

Obama to NAACP: Blacks must be responsible

CINCINNATI (AP) — Democrat Barack Obama received a prideful welcome from the annual NAACP convention Monday night, but in a stirring speech to the nation's oldest civil rights organization, he nonetheless insisted Blacks must show greater responsibility for improving their own lives.

The man who could become the first Black president urged Washington to provide more education and economic assistance. He called on corporate America to exercise greater social responsibility. But he also received his most lusty applause as he urged Blacks to demand more of themselves.

"If we're serious about reclaiming that dream, we have to do more in our own lives. There's nothing wrong with saying that," Obama told a crowd estimated at 3,000. "But with providing the guidance our children need, turning off the TV set and putting away the video games; attending those parent-teacher conferences, helping our children with



Democratic presidential candidate, Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., poses with supporters at the NAACP convention in Cincinnati on Monday. Obama urged Blacks to be responsible.

their homework, setting a good example. That's what everybody's got to do."

He added: "I know some say I've been too tough on folks, talking about responsibility. NAACP, I'm here to report, I'm not going to stop talking about it. Because as much I'm out there to fight to make sure that government's doing its job

and the marketplace is doing its job, ...none of it will make a difference — at least not enough of a difference — if we also don't at the same time seize more responsibility in our own lives."

Amid building cheers, Obama declared: "When we are taking care of our own stuff, then a lot of other folks are going to be interested in

joining up and working with us and taking care of America's stuff. We can lead by example, as we did in the Civil Rights Movement. Because the problems that plague our community are not unique to us. We just have them a little worse, but they're not unique to us."

Obama, who grew up without his father, has spo-

ken and written at length about issues of parental responsibility and fathers participating in their children's lives. Yet a similar speech by the Illinois senator on Father's Day prompted an awkward rebuke from Rev. Jesse Jackson, a Democratic presidential contender in 1984 and 1988, a protégé of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and a fellow Chicago political activist.

Jackson apologized last week after being caught saying on an open microphone that he wanted to castrate Obama for speaking down to Blacks.

Republican candidate John McCain addressed the NAACP's 99th meeting on Wednesday.

President Bush was criticized for not speaking at the convention until 2006 — his fifth year in office.

Obama spokeswoman Linda Douglass denied the candidate was trying to boost support among White voters with his own "Sister Souljah" moment. Addressing a Black audience in 1992, Democrat presidential candidate Bill Clinton accused the hip-hop artist of inciting violence against Whites. Some Black leaders, including Jackson, criticized Clinton, but it helped reinforce his image as a politician who refused to pander.

"It's not just a speech aimed at Black audiences. It's aimed at all parents," Douglass said. Noting Obama also called for more corporate and government responsibility, she added: "This is a larger theme of responsibility."

While Jackson com-

plained about such Obama speechmaking, other civil rights activists from the NAACP disagreed. They think Obama is doing a good job balancing his role as a Black candidate with the need to speak to all races.

"He can't be totally focused on the Black community," said Kelvin Shaw, of Shreveport, La. Shaw said he is most interested in what Obama plans on nationwide economic issues like rising oil prices, household costs and jobs.

"We need to be talking about not one race, but what affects all people."

Cincinnati Mayor Mark Mallory, the city's first directly elected Black mayor, disputed Jackson's argument that Obama is ignoring other important issues for Blacks, such as unemployment, mortgage foreclosures and the number of Blacks in prison.

"I think he absolutely has," Mallory said. Besides his messages about responsibility, Mallory said Obama has talked about jobs, health-care, education and other "areas where Black people are disproportionately affected."

Civil rights veteran Julian Bond, the NAACP board chairman, drew loud applause in a speech Sunday night when he described Obama's candidacy as a milestone.

"The country seems proud, and I know all of us here are, that a candidate campaigning in cities where he could not have stayed in a hotel 40 years ago has won his party's nomination for the nation's highest office," Bond said.

Convention

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bers or enough money, and we do not have enough of either today," Bond said.

He expressed hope in incoming President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous who has vowed to rebuild the organizational membership.

"The man we have chosen as our new CEO knows all about organization — he organized his first voter registration drive when he was 14 years old and has devoted all of his professional life to the issues and causes that are the mission of the NAACP. Now 35, he is the youngest person ever chosen to lead us," he said to applause.

Also introducing Jealous' wife, Lia Epperson, he praised the couple, saying they share their life's work. Jealous is a former Black Press journalist who became executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a federation of 200 Black-owned newspapers. He is currently president of San Francisco's Rosenberg Foundation and will start his new job with the NAACP Sept. 1.

Epperson, a Harvard University graduate, is formerly a lawyer with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and a law professor. Epperson and Jealous were married in 2002 in Pacific Grove, Calif. They met in 1993.

Bond compared Jealous to pioneer journalist, NAACP founder and reformer Ida B. Wells.

"When she was told to move to a Blacks-only train car, she not only refused — she bit the conductor as he threw her off the train. Then she sued, winning \$500 in damages. We are still biting the conductor — and Ben Jealous has sharp teeth!"

Despite lower numbers and financial woes, Bond says the consistency of the organization's message on behalf of Black people has kept it strong.

"A recent survey confirms that our work is both valuable and valued. The NAACP has the highest favorability of 17 organizations working in the civil rights arena. The NAACP is viewed favorably by almost all Blacks — 94 percent, including 70 percent who view it very favorably," he said.

With that, Bond listed a litany of charges against the Bush administration, including bringing the nation to "the brink of disaster" with "increasing income inequality, a nationwide housing crisis and skyrocketing gas prices."

He added that Bush led the nation to war on false premises, and the fact that the number of troops killed in Iraq has exceeded 4,000. He

compared what he described as the Bush administration's "abuse of power" to that of the Civil War and Vietnam days, including COINTELPRO, the FBI counter intelligence program that disparately investigated and harassed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other Black leaders in the 1960s.

"We thought we had put a stop to these kinds of spies and lies, but that was before September 11," Bond said. "Before wiretapping without warrants. Before torture. Be-

fore the abolition of habeas corpus rights for detainees. Before the Supreme Court stopped the Bush Administration an unprecedented four times from making a bonfire of the Constitution."

There must be a reconstruction he concluded, still hammering Bush.

"After eight years of this administration, we are going to need another reconstruction — reconstruction of a government which has been purposefully dismantled, privatized and politicized."



SCHOLARS EARNING DOLLARS

The Urban Chamber of Commerce held its scholarship gala at the Venetian casino-resort on Saturday. More than 25 graduating seniors are receiving scholarships. The students will be attending 12 different colleges and universities.

Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson