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Al Sharpton speaks out on race, rights and what bothers him about his critics



Al Sharpton of the National Action Network answers his critics in this exclusive interview with Wikinews' David

Shankbone. In it they discuss Don Imus, Tawana Brawley and the Presidential race.

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The Election Commission of Pakistan rejects former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers for the upcoming parliamentary election.

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rural Pakistan kill six and injure five.

•The Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir pardons a teacher at Unity High School for her alleged insult in the naming of her class's teddy bear "Muhammad".

•Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka breaks Shane Warne's record to become test cricket's leading wicket-taker.

•Kevin Rudd is sworn in as the 26th Prime Minister of Australia by Governor-General Maj. Gen. Michael Jeffery.

Neste Oil to build world's largest biodiesel plant in Singapore

Finnish company Neste Oil have announced that they intend to construct the world's largest biodiesel plant in Singapore at a cost of €440 million. The NExBTL facility will be Neste's third such project, and is intended to have a maximum capacity of 800,000 tonnes a year.

Demand for biofuels is expected to rise greatly over the next few years, as they are often cited as a good way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and are viewed as a renewable alternative to crude oil which has been at record high prices in recent months.

The site has been strategically selected to be close to Malaysia and Indonesia, both of whom are leading world suppliers of palm oil, which is intended to be the main

fuel for the plant. Between them they account for 80% of global production. However, the use of palm oil is controversial, as some environmental scientists and campaigners believe using it will have a negative effect as increased demand in turn causes higher food prices and greater levels of deforestation.

Earlier this year, Greenpeace attempted to stop a palm oil tanker ship destined to Neste's existing biodiesel plant in Porvoo, Finland, but failed to stop the delivery. In addition to the Porvoo plant, which began operations earlier this year and is at its capacity production of 170,000 tonnes, Neste plan a second plant to open in 2009.

The new plant will increase demand for palm oil, as it will require 200,000 hectares of palm oil plantations to supply the million tonnes of oil it requires per annum. "The new plantations are to be set up mainly in Indonesia, and increasingly in swamp rain forests," said Greenpeace's Lauri Myllyvirta. When such terrain is cleared of trees, the peaty soil begins to dry out. "In the years that follow, it releases all of the carbon that had been stored in it", Myllyvirta continues. He concludes that he believes palm oil cultivated in such conditions produces ten times the carbon dioxide emissions of fossil fuels. Jarmo Honkamaa, director of Neste's biofuel sector, countered these claims with his belief that the gas balance remains positive and points to Neste

statistics which say biodiesel diesel produces 40-60% less greenhouse gas emissions than standard diesel.

Another potential problem has been highlighted by Citigroup, who voiced concerns that Neste may not be able to complete the project on time and within the intended budget. Recently, Neste added a standard diesel production line at their Porvoo refinery. This was finished this year, approximately one year late and at an actual cost of €750 million, versus a budget of €500 million. Neste CEO Risto Rinne said in response, "we have learned our lesson," regarding the miscalculations on the new facility, and said that this knowledge, coupled with that obtained during construction of the Porvoo biodiesel plant, had been factored into calculations regarding the Singapore plant.

Construction on the third facility will start early next year, and is scheduled to end in 2010. Neste said in a statement that the investment was "part of Neste Oil's strategic goal of becoming the world's leading renewable diesel producer."

US: Iran nuclear weapons initiative ended in 2003

A senior United States intelligence official said today that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in the fall of 2003 under international pressure. The official cautioned that Iran is still continuing to enrich uranium and could have a nuclear weapon available between 2009 and 2015, but the report states that intelligence shows that Iran has not restarted their nuclear weapons program.

"Teheran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons program suggests it is less determined to

develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005."

The finding, published in a new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, is a major deviation from the intelligence the U.S. suggested two years ago. The United States believed that Tehran was determined to develop a nuclear capability and was continuing its weapons development program.

"This is good news in that the US policy coupled with the policies and actions of those who have been our partners appear to have had some success. Iran seems to have been pressured. Given that good news, we don't want to relax. We want to keep those pressures up," said an unnamed official.

Iran claims that it is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes. The United States has insisted it will not back down until Iran rid of all possibilities to get a weapon of mass destruction, but is determined to solve the differences with diplomacy.

"We should be having a surge of diplomacy with Iran. And based upon this [estimate], I think it would be a pretty good idea," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Iran would not be capable of technically producing and reprocessing enough plutonium for a weapon before about 2015, the report states. But ultimately it has the technical and industrial capacity to build a bomb, "if it decides to do so," the intelligence agencies found.

The same agency in 2005 stated that Iran was "determined" to build a nuclear bomb.

Sefton, UK ex-mayor gaoled Belgian formation talks: King consults incumbent PM

The former Mayor of Sefton in the United Kingdom has been gaoled for fraudulantly obtaining state benefits.

John Walker and his wife Catie, were found guilty of conspiracy to defraud at Liverpool Crown Court and of exaggerating ill health to obtain disability living allowance.

The Judge Brian Lewis described the fraud as "a disgraceful breach of trust".

He was gaoled for 15 months for conspiring to defraud £32,871.85 in Disability Living Allowance together with a six months concurrently sentence for conspiracy to defraud £4,000.25 in Income Support.

His wife, Catie Walker, was gaoled for eight months for the DLA offence and a concurrent four months for the Income Support swindle.

Calls for "critical breakthrough" in the opening speeches of Climate Conference in Bali

The caretaker prime minister of Belgium, Guy Verhofstadt, reappeared on the political stage today as he accepted the royal request to suggest solutions to the ongoing federal government formation talks.

Recollecting his statement to the press on June 10, 2007, when he recognised his electoral loss and the victory of his opponent Yves Leterme, he told reporters today that he "hadn't thought nor hoped to face you once more, but the King has asked me to inform him on a short term about possible strategies to deal with the political

stalemate in which we have ended up over the last few months.

"Our country is experiencing one of its most severe political crises of the last decades. The elections are six months behind us you see, and the country still doesn't have a worthy government. Meanwhile, our country's image is being damaged en socio-economic and daily problems of the people remain unsolved."

—Incumbent PM Guy Verhofstadt's analysis of the current situation in Belgium.

Indeed, after 177 days, the country's political parties have still found no compromise on the roles of the French- and Dutch-language community. Two days ago, Leterme returned to King Albert II to tender his resignation as leader of the formation talks.

The incumbent PM said he would discretely contact the leaders of all democratic parties during the next few days. He said his starting point would be dual: the country needs a considerable reform of its federal status, and there are certain urgent problems that outrange the capacities of the caretaker government dealing with the ongoing affairs.

Verhofstadt called for all involved to take responsibility, in the interest of the country and its citizens.

Al Sharpton speaks out on race, rights and what bothers him about his critics

At Thanksgiving dinner David Shankbone told his white middle class family that he was to interview Reverend Al Sharpton that Saturday. The announcement caused an impassioned discussion about the civil rights leader's work, the problems facing the black

community and whether Sharpton helps or hurts his cause. Opinion was divided. "He's an opportunist." "He only stirs things up." "Why do I always see his face when there's a problem?"

Shankbone went to the National Action Network's headquarters in Harlem with this Thanksgiving discussion to inform the conversation. Below is his interview with Al Sharpton on everything from Tawana Brawley, his purported feud with Barack Obama, criticism by influential African Americans such as Clarence Page, his experience running for President, to how he never expected he would see fifty (he is now 53). "People would say to me, 'Now that I hear you, even if I disagree with you I don't think you're as bad as I thought,'" said Sharpton. "I would say, 'Let me ask you a question: what was "bad as you thought"?' And they couldn't say. They don't know why they think you're bad, they just know you're supposed to be bad because the right wing tells them you're bad."

Sharpton's beginnings in the movement This exclusive interview features first-hand journalism by a Wikinews reporter. See the collaboration page for more details.

