



# TAVIS SMILEY PRESENTS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **STATE OF THE BLACK UNION 2008 EXAMINES ROLE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

*Symposium urges community to look beyond race for White House,  
focus on larger agenda*

NEW ORLEANS — Following a Day of Service rebuilding some of the most devastated areas in New Orleans, the 2008 State of the Black Union symposium hosted a panel of distinguished scholars, policymakers and leaders in a lively discussion about the role of African Americans in the 2008 presidential elections at the Ernest E. Morial Convention Center this morning. The conversation continues this afternoon and features a speech by Senator Hillary Clinton at approximately 5:30 p.m. ET, which will be aired live on C-SPAN.

Moderated by Tavis Smiley, the panel included a venerable list of who's who of African American leaders such as New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Xavier University President Norman Francis, Policy Link President Angela Glover Blackwell, and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Chair Naomi Churchill Earp. The program also included presentations from Pastor Melvin Jones, a Hurricane Katrina hero, and Daron Boyce, a youth activist and aspiring political leader.

The presentations kicked off with a warm appreciation for the volunteers who pitched in to rebuild parts of the Lower Ninth Ward and a clear signal that the Crescent City is well on its way back to its pre-Katrina glory. Responding emphatically to those who questioned whether the city should be rebuilt at all, Nagin declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, New Orleans is back and getting bigger, better, and stronger every day," and pointed out that 71 percent of the city's population is now back at home.

Rev. Jackson recalled that the country he came of age in was filled with restrictions and taboos for black Americans. While he and other panelists underlined the significant progress that has been made in recent years, Georgetown University Professor Michael Eric Dyson said, "We don't live in a post-racial society — but we do hope to live in a post-racist society."

Panelists observed that Senator Barack Obama's historic run for the White House didn't come out of thin air. "Rosa Parks sat down so we could stand up. Martin Luther King marched so Jesse Jackson could run. Jesse Jackson ran so Obama could win," said Cleo Fields, former Louisiana

State Senator and U.S. Congressman. But Fields also drew applause when he admonished the audience not to ridicule those who support Senator Clinton's candidacy.

"We've got to have a love language in these difficult deliberations," said Smiley, referring to the lively disputes between supporters of the two Democratic presidential candidates.

This political argument, which is being played out in many African American families, will soon come to an end, panelists assured the audience. "After the primaries are over, the Congressional Black Caucus is going to be united to fight for the issues that we all care about," said Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-Ohio), who supports Clinton's bid.

Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-Washington, D.C.) added, "In the euphoria of the moment, we should not forget that our agenda is the same, whether our president is George W. Bush or Barack Obama."

Among the community's most pressing concerns, Rev. Jesse Jackson observed, was the plight of young black males, many of whom "have targets on their backs." Jackson called the incarceration of nearly a million African Americans a "disgraceful situation" and said that instead of imprisoning our young people, the country should be offering them more educational opportunities.

The 10<sup>th</sup> State of the Black Union will take place in Los Angeles on Feb. 28, 2009 following the publication of the third installment of The Covenant series, "Accountable: Making the Covenant Real."

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#### **About Tavis Smiley Presents**

Tavis Smiley Presents is an event production company dedicated to bringing thought provoking discussions, engaging town hall meetings, and consumer expos to communities across the country. During the last nine years its programs have reached more than 350,000 conference attendees and attracted millions of television viewers nationwide. Tavis Smiley is the host of *Tavis Smiley* on PBS, a weeknight half-hour talk show and the host of *The Tavis Smiley Show* from PRI, a two-hour news and opinion program featuring provocative commentary and exclusive interviews. He's the author of 12 books including his bestselling memoir, *What I Know for Sure: My Story of Growing Up in America*. He founded the Tavis Smiley Foundation to provide leadership training skills to youth ages 13 to 18.