

Obama top Black Press story, injustices second

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — At this time last year, then-U.S. Senator Barack Obama was not the Black community's favored candidate to win the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States. Indeed, because of America's past history of racism, most Blacks did not initially favor Obama as the Democratic nominee because they simply did not believe he could win the general election.

In January of 2008, an *ABC News-Washington Post* poll showed Obama's Democratic Primary opponent Hillary Rodham Clinton at 40 points higher than Obama among African-Americans who had been asked their preference for the Democratic Primary.

Only a month earlier, in December 2007, only 54 percent of Blacks to 65 percent of Whites even believed America would be willing to elect a Black president.

But, it was Obama's win in the Jan. 3 Democratic Pri-

mary in Iowa — a 95 percent White state — that caused the world to hearken his convincing chant — "Yes we can."

Immediately, the pace of his Black support escalated. By mid-January, an ABC News poll showed Black support for Obama slowly reversing at 60-40 percent over Clinton. After he won the South Carolina primary on Jan. 26, his Black support skyrocketed and solidified at well more than 90 percent for the rest of the way.

Coupled with overwhelming support from a cross section of White and Latino-Americans, the advent of Barack Hussein Obama — a son of a Black Kenyan man and a White woman from Kansas — as America's first Black president-elect, now stands as the nation's top Black story of 2008, and is undeniably among the top stories in American and world history.

Still, with all the euphoria surrounding the Obama election and now the anticipation of his Jan. 20 inauguration, other issues of racial

inequality told in 2008 Black Press stories reveal that racial inequality remains the top issue in the first decade of the 21st century. In alphabetical order behind Obama, those issues/events — chosen by the NNPA News Service based on prevalence and historic importance — make up the remaining top nine Black Press stories of 2008:

—**Black Incarcerations:** America's prisons continued to burst at the seams with African-Americans. NNPA columnist Ron Walters quotes a Pew Center study on adult imprisonment that says one in every nine African-Americans is incarcerated; including one of every 15 Blacks between the ages of 18-39.

—**Economic Injustice:** Whether in prosperity or economic decline, Black people still experience twice the unemployment rate as Whites, according to reports from the Bureau of Labor Statics. According to NNPA columnist Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, African-Americans' economic standing is only 57

percent of mainstream America. And because more than 50 percent of Black mortgage holders received sub-prime loans compared with only 18 percent of Whites, the current sub-prime mortgage meltdown has a disproportionately negative affect on African-American homeowners. An Afro-American Newspaper story by Zenitha Prince, headlined "Black Middle Class in Crisis," quotes a report by United for a Fair Economy saying of the sub-prime loan crisis, "Black/African-American borrowers will lose between \$71 billion and \$92 billion... and the ripple effect will exact an even higher toll."

—**Educational Inequities:** Remarks by then Democratic contender Barack Obama in a March 19 speech in Philadelphia perhaps said it best: "Segregated schools were, and are, inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them; 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the perva-

sive achievement gap between today's Black and White students." One example of these complaints around the nation is found in a story by Gordon Jackson reported in the *Dallas Examiner* in August 2008. It cited a lawsuit filed by the Black Coalition to Maximize Education and a former bond administrator charging the Dallas Independent School District with severe neglect of inner-city schools while planning to spend millions of dollars in the southern sector through a recently passed 2008 bond program.

—**Hate Crimes and Threats:** The Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, a leader in the fight against White supremacist groups, reports more than 200 hate-related anti-Obama incidents nationally just in the first two weeks after the election of Barack Obama, according to the *Wilmington Journal's* Cash Michaels. Also, due to threats during the 20-month campaign, the Democratic presidential contender got Secret Service protection months before any of the other 20 candidates. These incidents are on top of a record number of unrelated noose threats and other hate incidents reported during the year leading up to the primaries, including the kidnapping and hate-torture case of West Virginian, Megan Williams. The most recent high-profiled alleged hate crimes are the dragging death of 24-year-old

Brandon McClelland of Paris, Texas and the shooting death of football star Billey Joe Johnson of Jackson, Miss.

—**HIV/AIDS:** Black America's response to the AIDS crisis is finally gaining momentum, says NNPA columnist Phill Wilson, executive director and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute. This growing awareness and discussion is largely due to the Center for Disease Control's Heightened National Response to HIV/AIDS in the Black Community. But, the statistics are still horrendous: "Every year, more than 56,000 people in this country contract HIV. The devastation is worse among Black Americans, who represent nearly half of all new HIV infections, including two-thirds of the new cases among women and 70 percent of the new cases among adolescents," Wilson reports.