David Shankbone: You grew up around so many great American musicians and singers like Mahalia Jackson and James Brown.
Al Sharpton: I grew up in the black church. I started preaching at four as a wonderboy preacher. The church that I grew up in, Washington Temple Church of God in Christ in Brooklyn, was a hot spot for gospel singers. It was probably a mega-church before there were mega-churches. Bishop

F.D. Washington, who was the bishop of the church, had about 5,000 members in the late fifties and early sixties. All the gospel greats would come to the church. Because I was the wonderboy preacher, and I had my own little church celebrity, I got to know all the gospel singers. It began my early dealing with the entertainment world, through the gospel singing. In 1964 when the World's Fair came to New York, Mahalia Jackson had me preach and she sang there that night. Then I did a few other cities with her.

"All the gospel greats would come to the church. Because I was the wonderboy preacher, and I had my own little church celebrity, I got to know all the gospel singers." Mahalia Jackson in 1962.

DS: What was that like touring with Mahalia Jackson?

AS: It was fascinating to me. Here I am a little kid, I'm not even ten years old, and Mahalia Jackson was arguably the preeminent gospel artist of that time. It was quite a charge to me. A lot of times now I land into LaGuardia Airport and you see the circular, which was the New York pavilion of the World's Fair, and that's where I preached when I was nine years old. I think about that a lot flying in, that night with Mahalia Jackson. Now that's wow, 47-years ago.

DS: Did you keep in touch with her throughout her life? Did she have a presence in yours?

AS: Not as closely as James Brown. We would run into each other. She died when I was still very much in my teens. Madame Ernestine Washington, who was the first lady of the church I grew up in, she was a gospel singer. I knew a lot of the gospel greats.

James Brown and I got close in my teen years. What happened was when I was around 12 or 13, Martin Luther King had come to the church and I got totally mesmerized by Adam Clayton Powell, who was the Congressman in Harlem and a preacher, so I wanted to get involved politically. The church that I was in was Pentecostal; I'm now Baptist. But it was Pentecostal, and it wasn't that involved in social justice, although Bishop Washington was. Bishop Washington said he didn't want me to get involved with the more militant groups, because at that time you had the Black Panthers and a lot of others. So he brought me to Reverend William Jones, who was head of Operation Breadbasket, SCLC, in New York, who later became my pastor after Bishop Washington died. Reverend Jones converted me Baptist from Pentecostal. They knew who I was because of my preaching as a little boy. I became the youth director in New York of SCLC Operation Breadbasket. King had just gotten killed; this is 1969 and he had gotten killed the year before. I met King, but I didn't know him. I was 12, 13 years old. But I got to know Dr. Abernathy, who succeeded him —

DS: Ralph Abernathy?

AS: Ralph Abernathy. The Director nationally of Operation Breadbasket was Jesse Jackson, who was in his late twenties, early thirties. It was interesting, because Jesse Jackson's age and my age gap was the same as his and King's. Jackson at that time had a big afro and a medallion. He became a hero to me. Adam Clayton Powell, who had been my hero, had retired and moved so I became a protégé of Reverend Jackson. We became close.

James Brown: a father to Sharpton
DS: Are you still close to Reverend Jackson?

AS: Yeah, we talk. In 1971, when Jackson left SCLC over whatever their problems were with each other—that's when he left to form Operation Push—I also left the SCLC in protest because I was close to Reverend Jackson. I took my youth division with me and formed National Youth Movement, which was my organization. Jesse didn't have an organization here in New York. When I formed it, maybe about a year, six months later, a young guy joined the organization from Georgia — he would come up here thinking about going to college — named Teddy. Teddy's father was James Brown. Teddy got killed in a car accident in upstate New York. He and I were the same age, sixteen. James Brown came to New York and the disc jockeys here told him about this young preacher his son liked. He decided he'd do a memorial concert for his son for my youth group. He talked to me, he liked me, and of course this was, like, The Icon. He became like the father I didn't have after my parents separated, and I became like Teddy, his ambitious young son. He had other kids, but they were not as old as Teddy and they didn't have the ambition, so we started a father-son relationship.

DS: How did James Brown's death affect you?

AS: Oh, I don't think anything has affected me more.

DS: He was such an icon, but then to also have had this deeply personal relationship must have had an extraordinary impact on you.

AS: James Brown was the father I never had. I traveled with him; he financed my youth group. I met

my wife — we're no longer together — when she was his background singer. He put my kids in private school. I styled my hair after him; he actually styled my hair after his. What I do functionally is what Dr. King, Reverend Jackson and the movement are all about; but I learned manhood from James Brown. I always say that James Brown taught me how to be a man.

DS: What was one lesson that he taught you?

AS: Determination. Don't be afraid to listen to your inner ear. James Brown changed music; he changed the beat of music. I learned from him to trust your inner ear, go by your own beat. I remember in the 1970's when disco became popular he refused to water down his music, and it ended up his music became the basis of funk and rap and all that. I watched him deal with adversity and go to jail. When he was in jail I went and saw him every month, and I went and preached for him. He never gave up, he was very determined. He taught me how to take adversity and use it to your advantage.

DS: There is so much anger at injustice, and that anger can fell a person's ability to right wrongs, or can steer them down a bad path. You have been able to take your anger and use it productively. When you come across a young person who is angry at the world around them, what kind of advice do you give them?

AS: The challenge is to learn that your anger can fuel you in achieving things that can eradicate what you're angry about; or your anger can consume and defeat you. I'm known for fighting racial bias, police misconduct, and things against poor people. I can either be strategic to say this is Plan A, B

and C to get racial profiling off, or hate crime laws passed, or close the Navy base in Vieques, and I'm going to use my anger, my real, heartfelt anger to fuel me to get up at five o'clock in the morning to do Plan A, B and C; or I can be someone so angry that I never get to a strategy, I never get to Plan A, B and C. But then the police are not challenged, and the hate crime laws are not written, and Vieques is still open. So the question one has to ask one's self—I tell young people all the time, and most of the National Action Network leadership in our chapters are younger than me—you have to make a choice at some point in your life: are you going to do something about what angers you, or do you want to just be angry?

Because I learned a long time ago that those in power don't care that you're angry, they care if you use that anger to do something about it. You have a choice. I used to like boxing. My father was a boxer and I used to watching boxing matches all the time. If you go into the ring just mad you'll get knocked out. Or you can go into the ring and have training, and have a fight plan, and use your natural anger to fuel your fight plan; it's according to what you want to be. But the one with the fight plan that uses his anger to drive the fight plan is the one who ends up champion. The one without one just ends up angry and laying knocked out. It's your choice. I'm not saying I came to that out of brilliance; I came to that out of trial and error. I used to be angry with no plan. Just recklessly angry.

DS: What would you do?

AS: Just mad, just react. And achieve nothing. You've got to say that life is about stated goals, benchmarks, and what you want to achieve at the end of life. Because everybody comes to an

end. What was the purpose of your life and what did you achieve? So if my goal was to build a social justice network, and to change things, at the end of life in the social justice arena, did I do that? It won't matter if I was angry or happy, it will matter if I have achieved that. That's what I learned from James Brown. You got to decide what your purpose is, not others. Much of the media criticism of me assumes their goals and the impose them on me. Well, those might not be my goals. So they will say, "Well, Sharpton has not won a political office." But that might not be my goal! Maybe I ran for political office to change the debate, or to raise the social justice question.

DS: Which you see today. Dennis Kucinich or Tom Tancredo, they're not there because they think they are going to win; they are trying to frame the issues.

AS: Right. And if they are there to frame the issue, then they are successful. One of the things I learned from James Brown is don't let others determine your success. Your success is based upon your goals, not the goals they impose upon you.

Criticism: Sharpton is always there

DS: A lot of the criticism that is lodged at you is that you always seem to pop up around hot button issues, or where there is some race issue. My interview with you came up during my Thanksgiving dinner with my family, and I'd like that dinner to inform our discussion because it illustrated many of the typical perspectives about you. My brother-in-law made that point, that there you always are around the controversial race issue. I responded with, "Well, what was he saying? Was he wrong about what he said? Why do we focus on

Sharpton and not the issue he is talking about?"

