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**A Note to the New President of the NAACP
The African World
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.
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I hope that you, the reader, will join me in congratulating Ben Jealous in his appointment as the new President of the NAACP. The 35 year old president of California-based foundation has a major task in front of him. With that in mind, I wanted to send him a note. If you happen to agree with the thrust of this, I would encourage you to send a similar note to him.

Dear Mr. Jealous:

Congratulations on your appointment as the new President of the NAACP. Your appointment comes at a critical time for Black America, and for that matter, for this planet. More than anything else, you will need to transform the NAACP into a 21st century organization, an organization fully prepared to address the challenges that are significantly different than those faced during most of its life span.

There are several tasks that I would like to respectfully put before you for your consideration as you make plans for your administration. These include:

- Katrina: As you and I both know, the reconstruction of the Gulf Coast has been perverted by the policies of the Bush administration and their allies. What Katrina did not destroy, the Bush administration is now attempting to eliminate through mass privatizations, the eradication of public housing, and the under-resourcing of public health. To this, of course, must be added the on-going challenge for evacuees who seem to be all-but-ignored by those supposedly in charge of the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. The NAACP can play a major role if it convenes a

strategy meeting of major national and local organizations to develop an approach that confronts the Bush administration's cynical attempts at introducing its vision of a Black-free, working class-free Gulf Coast. Both Black and labor organizations really dropped the ball in 2005 in failing to turn the Katrina issue into a national moment and movement countering the economic and political priorities of the USA as a whole. Instead, we either looked at it as a charity case, or a locale for Black contractors to get their piece of the action in the reconstruction. We need you to take leadership.

- The wars: As you know, Black Americans, more than any other group, have remained steadfast in opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet this does not translate into Black people playing a leadership role in the anti-war movement. We express our outrage, but this outrage is not accompanied by street action, or necessarily action at the voting booth. The NAACP could join with organizations such as Black Voices for Peace and the Black Radical Congress in building a strong, Black anti-war movement. It needs to be very broad and we need to pay special attention to Black veterans who, along with other veterans, are being cast aside by the same Administration that was so eager to send them into harm's way in these wars of aggression.
- HIV/AIDS: Although there has been a great deal of attention to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, you know and I know that there remains a great deal of denial within Black America. Part of this denial is that we often do not wish to discuss sexuality at all. We hide behind religious beliefs and ignore that homosexuality always has been a reality in our communities; we do not have conclusive discussions about Black male/female relations, sexism, spousal abuse, etc., and act as if these are private matters. We close our eyes to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS on the African continent, and sometimes want to believe that we can promote abstinence and call it a day. Brother, we need the NAACP to make discussions about this pandemic real, which means that an organization as credible as the NAACP needs to say that we have to be totally prepared to put issues of sexuality and drug abuse on the table for serious discussion, rather than treating them as comedy or opportunities for voyeurism. There are millions of lives at stake.

Clearly there are many other areas where we need the active leadership of the NAACP, but let me end by saying that being of a post-Baby Boomer generation gives you an advantage and a challenge over your predecessors. On the one hand, you are less likely to fall into nostalgia for the old ways of acting and practicing. On the other hand, you do not have that link with the earlier generation of struggle that got us as far as we have gotten (with all of its strengths and weaknesses). For that reason, I can say that there are many of us who are ready and willing to offer our assistance as you step forward. We do not wish to see you fail. No, we of the Baby Boomer generation are not ready to retire, but we are ready to partner with you to move the Black Freedom Movement successfully forward. We can do it together.

In solidarity,
 Bill Fletcher, Jr.
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BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, *Bill Fletcher, Jr.*, is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the **just released** book, [Solidarity Divided](#): The Crisis in Organized Labor and A New Path Toward Social Justice (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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