

**Printed From Frost Illustrated**

2009-03-11

**'Whispering Out Loud' marks bridge to change*****By Melanie L. Campbell******NNPA Special Commentary***

*"I am where I am because of the bridges that I crossed. Sojourner Truth was a bridge. Harriet Tubman was a bridge. Ida B. Wells was a bridge. Madame C. J. Walker was a bridge. Fannie Lou Hamer was a bridge."-Oprah Winfrey*

On Jan. 20 the nation crossed a bridge into a new era, swearing in the first African American as president of the United States, President Barack Obama.

Despite the excitement and emotion elicited by this historic moment and the progress he has already made, for many American's the crossing of that bridge is still filled with fear of what lies ahead as our country struggles through the worst financial crisis of our times, wars in the Middle East and unrest in many parts of the world.

As an African American woman, I too am challenged by the current economic crisis and global strife. Yet, I am also optimistic about this extraordinary time we are experiencing and feel blessed to have the opportunity to help pave a new path for future generations.

Since taking office, President Obama signed the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which will create millions of jobs, increase and extend unemployment insurance, and subsidize healthcare coverage for nearly five million unemployed Americans. President Obama also challenged all of us that for this new era to be successful, it will require service, sacrifice and faith of all Americans.

Of course, the ongoing struggle for justice has empowered African American's with a unique understanding of the sacrifice, service, and commitment necessary to overcome adversity during hard times. And historically, black women have been the glue that held black families together during turbulent times.

We also are crossing a new bridge in American History as we now have the first African American First Lady Michelle Obama. The image of this moment will positively impact our children to believe they can be anything they want to be including president of the United States and first lady!

Further, as we celebrate this National Women's Month, it is very insightful that President Obama has tapped five phenomenal black women to serve in his administration including: Susan Rice, ambassador to the United Nations; Valerie Jarrett, senior advisor and assistant to the president for intergovernmental relations and public liaison; Melody Barnes, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council; Lisa Jackson, administrator Environmental Protection Agency, and Desiree Rogers, White House social secretary.

Their cultural insight and viewpoints will help ensure that the concerns of women, especially African

American women, are addressed by the New Administration.

Understanding the unique and valuable perspective black women have to offer on issues that confront our community, the National Coalition is proud to launch the NCBCP Black Women's Roundtable "Whispering Out Loud" op-ed series in partnership with the NNPA Foundation. The kitchen table conversations will be authored by women from all walks of life and provide insight and analysis on critical issues that impact black women, placing a special emphasis on what black women need and expect from the new administration and 111th Congress.

Contributors to the op-ed series are an intergenerational cadre of black women including: Dr. Dorothy Height, chair and president emerita, National Council of Negro Women; Evelyn Lowery, founder, SCLC W.O.M.E.N.; Susan Taylor, editor emeritus, Essence magazine and founder National CARES Mentoring Movement; Dr. Leslie Baskerville, president, NAFEO; Dr. Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich, senior professor, National Labor College; Felicia M. Davis, president, Just Environment; Clayola Brown, president, A. Philip Randolph Institute; Nicole Lee, president, TransAfrica Forum; Dr. Elsie Scott, president, CBCF; Dr. Barbara Williams Skinner, president, Skinner Leadership Institute, and others dedicated to economic justice, equality and equity.


Black Women's Roundtable, an intergenerational civic engagement network of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, is at the forefront of championing just and equitable public policy on behalf of black women, promoting their health and wellness, economic security, political and global empowerment in the policy making arena as key elements for success.

*Melanie L. Campbell is the CEO and executive director of the NCBCP, convener of the Black Women's Roundtable and an advocate and recognized expert on voting rights, census, youth civic engagement and women's issues.*

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 First Day Story