AS: Your answer is right, but let me give you something even deeper than that. If you asked the average critic, "Where is he?" Jena, Imus, whatever. You know what they won't recognize? Not only was I there, but I created it into being an issue. There was no Jena until we went into Jena. There was nobody else fighting Imus. The misconception is these these issues got hot and then I came in; no, I came in and I made them hot. There was nobody in Jena; nobody heard of Jena until we went down there. Nobody ever questioned Imus but us, which is why Imus came to our show. The reason why this becomes important is because not only are you right, 'Do you disagree with him,' but do you begrudge him being in front of an issue that he helped create? So who is supposed to be in front of it? I create an issue and then somebody else is supposed to lead it? Last Friday we had a huge 50,000 person march in Washington against the Justice Department . We went out there organizing with our chapters, got 150 buses from around the country paid for. Who is supposed to lead the march? You got people saying, "There he is leading the march." Well, he organized it. Who is supposed to lead the march? And the thing that gets me is, you get blamed for stuff you did not do. A lot of people think I led the Duke case. I never went to Duke; I never went to North Carolina. Never ever. They asked me to come, but I said unless I talk to the victim I'm not going. So you get criticized for what you do organize and lead, and you get criticized for stuff you had nothing to do with, just because people assume you were there. And it's crazy!

Nadine Strossen

DS: Nadine Strossen, the President of the ACLU, brought up in our interview that their critics intentionally distort their work to serve their own purposes. For instance, many people believe the ACLU works to keep religion out of the school, yet they have consistently fought for the right for religion to be in schools. She debated Falwell and Robertson on these issues, and they will still say that the ACLU is fighting to remove God from the public sphere.

AS: She's right! That's not their position!

DS: When you come across people who intentionally misinform the debate in order to scuttle your goals, what do you do?

AS: The only thing you can do is straighten the record out, but you come to expect it. The advantage I have is that I grew up in the movement and watched people from Reverend Jackson to James Brown. James Brown as the dominant father in my life; Jackson as the dominant teacher, who had to deal with the same misconceptions and controversies. When it came my time, I almost expected it because that is what they are going to do, which is to try and change the debate. What you learn is you don't let them change the premise. Because if you start with the wrong premise, you arrive at the wrong conclusion. I'll give you an example. A guy says to me the other day in an airport, "I admire you, but I'd like to see you on more than civil rights issues." I said, "Let me ask you a question: what do I do?" He said, "Well, you lead a civil rights organization." So what am I supposed to do? That's like getting on a plane and telling the pilot I'd like to see you do more than fly the plane. That's

what I do—I'm a civil rights leader! What is a civil rights leader supposed to do?

DS: That's the same response Ingrid Newkirk gave in an interview when I told her people say she cares more about fighting for animals than for humans. She responded that's what PETA does: give a voice to those who do not have one. She said that criticism is like telling a homeless shelter they care more about the homeless than people who live in mansions. AS: That's exactly right! I tell staff here and all the other cities where we have offices, don't complain when people come in here with problems because that's what you do. That's like a nurse saying, "Why do sick people come here?" Because you work in a doctor's office! Why do people who are in trouble go to a lawyer's office? Because that's what lawyers do. That's what I do: civil rights. So in many ways, what they consider criticism is complimenting my job. An activist's job is to make public civil rights issues until there can be a climate for change. So when people get angry at me for raising these issues and making them public, well, that's my job! That's what I'm supposed to do. If I could not get the public's attention on an issue, then I'm not a good activist.

Tawana Brawley to Megan Williams

DS: Are you tired of hearing Tawana Brawley always paired with your name?

AS: No. You know what happens? It has been so long—twenty years—that when a lot of people back up on that, others realize how ludicrous it is. They say, "Wait a minute, you have to go back twenty years to criticize him? And He believed in a girl that you don't believe in?" So, twenty years later now and the same thing happened to Megan Williams in West Virginia.

Was that a hoax? When you look at the span of my career, from Howard Beach before Brawley to Sean Bell now, if all you can do is go to one case twenty years ago, then most people would say that is a little shaky. I mean, come on. Because if I was a hoaxster, then why haven't we seen other hoaxes in twenty years? And why didn't the jury say they thought it was a hoax? The jury said they didn't believe Pagonos should have been labeled, the same jury that hit us with defamation. That jury said there was no conspiracy to lie, which is why they only awarded him \$65,000 from me. If they thought it was a hoax, I would have been indicted for conspiracy and I would have been charged with a whole lot more money. In many ways, I learn to just sit back and laugh, because if you have to go back to 1987 in 2007, that means I have a pretty good record.

"I disagreed with the grand jury on Brawley. I believed there was enough evidence to go to trial. Grand jury said there wasn't. Okay, fine. Do I have a right to disagree with the grand jury? Many Americans believe O.J. Simpson was guilty. A jury said he wasn't. So I have as much right to question a jury as they do."

—Al Sharpton on Tawana Brawley.

DS: How would 2007 Al Sharpton have handled the Tawana Brawley case differently than 1987 Al Sharpton?

AS: I probably wouldn't have made it as personal in terms of personal attacks on the Attorney General, but I would still have fought the case. I would have done the same case, I would have stood up the same way, and I do it the same way now. When we are approached—phone rings every day here with cases—we are not

the investigator. We are there to make sure there is a fair investigation. And I would have done the same thing then I do now. Not long ago a writer said to me, "How can you believe a girl is apprehended by four white men with the N-word written on her and all of that?" I told him, "Let me tell you a story I heard that sounds even worse. I heard of a guy who was grabbed and brought to a police station and they stuck a pole up his behind, and no cop would stop them and turn them in." He said, "That's ludicrous!" And I said, "That's Abner Louima, and it happened!" I fought that case, and those cops went to jail. So in my world, who decides what the most bizarre story in the world is? We hear these every day! He says, "I never thought about it like that." Megan Williams right now is Tawana Brawley. What are we talking about? I'll give you another example. Five young black kids were arrested and charged for raping a white female in Central Park. I defended them. Thirteen years later we find out that they did not do it. The DNA cleared them. One of them works for us now. So how do you know? Only by continuing to fight for what you believe in.

DS: You are saying that when you become involved you are fighting to ensure that there is a fair investigation into whatever has happened, and that sometimes you are paired with the fact that not everything turns out in favor of the person being investigated?
AS: That's exactly right. You get the downside, like the Brawley jury didn't believe her. I'll give you one worse. Amadou Diallo was killed, forty-one bullets. The jury said they weren't guilty. He's still dead. So on paper was I wrong about Amadou Diallo? He's dead, forty-one bullets killed him, but the jury

said that those cops were right, so when do we decide? My comeback always is: I disagreed with the grand jury on Brawley. I believed there was enough evidence to go to trial. Grand jury said there wasn't. Okay, fine. Do I have a right to disagree with the grand jury? Many Americans believe O.J. Simpson was guilty. A jury said he wasn't. So I have as much right to question a jury as they do. Does it make somebody a racist? No! They just disagreed with the jury. So did I. I happened to not believe a fifteen year old girl could have made all that up and guess the names of the people who admitted they were together. I just don't believe that. Now, what happened? I don't know. But I don't believe that. So, we'll just disagree.

Sharpton and the African-American media

DS: Earl Ofari Hutchinson recently wrote a relatively laudatory column about you in The Huffington Post. In it he said, "When Sharpton toppled Jesse Jackson from the top spot as black America's main man, the notoriety, and the hostility, that that title carries with it, insured that he'd take the heat for whatever went right or wrong when blacks took to the streets in protest." What do you think happened to Jesse Jackson's place in the black community? Hutchinson is a prominent black man saying you toppled Jackson.

AS: Well, that's a hard thing for me to comment on. When I was growing up Reverend Jackson was a hero to me and a mentor. I'd rather not get into that. I'll let Earl and others give their opinions. I'll stay out of that. That's difficult for me to answer....

