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On Jan. 19, the eve of the Presidential inauguration, the Rev. Al Sharpton stood outside Trump International Hotel in New York City with Mayor Bill De Blasio, filmmaker Michael Moore, actor Alec Baldwin and thousands of protesters to kick off their 100 days of resistance to the president-elect's agenda.

"We are sending you a message from your hometown. You can try to turn back the clock, but you won't turn back time." Sharpton said to the cheering crowd. "We are not going backwards."

Since then Sharpton has led protesters in Washington, D.C., spoken out on Twitter, and personally expressed his concerns about voting rights, federal cases and investigations into the deaths of Eric Garner and Walter Scott, and the auditing of police departments to Attorney General Jeff Sessions. This April, Sharpton said they will begin gearing up for a "Spring offensive" to maintain the movement's momentum going into the midterm elections.

"The opponents, the adversaries of what we believe in and stand for are counting on us becoming distracted, or becoming one that just give up or gives out," Sharpton said.

"I think that the only way movements succeed is if there is a sustained indignation," Sharpton said.

The controversial and sometimes polarizing Sharpton has grabbed his share of the headlines during his lifetime. He was often an advisor to President Barack Obama, and now he brings a New York-savvy read on the 45th president. He has known Trump for 30 years, and he called the president a "salesman, a promoter, a P.T. Barnum guy" whose currency has always been hyperbole and overstatement. This was evident during his campaign when he said that black communities were "absolutely in the worst shape they've ever been in before," a claim Politifact rated "pants on fire." Despite Trump's claim that he has a "great relationship" with "the Blacks" Sharpton said that he's never seen him in any of New York's City's minority neighborhoods.

"I've never seen him in Harlem, or Bed-Stuy," Sharpton said. "Not one time. I can't think of one event that I've seen him."

Though it's still early in Trump's presidency, Sharpton said he's already been discouraged by Trump's actions towards minority communities.

On Feb. 28, one day after the fifth anniversary of the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, Sessions indicated that

