editor Frederick Douglass faced a similar dilemma on July 4, 1852, as a speaker in Rochester, N.Y.

"Pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our

humble offering to the national altar and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?"

In the speech, known as "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" the editor/publisher of the *North Star* answered himself: "But such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common."

Last week, 156 years since the Douglass speech, Black newspaper publishers, editors and journalists who gathered in Louisville, Kentucky, for the annual summer conference of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, grappled with later stages of this dilemma in response to a question from the NNPA News Service last week, "What to the Black Press is the Fourth of July?"

Most agreed that although Black America has come a long way — as evidenced by the presidential candidacy of Sen. Barack Obama — the job of the Black Press of America on this Independence Day is to escalate the plea for justice.

"It's a time when we are very real with ourselves in understanding the freedom that America allows us to enjoy when compared to other countries," said Sonny Messiah Jiles, publisher of the *Houston Defender*. "But, it's also a time to grasp the realities of discrimination, whether it's in the housing discrimination, predatory lending and the list goes on and on."

Irv Randolph, managing editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, agrees, saying the holiday is like a revival for the Black Press.

"For us, it's a reminder of a continuing quest for all of our readership and for people to get the American dream and full equality in our society," Randolph said.

Striving toward that goal is a daily mission for the Black Press of America. From coast to coast, the more than 200 NNPA members — mostly weekly publications — write stories that point out injustices and inequalities that are still pervasive even 181 years after

Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm founded *Freedom's Journal*, the first Black newspaper, in 1827.

"Our communities are on fire," said Bankole Thompson, senior editor and editorial page editor of the *Michigan Chronicle*. "What we need to do is increase upon that legacy of *Freedom's Journal*, increase upon the Legacy of pioneering Black journalists who did what they had to do to pave the way for us as Black journalists to be able to do what we do."

NNPA grew out of the National Negro Publishers Association in 1940, just prior to the start of World War II. Throughout the war, the famous "Double V" campaign — victory against fascism abroad, victory against racism and Jim Crow at home — raged in Black newspapers across the country. Some see history repeating itself with the current war in Iraq while African-Americans face double unemployment due to discrimination here at home.

"It is the day that still lacks the promise that is yet to be fulfilled for all of America's citizens," says Ron Doss, editor/publisher, *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Yet, there must be some acknowledgment of the progress that has been made.

"It's sort of a mixed celebration," said Jake Oliver, publisher of the Baltimore-based *Afro-American News*. (See July Fourth, Page 10)

# D.C. officials unnerved by gun ruling

By James Wright  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The 5-4 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold a lower court ruling to invalidate the D.C. handgun ban was met with disappointment by government officials in the District and, according to some officials, would not affect most handgun laws in the U.S. District officials pledged to abide by the court's ruling and iterated the desire to keep handguns away from criminal elements.

"I'm disappointed in the court's ruling and believe introducing more handguns into the District will mean more handgun violence," D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty (D) said of the high court's June 26 decision in the District of Columbia v. Heller. "But I want to emphasize that our gun laws remain in effect.

It may be several weeks before there are changes to announce.

"In the meantime, I have directed the [police department] to implement an orderly process for allowing qualified citizens to register handguns for lawful possessions in their homes."

In 1976, in response to a rash of gun violence in the city, the D.C. City Council enacted one of the most restrictive handgun laws in the country. Residents were not allowed to own a handgun unless they had the approval of the police chief, obtained a license, kept trigger locks on it and reapplied for the right to have it each year.

David Heller, a District resident and special police officer who works for the Federal Judicial Center, challenged the law after being denied the right to own a

handgun by D.C. officials.

D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D) said she appreciated the court clarifying the Second Amendment. A constitutional law scholar in her own right, she predicted the ruling would likely produce an increase in gun violence but, she said, most handgun laws in the U.S. will not be affected by the decision.

"The decision's most serious effect is the increase in handguns in the home, where guns typically do the greatest damage in this country, that the ruling will inspire," Norton said.

"Today's decision is likely to encourage law-abiding people to buy guns, with the likelihood that the ruling will produce an increase in accidents and gun violence among family members and even neighbors, as some in the rush of anger, fetch the

guns to escalate or settle a dispute.

"Today's ruling turned on the absolute nature of the District ban," she said, "and largely has the effect of encouraging the District to bring its laws into line with many others in this country, and to go even further than many."

D.C. City Council Chairman Vincent Gray (D) said the council will work to implement the court decision but that public safety is priority. He said that in a few weeks, the council will study the decision by looking at the handgun laws in such cities as New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Chicago and will craft a response to the decision based on the information gathered.

James Wright writes for the *Afro-American Newspapers*.

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