"The main thing [black columnists] write about is criticism of black leaders. If you read their columns you understand what

their job is. 'White leadership is never at fault. Government is never at fault. It's black leaders.'"—Al Sharpton

DS: Clarence Page again in reference to this wrote, "'gangsta' culture punishes those who don't 'Stop Snitching,' to quote a popular inner-city T-shirt slogan, even when the victims are innocent neighbors. A lot of us black Americans would like to take back our streets. We could use a little more help from our leaders."
AS: We could use a little more help from Clarence Page, again. When I had the campaign against these lyrics—I had the "It's Not Snitching, It's Saving" campaign—Clarence was totally silent. We've taken that head on, and had rappers attack us. David Banner said "Al Sharpton can suck my so-and-so." Jay-Z has a record out, and he's a friend of mine! He says, "Don't tell me Al Sharpton not to say 'bitch'!" They don't attack Clarence Page they attack me because I'm attacking them. Just look at the rappers attacking me. So somebody should ask Clarence Page why they are attacking me if I'm not out there fighting them.

DS: You are saying that black columnists, whether it be Clarence Page or Juan Williams, who seem to have made their names by attacking a lot of the work done at the grass roots. How can you change that?

AS: I don't think you can. That's their role. If you go back to the sixties it was Carl Rowan who used to attack Martin Luther King. You have blacks who understand that one of the ways to get a job in the mainstream media is to attack black leaders.

DS: Such as Juan Williams?

AS: Oh, Juan Williams who works

at Fox? Juan Williams works for Rupert Murdoch and wants to ask me about accountability? I mean, really. He works for Rupert Murdoch and wants to ask me about accountability. I think he was mad because a Republican donated some money to the National Action Network. And you work for Rupert Murdoch. Because we are on The Word Network we should have gone to a rally for The Word Network. It's ridiculous. Again, what do they do? The main thing they write about is criticism of black leaders. If you read their columns you understand what their job is. "White leadership is never at fault. Government is never at fault. It's black leaders." What's ironic is the ones they do praise—Bill Cosby does my radio show maybe once a month. Real close with me. They praise Cosby, but never talk about the fact that Cosby and I work together on these very issues. And Cosby supports what I do. How do they reconcile that? Because they understand that part of their compact with the right wing is that they'll beat up on Al Sharpton, or Jackson, or whoever, because they are black.

Why the need for an Al Sharpton?

DS: At Thanksgiving we were talking about the different voices for different communities, and I said that there is no Latino Al Sharpton—the Cubans used to have Jorge Mas Canosa, but nobody has taken his place—nor is there an Asian Al Sharpton. With the black community it seems like Americans are always looking for THE voice. Do you think that your visibility has been externally imposed?

AS: No, I disagree with that. I'm glad you had that discussion. Do you know why I disagree with you? In the Latino community you don't have an Al Sharpton, you

have La Raza. Every community does have an organization or institution. So number one, that's not true. Second, in the black community—

DS: But there's no one voice. It seems like the others never have a singular voice.

AS: Yeah, but that one voice is always the head of some group. Believe me, if I could not prove that we could deliver the bodies to these protests, the press wouldn't cover me. The only reason the press covers me is we create the issue. The press ignored Jena until we put 40,000 people down there. So if we have the organizational muscle, they aren't doing me a favor. The white media didn't create me, they covered me. When I went to Howard Beach, there were hundreds out there and they threw bananas at us and all. The press didn't contact me and say, "We'll tell you what, Sharpton, you go out there and we'll cover you." No! I created the drama like King did in Selma, Alabama. So what they are really saying is, "Let's be selective because if we don't like Sharpton let's not cover Sharpton because we want somebody else." Usually even the black critics that criticize charismatic leadership are blacks without charisma who can't do it themselves. We've always had charismatic leadership, whether it was Mandela in South Africa or King in the south. The question is what you use the charismatic leadership for; what's wrong with that?

DS: Shane Johnson is an African-American blogger who was protesting your Washington, D.C. Department of Justice march. Clarence Page, who is one of your critics within the African-American community, wrote a column about it. He wrote, "Why do we black folks get so much more agitated

about occasional white-on-black insults than about the black-on-black assaults that constantly terrorize certain neighborhoods?" AS: My answer is why doesn't Clarence Page do something about it when we everyday deal with that. That is dealt with every day and every way. Not only have we dealt with black on black assaults, not only do we do crime rallies, not only do we denounce it, we've even been the ones to go as far as to march on black rappers about the n-word, misogyny and violence to women that a lot of them glorify. Clarence Page and them don't do that, we do. My critics were totally silent when we were marching on the rappers, the records companies and all of that this summer. But when I do a Justice march, they criticize. Well, where were they when we were marching on some of these rappers who glorify violence? That's why they have no credibility in our community. Because we are marching on the record companies that glorify violence; we are marching on black on black violence. They are not. They wait for us to do an issue that is race-based, and act like that's all we did. We spent half this year fighting lyrics in records, the glorification of violence, drugs in our community. I'm the one who painted the crackhouses, saying get them out of our community. Where was Clarence and them then?

DS: Is getting your message out that you do more than just race-based issues a challenge you have difficulty overcoming? That's all that people hear and see you do. AS: Well, that's one of the challenges, but part of the problem is guys who are critics won't tell the truth. If you were to ask them, they know we've marched against record

companies. They won't cover them, because they know—particularly a lot of black columnists—because that's the way they can be heard: to be against whoever is out there. They did it to Jesse before me, and they did it to King before him. You know, one of the ways you can get covered if you are black in the mainstream media is to attack the guy that is up front. Make him the boogeyman. I accepted that going in.

Al Sharpton and Presidential Politics

DS: Recently a poll came out that showed sixty-one percent of the black Americans surveyed said values between poor and middle-class blacks are moving too far apart to be viewed as a common black experience. Only 41 percent expressed that view in a similar 1986 poll. Do you think the black experience is no longer defined by race, but by socio-economic status?

"But do you know what nobody ever talks about? I'm the only black who ran for President who had to run against another black: Carol Mosley Braun [above]. Jesse never had to face a black; Shirley [Chisholm] never had to face a black. Obama hasn't had to face a black. The real question is: why did Sharpton get so many more votes than Carol Mosley-Braun, who on paper was a much better candidate?"

AS: No, I think it was always divided on socio-economic status. I think that there is a growing socio-economic difference that brings the contrast more to light, but that all comes together around the question of civil rights. There's no difference. There's any number of polls that show that most blacks, no matter what their class, say that there is still bias in

America. Whether you are a kid in Jena from a poor family, or a college professor at Columbia with nooses hanging on your door, you still have a race problem. You may have a difference in views about values, but both of you still feel there is bias at whatever class level you are at. That is why they were shocked when I ran for President and the black elite—the Bob Johnsons who own BET and Earl Grey—were some of the biggest contributors to my campaign. Because they said we still have to have somebody out there fighting race. Let me give you the schizophrenia of the political animal. When I ran for President, I won every black district in Washington D.C. I then won the black vote in South Carolina, when I never was from the south. But do you know what nobody ever talks about? I'm the only black who ran for President who had to run against another black: Carol Mosley Braun. Jesse never had to face a black; Shirley [Chisholm] never had to face a black. Obama hasn't had to face a black. The real question is: why did Sharpton get so many more votes than Carol Mosley Braun, who on paper was a much better candidate? Former U.S. Senator, former ambassador, and she never got anywhere near my vote. It shows that blacks vote based on who they think supports their interests. Now you are talking about Obama has to fight Hillary for the black vote; I had to fight Carol Mosley Braun for the black vote, and beat her everywhere. I think that is the analysis they don't want to give. They'll say Sharpton didn't get the votes that Jesse got, but they never mention there was a black woman—the only black woman who ever served in the U.S. Senate—running against Sharpton! They forget that now.

DS: What did you learn about national politics from your Presidential run?

AS: I'll tell you, I will be completely candid with you. I learned these guys are not that smart. I expected them to be a lot smarter, a lot more difficult to debate, and I learned a lot of them only have the value system of win, win, win. They don't believe in anything. Obviously I ran to put forth a political position and to make visible a constituency. And obviously many of them didn't; but I thought they had some core beliefs. Most of them didn't have core beliefs.

DS: Is there one moment that sticks out in your mind?

