

Black publishers award Obamas

*By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — A historic delegation of 50 Black publishers and their guests, who convened at the White House last week for a Black Press Week award to President Barack Obama and his family, received equal praise from the First Family for the work of the Black Press of America.

It was a delegation of the more than 200-member National Newspaper Publishers Association, honoring America's first Black President for his NNPA Newsmaker of the Year selection by awarding him with a book of front pages of Black newspapers from his historic Nov. 4, 2008 election.

"The reason that I've been able and Michelle has been able to do what we're doing is because of the extraordinary support and thoughtfulness with which you've covered our campaigns and our activities, and so I am very thankful to you," President Obama told the publishers during the ceremony in the State Dining Room March 20. "You are welcome in this house, the people's house, and we are looking forward to continuing to spread, not just our stories, but the stories of struggle and hope and hardships that so many people are going through right now, making those stories real and putting a face to the numbers and statistics, because that's how we end up being able to inspire the country as a whole to make the kind of forward progress that we need."

It was a lighthearted atmosphere for the president and First Lady Michelle Obama, dealing with dire issues, as well as for the publishers whose daily lives are focused on the long-held mission of equal justice for African-American people. In remarks interrupted several times with cheers and applause, Obama and First Lady Michelle appeared genuinely touched by the magazine-styled book awarded to them, by NNPA Foundation Chair Dorothy R. Leavell, publisher of the Chicago and Gary Crusader newspapers.

NNPA's Newsmaker of the Year is the highest annual honor bestowed during Black Press Week, the March, 16, 1827, birthday of the Black Press, now in its 182nd year.

"We are so happy to be here and to also congratulate you ... and to let you know that we've got your back," said Leavell as the room

erupted with cheers and applause from the publishers. Leavell then gave Obama and the First Lady the 80-paged document titled, "The Black Press Committed to the Cause."

On the back of the book of Black Press front pages are the words of Richard Hatcher's song, "Feelin' Good," as a reflection of how musical themes flowed throughout the campaign.

"We want to honor you... We hope you will enjoy looking at them," Leavell said.

"Well, that's beautiful," Obama responded, flipping through the book as he asked First Lady Michelle to speak first.

"This is such a special award," she began. "When you're in the middle of the news making, you don't realize how much news you made until it's over. But, this is very special coming from this organization, this membership because you've followed us through this journey. And to honor us as a family is what makes it special because you recognize that we have been going through this as a family, as a community and all of you know the ins and outs that come along with this."

This is the third Newsmaker award for President Obama. In 2005, he received it as a junior U.S. senator and rising star in Black America. He received it again last year as a leading presidential candidate, poised to make history. Because he could not attend the annual gala due to Senate votes last year, he promised to receive the award at the White House if he won the election. Both his win and the award are now a part of his historic record.

Returning the honor, Michelle Obama stressed that the historic record of the plight of African-Americans has been kept all along in Black newspapers across America.

"You know our story. Our images, our journey, our path are not foreign to you. And we are reminded of that when we read our story in your stories. It feels different. I often say I finally recognize myself when I read your papers," she said to applause. "On behalf of the Obama family, the girls and Grandma (her mother, Marian Robinson, who lives with the family), we thank you so much."

NNPA has approximately 215 members, but the White House limited the delegation to only 50 due to available space. Before greeting and shaking hands with each

member of the delegation, Obama drew laughter and applause during remarks in which he reflected on his three-time win of the award.

"I just want to thank all of you for this extraordinary honor of being a newsmaker three times. I will try to be a little more low key for the next four years. I don't want to be like a seven-time (loud laughter) ... because other people will feel left out," he said.

Obama said the award was "especially gratifying" because the whole family was being honored this time,

including their daughters, Sasha, 7, and Malia, 10. He praised his wife for her part in helping the historic election to come to fruition.

"I could not have done this without Michelle, who is the foundation stump of our family and who each and every day makes me realize how lucky I am to be married to [her]," he said.

He added that the children bring light moments to his life that take the edge off of the daily grind of tough issues.

"After you've had a bad (See Honors, Page 11)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Carole Geary

President Barack Obama proudly displays book of Black Press front pages awarded by NNPA foundation chair Dorothy Leavell, center. First Lady Michelle Obama said to her, "I finally recognize myself when I read your papers."

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