

# Jackson, Sharpton: Activist roles will not change

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, viewed as perhaps the highest profiled civil rights leaders in the nation, both say their roles will not change as America beholds its first Black president.

"The issues haven't gone away," said Sharpton. "Barack Obama said this is the beginning of change. This is not change itself. It's almost insulting to act like Blacks should now shut up just because we have a Black president."

In an interview, Sharpton was responding to widely held perceptions and debates by pundits and TV personalities that President-elect Barack Obama will now become America's new Black Leader.

Both Jackson and Sharpton, having been presidential candidates themselves, said in interviews that while they are celebrating the historic election, it is ridiculous to think that a sitting president could single-handedly eliminate the voluminous problems in the Black community.

Illustrating, Jackson compared the anticipation of the Obama to another big day in Black history.

"It's the biggest day since Dec. 31, 1862," when slaves awaited the signing of the



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Emancipation Proclamation.

"After 246 years of slavery, we hoped for an Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln signed the order the next day, but still they had to wait until the 13th Amendment in 1865 to get free."

Jackson explains, "This is the beginning of a struggle. What we want now is we want the playing field even. We want civil rights laws enforced and funded for all Americans. Just to even the playing field would be a massive step toward a more perfect union."

Still pride in and affinity for the nation's first Black president and the magnanimous stride that he represents will cause traditional rights leaders to reserve judgment and not act hastily toward him.

"Sure we will be patient with and sensitive to President Barack because he is our candidate and we are utterly fascinated with him," Jack-

son said. "There's no question about that. But, we must continue our quest to address the issues of pain and crisis."

Jackson said Obama will make their jobs much easier.

"When you have a good president who is positive, you tend to get remedy," he said. "When you have a guy like Bush, who is hostile, you tend to get rejection."

Widely seen on national television with tears streaking his face at the Chicago victory celebration, Jackson told what he was thinking at that moment:

"I looked at Barack standing there in all of the majesty... I saw children in Kenya and Haiti and Europe all riding on his every word. It was a joy. But, then the journey to get us there was what really broke me down," he said.

He reflected on civil rights leaders and activists who were killed, beaten and bitten by dogs.

"After all these struggles, here was this guy standing there in all of his majesty giving leadership to the world," he said. "It was overwhelming to me and I just wished Medgar Evers or Dr. King could have been there just for a minute to see the results of their work. They were redeemed that night. The marchers and the martyrs and the murdered — they were redeemed that night."

Among those who were there among the civil rights protestors of the 60s was the Rev. Joseph Lowery, who co-founded the Southern Chris-

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tian Leadership Conference alongside Dr. King. An avid Obama supporter throughout the entire campaign, Lowery said after the election that

civil rights leaders must now stay the course: "We must continue to speak truth to power no matter what color power is."

## Groups prep for TV switch

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a coalition of 16,000 African-American and Latino member churches, has announced the distribution of about 3.5 million applications for the federal government's converter box coupon program to African-American congregants nationwide. The government is offering coupons to all U.S. households to offset the cost of preparing for the transition to digital television (DTV) on February 17, 2009.

In partnership with the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), NBCI disseminated literature containing information about the upcoming transition and an application form for the government's converter box coupon. The \$40 coupon allows residents to purchase a converter box, a low-cost option for consumers to continue receiving television signals if they are not connected

to cable. NBCI has also conducted more than 20,000 educational sessions in faith-based communities all across the country.

NBCI, led by Reverend Anthony Evans, is a partner in NAB's national multiplatform campaign to educate the transition's most disproportionately affected populations, including persons with disabilities, seniors, rural communities and racial minorities, about the DTV transition.

"This is a huge victory for NBCI, and I congratulate our member churches, our 35,000-volunteer force, dedicated ministers and NAB. NAB has played a pivotal role in helping us get out the word about the big digital switch and should be commended for its leadership," said Evans, president of NBCI.

Debra Coley-Bagley, chair of NBCI's board of directors added, "We are so very proud of the leadership

NBCI has demonstrated on this national DTV education campaign. This clearly mirrors the broad depth and capacity that the Black church is able to bring to bear concerning any national public education campaign or health preventative initiatives. There is still much work to be done, but thus far this has been an enormously successful venture. We look forward to completing the task."

— Rev. Mark McCleary, who is working closely with NBCI, in organizing the churches and volunteers behind the DTV campaign, said, "We have worked very hard on this project and our volunteers have given one hundred and twenty percent on helping to get out the word on DTV. Rev. Evans' leadership is clear and decisive. He is well-organized, and our volunteers in churches around the country cannot be more pleased of how he is handling this campaign."

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