AS: Probably, but let me get back to that. I also learned that once most Americans and I talked, that we didn't disagree that much. When I was campaigning in Iowa and New Hampshire—totally white communities—that the more we talked not only did they get more comfortable with me, I got more comfortable with them. Because people really don't disagree on fundamentals as much as the disagree on the stuff we've been programmed to disagree on with each other.

DS: The way it's presented in the media.

AS: Correct. People would say to me, "Now that I hear you, even if I disagree with you I don't think you're as bad as I thought." I would say, "Let me ask you a question: what was 'bad as you thought'?" And they couldn't say. They don't know why they think you're bad, they just know you're supposed to be bad because the right wing tells them you're bad.

DS: It seems the media—both liberal and conservative—has to follow a narrative.

AS: Exactly. So even my worse criticism—Brawley—tell me what is wrong with a civil rights leader believing a 15 year old girl who came to him. I didn't tell her the story, she told me. What was wrong about that? "I guess nothing. Did you know she was lying?" A jury didn't know. She said that I didn't know what her story was. So in your worse scenario, the lack of discourse is what separates most Americans. I learned that more than anything in the campaign. When I would meet with a lot of the handlers and DNC officials about the campaign, and everything was geared toward polling and focus groups, and not core beliefs, that's when I got this thing that took me, as one who is a true believer—I mean, I've been prosecuted, stabbed, 9 days in jail in Vieques for what I believe, jail twenty other times—at the end of the day people have to say I believe in what I do. I don't know if there are a lot of people in national politics that have core beliefs that they would go to jail for, or even be willing to die for. I just don't feel that way about those people. Ultimately, I only respect people who are willing to put it all on the line.

DS: Was there a moment that sticks out in your mind during the campaign with anyone in particular?

AS: Not really.

DS: What about during the debates?

AS: You could see people change. Remember when I ran in 2004, and when the debates started in 2003, most of the people on the stage, including Kerry and Edwards, were pro-war. I was the first one—even before Dean—who came out against it. Then Dean came out and joined the race later. I saw them go from, "We got to

fight terrorism, we got to go to Iraq," almost to my position in a matter of four or five months, which I considered questionable. It also validated why you need public pressure. I remember I went to the first huge anti-war march in Washington, the Answer march. I was the first Presidential candidate that would go.

On Barack Obama

DS: Who are you supporting for President?

AS: No one yet. The question is, who is going to support a strong social justice agenda? When I sit and look at the Democratic debates, with all these hangmen nooses, and all these hate crimes, and they don't even bring it up, how can I support them when they're not supporting us? If I was on that stage it would be on the agenda.

DS: The Post reported back in April that you have a conflict with Obama. What do you think is behind that story?

AS: I think it's trying to get a double shot. Hurt him with people that like me; hurt me with people that like him. Say that Sharpton has a problem with him so the Obama people say, "Oh, why is Al messing with Obama?" The people that are in the debates, where he has to contest with Hillary, "Oh, you have a problem with Al Sharpton." I don't have a problem with Obama. I talk to Obama, I talk to Hillary, I talk to John Edwards. I have a problem that none of them are forcefully raising the social justice agenda. Why? That's what I do. I'm a social justice leader. That's what I do. And I think if you went to a union leader, he'd say, "I like their issues on this, but what about labor?" and I think if you went to a woman leader, "What about gender divided?" Why do people expect

me not to be concerned about civil rights? That's what I do.

DS: Why do you think Obama is not dominating the black vote?

AS: I don't know. I think one, they don't know him as well. They are just learning him. I think he'll do alright, but I think the strategic mistake his handlers made—I don't think it was him—is they sold him as beyond race. The antithesis to the civil rights guys. The problem with that is the blacks say, "Okay, you aren't standing up for us, then fine." So you can't come back later and say he's the black candidate when he said no he's not. A lady at The New York Times called to do a story and I made her change the whole thing. She said, "I want to do a story on Obama and the civil rights generation and the conflict." I said, "You've got a problem. Obama and I are the same generation. We are only six years apart. How do you count generations?" She said she hadn't thought about that. You could do that with Jesse, but Obama is 46 and I'm 53; that's not a different generation. Why don't you talk about that every generation has had blacks on the inside and blacks on the outside. Ed Brooke was in the Senate like Obama when King was alive. Ed Brooke was elected and sitting in the Senate when King was alive, and he was a Republican from Massachusetts. Then we had Carol Mosley-Braun, then we had Obama. Ron Brown was chairman of the party when Jesse Jackson was the outsider. This new thing is that you guys don't do research. There's always been blacks inside the system and blacks outside. That's not generational, that's functional.

The Iraq War

DS: Do you think there should be

conscription?

AS: I don't know. I don't know. That's debatable to me.

DS: Do you consider our military a volunteer army?

AS: Yeah. I think that a volunteer army—I'm against drafts, even when Charlie Rangel came out with it. Even understanding the reasoning, to make rich as well as poor go, I just think the rich will find a way to get around it and there will still be a disproportionate amount of poor.

DS: Which you saw in Vietnam, and many national leaders now found ways not to go.

AS: Exactly right. I was in high school at the time of the Vietnam War, there was a draft, and the rich kids didn't go. They found a way around it.

DS: How has the war affected you?

AS: I think it has affected me in that I have seen and actually preached at soldiers' funerals. I've seen the families suffer for absolutely no reason. There never was Weapons of Mass Destruction, there never was eminent danger, so I have seen it up close and personal in terms of families losing their sons. I've also seen resources that we could have used to provide training and jobs in this country just sent over there arbitrarily. I also watched when Katrina happened the way people who were relocated around the country couldn't vote at home, but Iraqis could vote from America in the elections in Iraq. I think it brought out the glaring contradictions of American democracy as practiced by people like the Bush administration.

DS: Are you optimistic for the future?

AS: Absolutely. There is no doubt

in my mind as I sit here today that the world will be better, America will be better, and that those like us—no matter how controversial—will be redeemed in history. There is no doubt in my mind. Whether we live to see it physically or not, I have no doubt in my mind.

Sharpton as a symbol

DS: I had interviewed a documentary filmmaker named Kira Nerusskaya, who is one of the leading voices in the fat acceptance movement. She is what she calls a "BBW". A Big Beautiful Woman. Your name came up in that interview and she called you Reverend 911 and mentioned that fat people don't have their own Al Sharpton, someone they can turn to when they are being hassled at work because they are a drain on their insurance, or when fat people are discriminated against or harassed. When you hear that you have become a symbol that transcends your community, what do you think?

AS: I thought you were going to say she is disappointed that I'm not as fat as I used to be. On one level I think it is flattering. It is something you never think about when you jump into this. Again, I joined the movement WAY before I was old enough to understand all of that—

DS: When you were ten, when you were preaching—

AS: Yeah, exactly. People say now I'm living by ambition or whatever else they accuse me of, but what was I living by when I was ten years old? Twelve years old when I joined Breadbasket. It's also frightening because it makes you all the more a target for every critic. There's not a month that goes by that we don't have a serious death threat. Every criminal justice guy is trying to topple you. So you become a

target as much as it is flattering, so I always remember the upside and the downside of it.

DS: It's interesting that you have become that to other people.

AS: It is, but I'll tell you what else is interesting that she said—and I don't know if she intended to say it this way or not—when she said I'm Reverend 911. What a lot of people don't understand, particularly in the white community, is I'm projected as an ambulance chaser. But I'm more the ambulance. People call me because they know I will come. If nothing else you write, I have never fought a case where they didn't ask me to come. People have this picture like I'm sitting up in bed at night with a walkie-talkie. "You hear anything? Oh, let's run! It's Virginia today!" People call us. Jena all the way to Florida all the way to Jasper, Texas, all the way to Sean Bell. Every victim calls us. On my syndicated radio show now if we get a case I make the victim get on and say, "Now, you asked me to get involved in this?" That's what I did with Jena. Now nobody remembers because nobody knew what Jena was then. We respond to a person coming in, which is why it's absurd when black conservatives, "Who put Sharpton in charge?" The victim! Who put me in charge of Jena? The people involved with Jena asked me to come. What gives you the right to tell people not to have who they want to represent them. Could you imagine? I'm leading the march on Jena, asked to come in by the parents of the kid in jail, and they're going to sit on MSNBC that night and ask, "Well, why is Al Sharpton leading it?" Because the parents of the kid asked me to lead it! Duh! So at least let's be straight-up about it.

