

# NNPA: Black Press must hold brass accountable

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The National Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation, giving four top awards during its annual Newsmaker of the Year Awards Gala, was told by those same honorees that its contributions to justice in America is yet untold.

"We have not adequately evaluated the stature of the Black Press and what it has meant to this country," said civil rights dean Rev. Joseph Lowery, who was honored as the Black Press of America's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient in the March 19 gala.

He recalled how "immediately following the 1963 March on Washington, the White press' initial report was that we had about 50,000 people. But Black radio and other Black media personalities challenged that and talked about a half million people. And then the White Press then came back with 250,000 people," he recounted.

"But, had it not been for Black media, I'm certain they never would have reported the truth. We have yet to uncover all the ways that we have been served, all the ways that we have been positively impacted by the Black Press."

Lowery was introduced by Harry Alford, president of the National Black Chamber of Commerce as a "giant" among giants, who, during the pains of Jim Crow and segregation, "didn't kneel to Pharaoh; they didn't bend over to Caesar, they made the world change for the better." Furthermore, because of the election of President Barack Obama as a result of the work of those like Lowery, "Today, African-Americans are the envy of the world," he said.

Lowery received a standing ovation as he made his way to the podium. His 87-year-old frame appeared strong despite a brief illness that caused him to pass out after a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church March 15.

Like Lowery, Rev. Al Sharpton and Xernona Clayton, also responded to their NorthStar Community Service Awards with praise and encouragement for the Black Press.

"I am honored beyond words to receive this award because of who it comes from," said Sharpton. "If it had not been for your work

and your newspapers, so many of the things that we fought and so many of the battles that were won would not have happened."

The threat is now beyond the Civil Rights Movement as some claim America is now in a "post racial" society after the election of President Barack Obama, Sharpton pointed out.

"If they can make us buy into this whole rhetoric of 'post-racial America,' they will say we no longer need civil rights; they will say we no longer need Black Press."

Sharpton, initially a New York-based Black activist, whose popularity and influence is now entrenched across America, listed issues that are reflective of a lack of racial growth.

"The reason we need Black Press in 2009 is the same reason we needed it in 1889," he said. "Tonight, Blacks are still doubly unemployed to Whites in America. Tonight, we still have health disparities. Tonight, one of the reasons we're dealing with educational inequities is because the achievement gaps between Blacks and Whites today is the same as it was during 1954 when we

## Homeless

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and Panhandling Study. Job loss forced 35 percent onto the street. Seventeen percent said they were alcoholics. Six percent attributed their plight to gambling addiction. Five percent blamed domestic violence; another five percent cited family and living issues (fallouts with relatives or roommates).

One third of them reported living in some sort of transitional housing, while 32 percent said they lived with family or friends and 35 percent stayed on the streets.

Men comprised 85 percent of Tuesday's participants. Black men made up the largest percent of indigents—65 percent.

Jerry Harris said he's been homeless for six months. "I'm suffering from arthritis and pain in my lower back that keeps me in this wheelchair. My Medicaid and social security is pending, so this is a temporary thing just to get something to eat today. I get \$400 a month from social services to live in a homeless shelter, but I rather live in my own apartment."

Freddie Hamilton has been living on the streets



Sentinel-Voice photo by Roy Lewis

James Clyburn, D-S.C., Trumpet Awards founder Xernona Clayton and rights icon Joseph Lowery share a moment.

had Brown v. Board of Education. If we do not have the vehicles to talk about that, it will not address itself."

Clayton, founder, president and CEO of the Trumpet Awards, says her respect for the Black Press is entrenched in the everyday running of her business and personal life.

"Every time I go into the airport or I go into the news store, I ask for the Black paper of that community," she told the audience. "And I do it because I kind of know

they don't have it, but I have to do it for me ... I want to let them know that I'm expecting to see the Black paper. I have enormous respect, indescribable respect for the Black Press," said Clayton. She added that she once fired a public relations person who eliminated the Black Press from top coverage of the Trumpet Awards. The petite Clayton is a powerhouse among civil rights leaders.

In his introduction of her, Los Angeles Sentinel Publisher Danny Bakewell said

she had distinguished herself in so many ways that when he first met her, he expected her to "come flying in or walking on water or doing something that has been described to me about this little five-foot woman who has uncharacteristically done things that most people wouldn't even dream of, let alone do."

Among those things, he said, was her successful campaign to reverse deep segregation within hospitals in Atlanta and once convincing a grand dragon to denounce the Ku Klux Klan.

But, her life has been spent giving accolades to others. Bakewell described the Trumpet awards as "one of the most magnificent and one of the most acclaimed awards presentations in this country, really in the world."

The audience of publishers, civil rights stalwarts and other friends of the Black Press cheered and applauded each award winner. They also included a special Political Leadership award to U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., now majority whip of the U.S. House of Representatives, the highest ranking African-American in Congress.

Political issues on the horizon are crucial to be addressed by the Black Press, said NAACP President Benjamin Todd Jealous, who also attended the dinner.

"There are some big fights coming up in this town," said Jealous. He listed the Employee Choice Act pertaining to the advantages of Unions to Black people; the No Child Left Behind legislation and whether it will demand higher "standards without money" as just a couple of battles before Congress that will need Black Press input. He also listed the Anti-Racial Profiling Act and the Law Enforcement Integrity Act as needed legislations against the epidemic of controversial police shootings of Black people around the nation.

In obvious reference to Black Press support of Clyburn and NNPA Newsmaker award winner President Barack Obama, Jealous warned the Black Press to not lose sight of the Fourth Estate's (media's) job to hold government accountable.

He said, "These are times to be vigilant, to be supportive of friends, but also to hold them to account."



Sentinel-Voice photo by Les Pierres Streater

James "Cookie" Collins cooks ribs and chicken. Collins teamed with other business owners and leaders in West Las Vegas to provide free food to the homeless in the nearby area.

since 1999. The homeless Army veteran moved to Las Vegas after his mother died. "I've been struggling daily just to make ends meet. It's been tough but I feel that things are going to get better."

Joe Jones got laid off two months ago. His wife's income from a part-time job isn't enough to make ends meet. Jones said he's constantly applying for casino

jobs, but has yet to get called in for an interview.

"I saw other people lined up and I came over to see what was going on. I lost my job at a local casino as a food runner and just recently got extended for my unemployment benefits."

His two children in tow—ages three and four—Charles Armstrong patiently waited to get food for himself and his family. He hopes

to have a mobile car washing and detailing business up and running in a few months.

"I live in the neighborhood and I've been unemployed for the last six months. I used to work in housekeeping at San Remo until they changed over to Hooters and I got laid off... It's been a rough time and I need work badly."

Las Vegas City Councilman Ricki Barlow, whose

Ward 5 district encompasses West Las Vegas, praised the business community's efforts to address hunger in this neighborhood. "I'm here to support the efforts of those feeding the homeless and others that are providing needed services to assist the homeless living on the streets."

But Collins might have been the most popular person in the area. The Las Vegas native worked the barbecue pit like a pro, producing perfected smoked chicken and ribs. Recognizing the decades-long plight of West Las Vegas to access resources and address pressing community needs, Collins was eager to help.

"It has been a blessing for me and my family to open up this business and now have an opportunity to give back to the community," he said.

He hopes to team with more businesses, politicians and community leaders to host similar events in the future. "When people can eat as good as I can and not rely on scraps they pull from the trash cans, it makes me feel good that I had a part of making it happen for them."