—**Homicide Rates:** Thousands of young Black males in major cities died of gunshot wounds in gang or drug-related incidents in

2008, perpetuated by Black-on-Black crime. In August, the *Seattle Medium* reported a march by friends and families of homicide victims; plus the Seattle/King County NAACP organized to send the message, "Enough is enough." Other major cities struggle to address social ills that lead to the violent behavior.

—**Mac and Hayes Dies:** Actor-comedian Bernie Mac and music icon Isaac Hayes died one day apart, August 9 and 10 consecutively. The deaths, both from illnesses, silenced two major entertainment voices — music and laughter — both of which have the "power to bond us in ways well beyond race, politics and ideology," as stated by NNPA columnist Marc Morial.

—**Police Shootings:** Misconduct: Mourning turned to outrage on April 25. That's the day when the three New York City police officers who gunned down unarmed Sean Bell in a hail of 50 bullets on his wedding day — Nov. 26, 2006 — were all acquitted. His fiancée, Nicole Paultre Bell, cried out that Sean had been killed "all over again." Her outrage reflects Black families and civil rights leaders across the nation who cite police misconduct through violence and/or racial profiling as being as prevalent as ever in the Black community.

—**The 45th Anniversary of "I Have a Dream":** August 28, 2008 was largely marked by the euphoria of then-Democratic nominee Barack Obama's acceptance speech at INVECO Field in Denver. Nearly 100,000 people gathered for the historic event, marking the first Black presidential nominee of a major U.S. political party. In his speech, Obama reflected on the promise of equality that Dr. King talked about in his speech at the 1963 March on Washington, the promise that Dr. King referred to as a "bad check."

Then he appealed to the nation in words that millions now hope will not be forgotten by his administration: "America, we cannot turn back. Not with so much work to be done. Not with so many children to educate, and so many veterans to care for. Not with an economy to fix and cities to rebuild and farms to save. Not with so many families to protect and so many lives to mend... Let us keep that promise — that American promise — and in the words of scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess."

Murders among Black youths up

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of young Black men and teenagers who either killed or were killed in shootings has risen at an alarming rate since 2000, a new study shows.

The study, to be released Monday by criminologists at Northeastern University in Boston, comes as FBI data is showing that murders have leveled off nationwide.

Not so for Black teens, the youngest of whom saw dramatic increases in shooting deaths, the Northeastern report concluded.

Last year, for example, 426 Black males between the ages of 14 and 17 were killed in gun crimes, the study shows. That marked a 40 percent increase from 2000.

Similarly, an estimated 964 in the same age group committed fatal shootings in 2007 — a 38 percent increase from seven years earlier. The number of offenders is estimated because not all crimes are reported, said Northeastern criminologist James Alan Fox, who co-authored the study.

"Although the overall rate of homicide in the United States remains relatively low, the landscape is quite different for countless Americans living, and some dying, in violence-infested neighbor-



Sentinel-Voice photos by Ramon Savoy

hoods," Fox said. Seizing on President-elect Barack Obama's incoming administration as an opportunity for more funding, Fox added: "There is an urgency for reinvestment in children and families. In essence, we need a bailout for kids at risk."

Obama will be the nation's first Black president. The study partly blamed Bush administration grant cuts to local police and juvenile crime prevention programs for the surge in crimes by young Black men and teens. Incoming Vice President Joe Biden has promised funding to put 50,000 new police officers on the street

to help bring violent crime rates back to a decade-long annual decline that began in the mid-1990s, after then-President Bill Clinton provided local officials with money to hire 100,000 new cops.

Nationwide, the number of murders and violent crimes overall dropped last year after increasing in 2005 and 2006, according to annual data compiled by the FBI. Overall, however, murders have risen by about 8 percent between 2000 and 2007. The FBI reported 10,067 arrests in murder and non-negligent manslaughter cases in 2007.

Half of the people arrested

— 5,078 — were Black. Almost 10 percent of Black people arrested for murder were under age 18, the FBI data show.

The number of young White men who committed gun-related homicides also rose over the same period, the Northeastern study showed, but not as dramatically.

In 2007, an estimated 384 White males age 14 to 17 shot someone to death, up from 368 in 2000.

The numbers of homicides committed by women and teenage girls — whether Black or White — were relatively few, the Northeastern study found.