DS: Do you think the criticism is more because you are successful for bringing attention to it?

AS: If I was not able to bring public attention, they would care less. And let's face it: some of them are very cynical and know they can get a lot of play criticizing me. I was talking about it at the rally this morning—we have rallies here every Saturday. You have one guy, I can't think of his name, a sportswriter from Kansas City who made a career out of criticizing me about Imus. He did every talk show. "Sharpton's wrong!" Nobody ever said, "Wait a minute, you a sportswriter, what are you speaking for? What are you talking about it?" It's ludicrous.

"I hate to admit it. I always thought I would probably get killed before now. After I got stabbed in 1991 I was sure that if I got to forty, I would never make it to fifty. Now I'm fifty-three, which is probably why I work as hard as I do."

Image: David Shankbone.

DS: Why do you think that happens?

AS: Because they know that there is a market for it. They know they can get air time for it.

DS: Did you ever do a DNA test to see if you were related to Strom Thurmond?

AS: No, I just accepted the documents; I never did the DNA.

DS: Do you keep in contact with Essie Mae Washington-Williams?

AS: I only met her one time. Because again, I don't know that we are related. I know that my great-grandfather was a slave of the Thurmonds, I don't know that there was any blood. When they came and told me I went down to South Carolina to Edgefield, and

visited the cemetery. The cemetery at the First Baptist Church of Edgefield is all Sharptons—of course the white Sharptons—and Thurmonds. While I was there, a man came up and said, "You know, the plantation that your great-grandfather worked on is still intact. A doctor bought it and he didn't change anything. He told me if you'd like to see it we can go over there." It's on Sharpton Road in Edgefield. [Sharpton shows Shankbone the photos of him at the plantation]. I look at it to remind me of how far we've come. [Sharpton shows Shankbone photos of civil rights leaders and his family]. This is the last time James Brown was on stage at the Apollo, to do my fiftieth birthday in 2004.

DS: Did you ever think you'd reach fifty?

AS: No. I hate to admit it. I always thought I would probably get killed before now. After I got stabbed in 1991 I was sure that if I got to forty, I would never make it to fifty. Now I'm fifty-three, which is probably why I work as hard as I do. I work 17, 18 hour days. Rachel [Noerdlinger, his assistant] will tell you 20, but she's lying because she feels I overwork. I feel every day I live is a day I never expected to live, so I try to do everything I can. I think that part of the problem with a lot of civil rights leaders is that this is the first generation that actually lived to be gray. What do gray civil rights leaders do? Because in the era before us, they were all dead by now.

DS: Who are some up-and-coming civil rights leaders under thirty?

AS: Some are in my organization. You've got Tamika Mallory, who heads the Decency Initiative here in New York. You've got Mark Coleman in Atlanta. You have Jerry

Moffet in Phoenix. I could name you fifteen to twenty in various degrees who have a lot of potential. Who will become national? I have no idea. I tend to work with all of them. We have thirty-three chapters, offices in seven cities, and 90% of them are under forty years old. Most of the people who marched with us in Jena and Washington were under forty years old. There's a resurgence of activism among young people, and I think a lot of it is they went through this era of blacks making it as CEOs and blacks making it in management, and now that era is over. Richard Parsons is gone soon; Obama is not dominating the black vote. So a lot of these people are saying that it's not happening. They are going back to that we have to struggle as a unit.

DS: At Thanksgiving my brother-in-law's brother made a point that we in white America don't remember history, and that we come across people who DO remember history and we are always shocked. "Why don't you get over it and move on?" But that doesn't take into account that there is a long history of racial problems that have set people behind in the race by half a mile, and suddenly it's supposed to be, "You're equal, it's a fair race now." AS: "Get over it!" Yeah. People are set back half a mile because they were given a disadvantage, not because they fell a half a mile. Then you tell us to catch up and forget that the race was unfair in the beginning. You're right.

DS: One sees this problem with history with the Christian Zionists in the right wing. They have an entirely different perspective on history. They don't view Thomas Jefferson and George Washington—who were secular—as our

founding fathers. When they talk about America's founding fathers they mean Cotton Mather and the Puritans.

AS: I think you have to be determined to not allow people to dismiss history. You have to use every forum to put history into perspective. People have a reason they want you to forget history, because history does not back up their point. One of the things Martin Luther King III and I talked about is that his father died one of the most controversial figures in the history of America, but you would think now forty years later he was revered by white America. He wasn't! The New York Times would write editorials about him telling him to keep his nose out of the Vietnam business. "Who do you think you are?" When he died—that's when I joined the movement—we had to fight to get him a national holiday. But today you read stories that guys like us aren't Dr. King. Well in Dr. King's time they didn't have him as Dr. King, but that's the benefit of distorting history. If you can erase history, erase why there are racial gaps across the board—health care, education, income—if you can erase how that all started, then you can make guys like me look extreme. But if you look at history and how we got here, we're really very reasonable to say some of the things we have said.

DS: Then the focus is on gangsta culture and instead of looking at how that came about, it is talked about as if it is a phenomenon that just happened?

AS: Nobody is looking at that, and the fact that if you didn't have gangsta culture, we'd still be in the back of the bus. Should we have stronger family ties? Of course. Should we stress education? Of course. Should we stress responsibility? Of course. But

people who had self-contained families that were very responsible still had to sit in the back of the bus and couldn't check into a hotel. Let's not act like gangsta is what caused racial inequity in our society. It's like saying you've got cancer, but you've also got a head cold, so the reason you've got cancer is you've got a head cold. No, you have cancer AND a head cold. You take Tylenol for the head cold, but you've still got to deal with the cancer. What they are trying to act like is taking head cold medicine is going to solve cancer. It's a bunch of crap! If every black in America had strongly family ties, and there were no out-of-wedlock births, which I strongly advocate and preach, it still wouldn't solve the racial inequality in the social fabric. Let's be honest about that.

Blacks and whites and talking about race

DS: At the end of the Thanksgiving discussion, I said that if a black person was sitting at the table with us, we would never have had the entire conversation. We talked about that. Do you think there is a nervousness amongst the races to engage each other?

AS: A lot of the nervousness is that white America is uncomfortable with having to deal with the guilt and history of racism, and they certainly don't want to admit it is still here, and black America in large part has for so long has had to try and act like it's not there to get along. It's almost like our silence will get us access so that we don't offend you. And those of us that are offensive have to then carry the burden of trying to push the envelope. That's why Bill Tatum, who publishes the Amsterdam News, said if we didn't have a guy like Al Sharpton we'd have to invent one. Because every

generation has to have somebody who pushes the envelope. We just do.

DS: I think it was Lani Guinier who used to talk about the problem is the races too afraid to talk to each other about race.

AS: I think Lani Guinier did talk about that. You have to not only have blacks, but you have to have whites and white leadership that want to have that dialogue. Most of them don't want to have it. We have to create that dialogue and hopefully some of the things we are doing creates the climate for that dialogue. What I have found is that many people in America, particularly the white people, don't really want peace, they want quiet. "Just shut up and don't talk about it. Fine, there may be a problem, but let's not talk about it." That's not peace, that's quiet. You'll never have peace until you have real dialogue and look at the difference between the life of a white and life of a non-white in this country, and how we close the gap. That's how you get peace. So people don't want racial justice; they want racial quiet. But racial quiet in the absence of racial justice is to allow for things to go forward unfairly. In the long wrong, that leads to explosions because people hold it in as long as they can and then they explode. The way to stop the explosions is to deal with the problem.

DS: Would you say what sums up the problem with dialogue as you see it is that white people are too afraid to offend black people by asking questions about their perceptions, but that black people become too offended by white people's ignorance?

AS: I think that's a fair statement. I think that's a very fair statement. I wish I had said it.

That hit it right on the head. Really.

