

NAACP President Says 103-Year-Old Organization is Growing

Written by Hazel Trice Edney
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The NAACP, in its 103rd year, has consistently grown over the past three years and continues to be relentless in its quest for equality and fulfillment of America's promises of freedom.

That is the NAACP described by its President/CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous, who upon the birth of his first son, July 4, indicated that he has intensified his commitment to racial justice for the future of all children.

“Brothers and sisters, I am proud to report today that the state of the NAACP is strong and getting stronger every day. In the past three years we have increased membership three years in a row for the first time in more than 20 years,” he told the crowd during his keynote at the NAACP national convention in Houston last week. “Because of you, because of your dedication and sacrifice and because of the more than 25,000 NAACP active volunteer leaders in our more than 1,200 active units across the country... it is truly never a question if we will win, but when we will win.”

In a reflective speech punctuated by applause, Jealous outlined both the wins of the past and the battles of the future, which he outlined as “game changers”.

He said, “So let everyone join me in pledging that we will achieve our game changers in the next half-century. We will see the end of mass over-incarceration. We will see the end of mass under-education. We will see the end of the great health disparities that divide this nation. We will see that this nation is a land of opportunity for all its children, regardless of color or creed, gender or sexual orientation. And we will see that every American has free and open access to

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the vote.”

Jealous gave some of the numbers indicating the growth of NAACP members and leaders who he described as the “lifeblood of this great association” and “the frontline in the fight for justice and equality in this country.”

He reported that in the past four years, online activists have grown from 175,000 to more than 650,000 people; including Facebook followers that have grown from 5,000 to 135,000.

He also said individual donors have grown from 16,000 to 125,000 people writing checks of all sizes to the association each year and that the organization, once beleaguered with financial problems, has now been in the black “every year for the past four years, and growing every year straight through this recession.”

The reflective tone of the speech, in Jealous’ fourth year as president, was partially fueled by the excitement over the birth of his son, Jackson Jealous on July 4, only days before the convention. “Like his sister Morgan, he is now a sixth-generation of the NAACP!”

Jealous wondered aloud about the future of the country in which his children and others will grow up.

“For any parent, the birth of a new child often causes you to pause and reflect on the world in which he or she is born. Will the world they come to know be one in which they can prosper and grow? Will the America they grow up in allow them to realize all the dreams and aspirations that they dare to dream? Will they love their country more than their Country loves them?” he asked. “I have spent many hours reflecting on these questions - questions that all parents ask of themselves, questions that I am certain Tracy and Sabrina pondered as they looked at their beautiful baby boy, Trayvon. And sadly, I, like many of you, and certainly Tracy and Sabrina, have come to face the harsh reality that in this great nation there exists a deep and troubling paradox: a conundrum of epic portions if I may add.”

The killing of black teenager Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in February has quickly

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become a symbol of the racial profiling and law enforcement injustices that remain pervasive in America.

Jealous implored the audience to continue fighting as those martyrs of the past. He listed civil rights heroes as examples. They included Florida NAACP leaders Harry and Harriet Moore who were blown up in their bed 60 years ago because of their efforts to register voters; Medgar Evers, who, was assassinated 50 years ago in Jackson, Mississippi; and the four little girls - Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Denise McNair - who were murdered in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. when White supremacists bombed the building.

“We are committed to defending the freedoms they died seeking to secure for future generations, and we are committed to ensuring that future generations remember the ultimate sacrifice each of these people made for them,” Jealous said.

Focusing on what civil rights leaders perceive as an assault on voting rights, Jealous express outrage at a string of voter-related legislations proposed in states across the nation.

“These are tough times. Our democracy is literally under attack from within. We have wealthy interests like the Koch brothers seeking to buy elections and suppress the vote. And to be honest, each of us is on the front line in every state of our union every day,” he said. “From redistricting battles in states like Georgia, to fighting wholesale takeovers of local government in states like Michigan, to fighting attacks on voter suppression across this country, there is no battle more important to the NAACP right now than the battle to defend democracy in our great nation.”

At least 36 states are either considering or have passed changes in voting laws that involve voter or state identification card, a change that civil rights leaders argue could intimidate and/or effectively disenfranchise many African-American voters, according to the “Map of Shame” drawn by the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

In conclusion, Jealous pressed the need to escalate the fight for racial justice.

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“The sad reality is that if we simply accept things as they are and allow those who wish to turn back the tides of all that we have gained and block the forward movement before us; that if we simply stay idle and watch the game rather than change it, that the American Dream and America’s promise will be denied to many of America’s children.”{jcomments on}