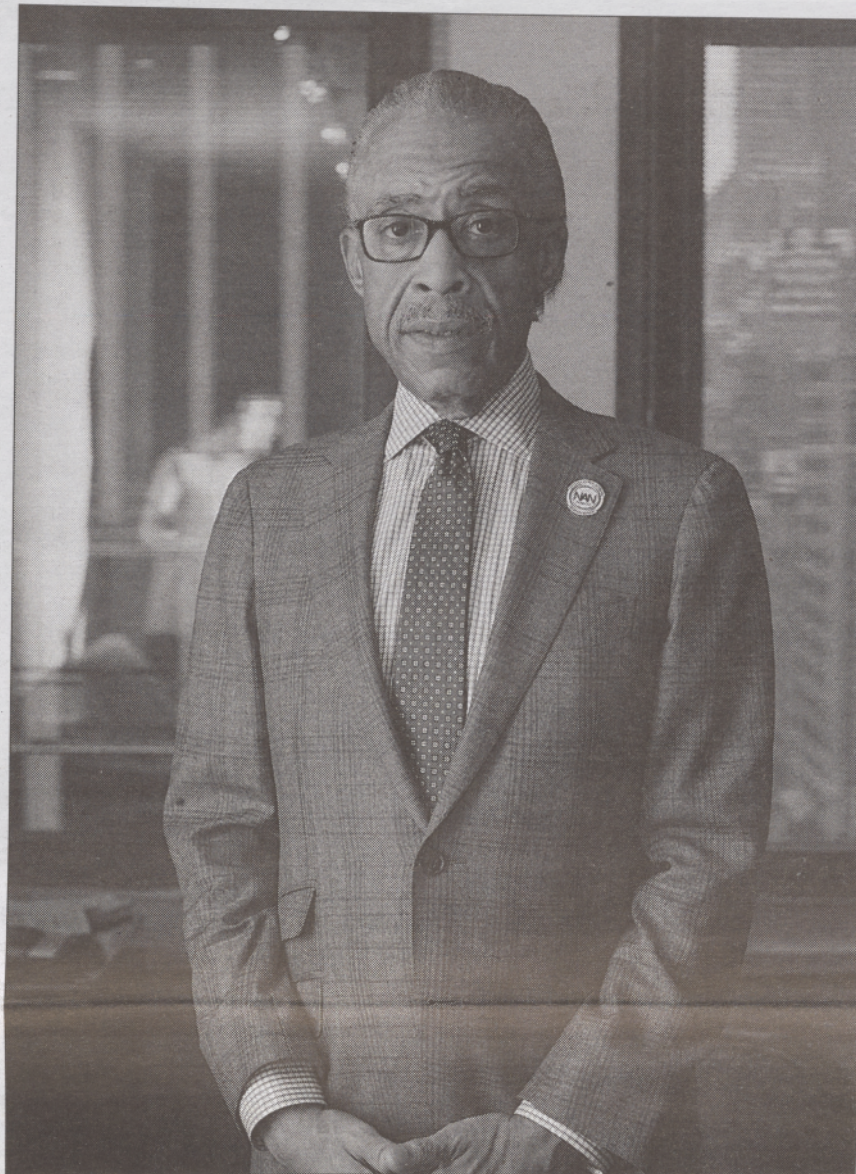


PHOTO BY ZENGZHENG WANG

'We are not going backwards'

Al Sharpton talks about holding ground under renewed threats to minority communities, police oversight

his office would no longer conduct audits of troubled police departments.

"Here's him saying that he's going to — in effect — reverse whatever advancement we've made there," Sharpton said. "And [he] has no fear that anyone's going to say anything about it,

Sharpton noted that the decision was made at a time when a police officer is under indictment for the death of Walter Scott, when there has been no conclusion to the federal investigation into the death of Eric Garner, and after the City of Baltimore and the Department of Justice agreed on a Consent Decree after the death of Freddie Gray.

"And you want to stop all of this?" Sharpton said. "And it's almost like, no news. No one's upset about it. No one's talking about it.

"It's very terrifying," Sharpton said. Sharpton said the timing either showed the administration is either "tone deaf, or they want to send signal that they want people to understand that that day is over.

"I don't know which it is," Sharpton said. The decision to stop auditing police

departments wasn't the only incident that Sharpton said bothered him.

In late January Trump marked the beginning of Black History Month by holding a "listening session" with about a dozen African Americans, who were mostly campaign supporters, according to the Guardian. At the time, Sharpton said the event was "tantamount to an insult" and that past presidents did a lot more to celebrate black culture.

A short time later, Trump came under criticism when he said that Frederick Douglass "is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is getting recognized more and more." Many, including Sharpton, thought it sounded as though Trump believed Douglass was still alive.

"It's a very dire situation," Sharpton said. "You couldn't make it up, let me put it that way."

Though the situation may be "dire," Sharpton said Trump's administration has reached out to him and other civil rights leaders.

In February Sharpton said he got a phone

call from Sessions asking if they could meet and discuss issues over coffee. Similar overtures were made to Marc Morial, President of the National Urban League, and Cornell Brooks, President and CEO of the NAACP, Sharpton said.

"I said, 'I don't want a cup of coffee, you can meet with all of us and we can deal with these issues as we have any other attorney general,'" Sharpton said he told Sessions. "His office has said that they were going to set it up, we're waiting to see. But it was supposed to have happened by now."

Sharpton said that if the meeting does happen, he won't go alone.

"I'll only meet with him or Trump if there's other civil rights leaders (there)," Sharpton said.

In the meantime, Sharpton said he's worried Trump's agenda will "reverse, and in many ways realign, where our country is going in terms of social justice, health care, (and) voting rights."

The Black community is particularly vulnerable, Sharpton said, with much to lose in the new administration.

"They have the right to vote to lose. They have the right to public education being a priority in this country which educates the overwhelming majority of our young people," Sharpton said. "They have the right of police accountability to lose — the right of police being prosecuted if they break the law they have that to lose. They have their health care that disproportionately helped us to lose, and they have our economic standing to lose.

"Black unemployment was cut in half under Barack Obama," Sharpton said. "We're hearing about a trillion dollars in infrastructure, none of that said to be going in our communities. If he does bridges and tunnels that are not in inner cities, that's not jobs for us. That don't impact us.

"We have a lot to lose," Sharpton said. Sharpton said he'd like to see the media do a better job focusing on the issues "like repealing Obamacare, like new tax codes" instead of chasing the distractions that Trump keeps feeding them.

"I think he throws so much at us," Sharpton said.

So far Trump's strategy has worked, Sharpton said.

"I think the media has become completely predictable and gullible to whatever he does," Sharpton said. "In the interim immigrants living under terror, people that are afraid they're going to lose their health care, all of that is pushed [to the side] and marginalized."