Don Imus, Michael Richards and Dog The Bounty Hunter

DS: When you think about Imus, Michael Richards and Duane Chapman, it's starting to seem almost like a rehearsed play. They have these racist explosions, and then they come to you seeking absolution. How do you feel about playing this?

"The critics say, "Why do they go to Al Sharpton for absolution?" What nobody ever asks is, "What did Sharpton do?" I made Imus go on my radio show and told him he should be fired. I never talked to the Bounty man [above]. And I told Michael Richards I'm not meeting with him." Sharpton on those seeking absolution from him for racist remarks.

AS: That's a great question, because if you name Don Imus, Richards, Bounty Hunter, they all three came, and none of them got absolution from me. The critics say, "Why do they go to Al Sharpton for absolution?" What nobody ever asks is, "What did Sharpton do?" I made Imus go on my radio show and told him he should be fired. I never talked to the Bounty man. And I told Michael Richards I'm not meeting with him. So, despite what they designed to happen with me, I never cooperated with the design. Imus only went on my show thinking if he did he would get past it; I used it for the basis to get him fired. He got everything BUT absolution. Why do they come? Because of my visibility. Right now National Action Network is the only civil rights organization in the country that can put tens of thousands of people in the street. I think we proved that if nothing else this year from Sean Bell to Jena to Washington. He thought if

he did he would get past it; I used it for the basis to get him fired. He got everything BUT absolution. Why do they come? Because of my visibility. Right now National Action Network is the only civil rights organization in the country that can put tens of thousands of people in the street. I think we proved that if nothing else this year from Sean Bell to Jena to Washington. You go where you think if you can get this group not to fight me, you get a pass. If somebody is accused of anti-Semitism, they go to the Anti-Defamation League. Does that make Abe Foxman the President of the Jews? No! That's what ADL does. It's insulting to us. They say, "Al Sharpton is not the President of Black America." No, I'm like ADL is in the Jewish community. That's what he does. If anybody is going to jump on this, it's him, so let me go to him. That doesn't mean he's in charge of all blacks. It means if it's a civil rights violation—that's what they have to do—he's been the guy up front. It's very simple. In gay communities you have the Human Rights Campaign. With women, you've got NOW. In the Jewish community, you've got ADL. Why wouldn't you have a National Action Network in the black community? But if sanity is that NOW can have Kim Gandy, and the Jewish community can have Abe Foxman, and the gay community can have Human Rights group, but the black community can't have an Al Sharpton, that's absurd!

DS: One of the issues that came up in reference to that at Thanksgiving was political correctness. My brother-in-law brought up the Don Imus 'nappy-headed hos' issue and said it was political correctness. His brother said that there is a big difference between calling black girls playing

basketball nappy-headed hos versus asking a black person why their families are in trouble. AS: Big difference. Big difference.

DS: But those get equated as being politically incorrect. AS: I think you're right. They equate it, and it's wrong. The reason I demanded Imus be fired was because he had a record of making these kinds of derogatory statements. It's clear that 'nappy-headed' was a racist term. That's not questioning social maladies in the community. What is the social malady or irresponsibility about 'nappy-headed'? 'Ho' is not only racist, it's misogynist. People who tried to put that over as he just wasn't politically correct are ridiculous. That's why if I or anybody else said a racist term against anybody else. That's not politically incorrect; that's bias. And ALL of us have made mistakes with language, but you pay for it. Which is why I don't object to him getting a job again, but he had to lose that job because he had consistently violated that job.

DS: Are you okay that Don Imus is going back on the air?

AS: Well, we'll monitor him; I'm not saying I'm going throw a banquet for him and say welcome home. He has the right to make a living, but because he has such a consistent pattern with this we are going to monitor him to make sure he doesn't do it again.

DS: Do you work with the Hip Hop Action Network?

AS: On some issues. They disagree with me at first when I came out hard on the n-word and all, but then they moderated their view. On some things we work together.

DS: How did they disagree with you?

AS: When I first came out and said the n-word, the b-word, should be stopped. Russell Simmons came out and said we can't censor artists. Then he got such a backlash he said, "We got it to be maybe voluntary, or something." Russell kind of slid backwards on that one. My thing is I'm against the use of the word, and I've been against it for a long time. Even in my book, "Al on America" I wrote a whole chapter on the hip hop generation and how to stop that. On top of it, all of us have used it; I've even stopped using it privately, because it's wrong. I think the thing that really drove it home to me was the kid who got beat up in Howards Beach last year, and Fat Nick—the white that beat him up saying no niggers in the neighborhood—his defense in court was that he was using a hip hop term. It's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. We can't be the only ones in America in which there is no hate term.

DS: If you could choose how you die, how would it be?

AS: I would probably choose doing something active. I would either be leading a march or preaching a sermon. I don't want to die old and incapacitated. I'd rather die in the firing line.

DS: What do you think is the greatest threat to humanity?

AS: Our ignoring nature. Our ignoring the signs of nature.

DS: Global warming?

AS: Global warming would be at the top of the list. Al Gore ended up being right. I think our ignoring nature, global warming, and then our ignoring the need for one standard of human rights all over the world. This second. But first nature, because we won't be here if we don't start taking nature seriously. Like global warming and

ecology and whatever we are doing with the environment. Second is how we deal with human rights standard all over the world.

DS: Are there any national politicians you look up to as leaders?

AS: I respect Dennis Kucinich. I respect Keith Ellison in Minnesota. Those are the two that come to mind right away. I'm far more progressive than most, but I really respect both of them.

DS: Do you think Joel Klein has done a good job with New York public schools?

AS: I think Joel Klein has done better than I thought he would. I'm not sure I'm into the mayor controlling the system. It's funny, Joel has a sense of grass roots than one would think. I think he has done better than I would have given him credit for. I didn't have a lot of hope for him. He has defied my low expectation.

Bali climate change conference begins

The freshly elected president of the World Climate Change Conference Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesian Minister of the environment, as well as his predecessor, Nabel Makarim, and Yvo de Boer of the UNFCCC, called for a breakthrough in negotiations on the first day of the 13th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Bali today.

All three speakers agreed that by the end of the conference, which lasts till the 14th of December, an agenda must be set for negotiations on a post-2012 agreement on climate change mitigation. In founding this demand, they each drew on the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, which establishes that the window for mitigating dangerous climate

change closes in year 2030.

The outgoing President of the last session, David Mwiraria, Kenyan minister for environment and natural resources, held the first speech making some statements on his term of office. He went on to remind that the least developed, many of which are African nations and the small island states, are the ones that will be hit hardest by global warming, now and in the future.

The new president of the conference, Mr Witoelar, Indonesian minister of the environment agreed with that statement, saying that the "most severe impacts [...] will be felt by poor nations, and the poorest within them" and drew the conclusion that it is "critical that we act, and act now." Looking at the chances for the the so-called Bali roadmap being agreed on, he noted that from consultations he had "heard that there was widespread support from governments" for making this happen. He went on to say that "Many have also expressed support for a target date of 2009".

As the two speakers before him, Yvo de Boer of the UNFCCC noted that 2007 had been a exceptional year regarding climate change, with multiple political high level meetings being held. He went on to say that the delegates should reach agreement on a multitude of issues that had only been in discussion up until now. Amongst others, these included the organizational questions regarding the Adaptation Fund, which is aimed at funding measures that will increase the adaptive capacity of nations with developing industries. Reaching agreement on these issues would allow their substance to be implemented, and

at the same time "free up the negotiation capacity needed for the post-2012 process".

Finally, he adressed the matter of whether the targets that are to be set by 2009 are to be internationally legally binding or not, an issue that the United States is particularly sensitive about. He stated that in his opinion form follows function, making an allegory to the targets needing to be set before agreement being reached on how they are to be mandated .

New Australian Prime Minister signs Kyoto

Kevin Rudd has been sworn in as Australia's new Prime Minister with an agenda of action on climate change and the repeal of unpopular industrial laws. The new Labor government has signed ratification document to the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and also plans to withdraw Australian troops from Iraq by the middle of 2008.

The agreement, which will come into force in 90 days, means Australia's greenhouse gas emissions should not be higher than 8 percent above 1990 levels. Environmental groups believe the Australian economy could easily manage even more ambitious targets. John Connor, chief executive of the Climate Institute, says Australia could cut its emissions by 20 percent by 2020.

"What this concludes is that we can actually have a strong leadership position with barely a ripple on economic growth. We'd still see a tripling of the economy through to 2050 and strong employment and quality of life growth," Connor said.

Mr. Rudd's decision to sign the

Kyoto climate accord isolates the United States, which will now be the only developed nation not to ratify the agreement. Australia's former conservative government refused to ratify Kyoto, saying it would damage the economy with its heavy reliance on coal exports, while countries like India and China were not bound by emissions targets.

Mr. Rudd's cabinet creates a new portfolio of Minister for Climate Change and Water, held by Penny Wong, an ethnic Chinese immigrant from Malaysia. She is one of seven women in cabinet, including deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Former rock singer Peter Garrett was sworn in as Environment Minister. Responsibility for running a strong Australian economy now falls to Treasurer Wayne Swan, one of Prime Minister Rudd's most trusted lieutenants. The recently appointed foreign minister Stephen Smith, a lawyer from Western Australia, is expected to visit the United States early next year to discuss Australia's plans to pull its troops out of Iraq.

"Australia's official declaration today that we will become a member of the Kyoto Protocol is a significant step forward in our country's efforts to fight climate change domestically, and with the international community."
—Kevin Rudd

Mr. Rudd's decision to sign the Kyoto Protocol clears the way for his government to play a stronger role when he leads a delegation of four Australian ministers to the U.N. climate talks in Bali.

They began Monday and will search for a new carbon emissions scheme to be introduced when the Kyoto treaty expires in 2012.

Teacher jailed over teddy bear given pardon

The Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir has issued a full pardon to British school teacher Gillian Gibbons who was sentenced to 15 days in jail after allowing children in her class to name a teddy bear "Muhammad".

The decision came after a meeting with two members of a British Muslim group, Lord Ahmed and Baroness Warsi who travelled to the Sudan after her imprisonment around a week ago. The imprisonment of the 54 year-old teacher from Liverpool caused international outcry with Muslims in Sudan protesting for her death, and British Muslims protesting for her release.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he was "delighted and relieved" at the decision and Mrs Gibbons said "I am sorry if I caused any distress" in a released statement. Mrs Gibbons is expected to be released into the custody of the British embassy in the Sudan.

Venezuela's constitutional reform referendum fails to pass

Venezuelan voters rejected a referendum on changes to the constitution. The chief of the National Electoral Council said it was rejected by a margin of 51% to 49%.

The referendum vote on sweeping reforms to the constitution would have allowed Hugo Chávez to run for reelection indefinitely, control Venezuela's foreign currency reserves, appoint loyalists over regional elected officials and expand presidential powers in the case of an emergency. It would also have established a maximum six-hour working day and 36-hour

working week, cut the voting age from 18 to 16, and expand social security benefits to workers in the informal economy.

Chávez called the vote a "photo finish," but swiftly conceded defeat. He vowed to "continue in the battle to build socialism" and though the reforms had failed "for now," they were "still alive." The vote marks the first setback at the ballot box for Chávez, since he came to power in 1999.

Raul Baduel, a former defense minister in Venezuela, now an emerging critic of the leader, said Chávez had manipulated the public's feelings in an effort to pass the reforms, which would also have limited citizens' rights were a state of emergency to be declared.

Kevin Rudd sworn in as Prime Minister of Australia

Kevin Rudd, current Australian Labor Party leader, was sworn in today as Prime Minister of Australia by Governor-General Michael Jeffrey. Rudd has become the 26th Prime Minister since Australia's federation in 1901.

Former Prime Minister John Howard and the Liberal Party and Coalition were beaten in the 2007 election which took place last month, by the Australian Labor Party who managed to gain the extra 16 seats they needed to have a majority in the House of Representatives. Mr Howard lost his seat that he held for 33 years, 11 as Prime Minister, to Labor candidate Maxine McKew.

Mr Rudd was sworn in at a small ceremony at Government House by Mr Jeffrey, alongside Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who was also sworn in today. Mr Rudd's wife, Therese Rein and his three children were also present at the

ceremony.

Later that afternoon, Mr Rudd plans to hold a full meeting which all of his newly-sworn-in ministers will attend. In late November, Mr Rudd requested that all his ministers attend a visit at two schools in their local electorate before meeting for a caucus meeting on November 30.

Russian opposition presents alleged evidence of election fraud

Russian opposition movement "Smena" has published a clandestine video of what it claims is falsification during the Russian elections. The video allegedly shows the election zone no. 730 in Moscow. "Smena" claims a woman is illegally voting on behalf of soldiers as she feeds their voting bulletins into the electronic voting machine, while a man watches. "Smena" presumes both are members of the local electoral commission.

Other allegations include a disproportionate share of absentee ballots used in polling places, voting numerous times by visiting different polling stations, ballot stuffing and machinations involving electronic ballot counting machines, campaigning at polling centers, voter bribery, and ballots in the ballot box before voting began.

Chinese officials say man dies of H5N1 Avian Flu virus

Chinese officials have confirmed that a man admitted to a hospital on November 27, died on Sunday from the H5N1 Avian Flu virus.

The man, only being identified as 24-year-old Lu, is from the Jiangsu Province of eastern China and was admitted to the hospital after having severe flu-like symptoms.

Lu was originally diagnosed with pneumonia. Tests done on blood samples from Lu confirmed the presence of H5N1.

Officials say that Mr. Lu was never in close contact with dead poultry and there are no reports of any birds being infected in the area and no other reports of human infection.

At least 69 other individuals are being kept at hospitals for observation, after having come in close contact with Mr. Lu, but officials say that none of those individuals are showing any signs of infection.

Lu's death brings the total number of those infected in China by the H5N1 virus to 26, with 17 dying from the virus in China since 2003. This is the first human infection since June of 2007.

English FA Cup third round draw

The draw for the third round of the 2007-08 FA Cup was held on December 2 in England.

The third round is where teams from the Premier League and Football League Championship join the cup.

Aston Villa have been drawn at home to Manchester United. The two teams will meet for the second time in two years. In the 2006-07 encounter Aston Villa were defeated 2-1 at Old Trafford.

There are three other fixtures consisting entirely of Premiership sides: Tottenham Hotspur v Reading, Sunderland v Wigan Athletic and West Ham United v Manchester City.

FA Cup holders Chelsea have been drawn at home against

Championship side Queens Park Rangers.

Conference South team Havant & Waterlooville make their first appearance in the third round after surprising League Two side Notts County in the second round. Havant & Waterlooville's potential opponents Horsham will also make their debut at this stage of the FA Cup if they win away to Swansea in their second round replay.

The third round will take place on January 5, 2008. 64 teams will take part in 32 matches, with replays if a match ends in a draw.

Today in History

- 1639 – English astronomer Jeremiah Horrocks made the first observation of a transit of Venus .
- 1676 – Scanian War: Forces led by Swedish Field Marshal Simon Grundel-Helmfelt defeated the invading army of Denmark–Norway under the command of King Christian V at the Battle of Lund in an area north of Lund, Sweden.
- 1791 – The Observer, the world's first Sunday newspaper, was first published.
- 1991 – Pan American World Airways, which was the principal international airline of the United States and which was credited with many innovations, ended operations.
- 1992 – Operation Restore Hope: U.S. President George H. W. Bush ordered American troops into Somalia to help provide humanitarian aid and restore order after the dissolution of the country's central government during the ongoing Somali Civil War.
- December 04 is Hanukkah begins at sunset (Judaism, 2007); Navy Day in India

Quote of the Day

You don't get very far in life without having to be brave an awful lot. Because we all have our frightening moments and difficult trials and we don't have much of a choice but to get through 'em, and it takes a lot of bravery to do that. The most important thing about bravery is this — It's not about not being scared — it's about being scared and doing it anyway — that's bravery. ~ Ysabella Brave

Word of the Day

- effectually; adv
1. In such a way as to achieve a desired result; effectively.

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