NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2001

Sharpton's Group Expands to West

By Curtis L. Taylor
STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Al Sharpton took his firebrand style of activism on the road yesterday, opening new branch offices of his national civil rights organization in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

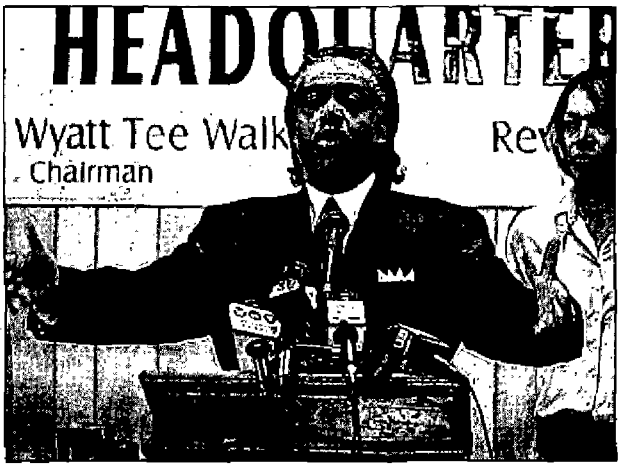
Sharpton, who has hinted at seeking the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, said the new branches of the National Action Network will provide his movement with solid bases on both coasts to expand his fight against racism in the movie, television and music industries.

"It gives us national outreach to deal with problems in these industries and we can now hit them on both coasts," said Sharpton after making an appearance in South Central Los Angeles. "It expands our political base, and in particular, if you look hard at the 2004 presidential election, we can reward our friends and deal with those who treat us as enemies."

The branch will be housed at the Hope Community Church in South Central, where yesterday a small gathering of locals and parishioners embraced the Sharpton-founded network with open arms.

Dream Team lawyer Johnnie Cochran will serve as the chairman, and the church's pastor, the Rev. Kerry Allison, will act as president, Sharpton said.

But the timing of Sharpton's expansion to the city raised eyebrows among some in the local activist community who say he is unwelcome when Los Angeles is struggling to recover from a bitter and hard-fought mayoral campaign that pitted ethnic groups against each other.



Newsday File Photo / Mayita Mendez

The Rev. Al Sharpton with Marjorie Fields-Smikle, executive director of the National Action Network, which has added new offices in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Mayor-elect James K. Hahn, who is white, won a narrow victory over Antonio Villaraigosa, who is Latino. But Hahn was later criticized by Villaraigosa supporters for running racially charged commercials that they say crossed the line. If he had won, Villaraigosa would have been the city's first Latino mayor in modern time.

But Sharpton, known for his wavy locks, fiery oratory skills and public appearances, appeared to be engaging in more subtle tactics on the West Coast. On Thursday night in Beverly Hills at a dinner for the local charity, the Brotherhood Crusade, Sharpton and Hahn were seen shaking hands and engaging in light conversation.

Elsewhere, the branch opening in North Las Vegas on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive sparked a mild controversy locally, when some officials of the NAACP chapter voted to switch their affiliation to Sharpton's organization, sources said.

Sharpton quickly denied any such controversy. He said that his organization will continue to work along with the NAACP.

"This puts us right in the gaming world where they cannot ignore us," Sharpton said.

An official with the Las Vegas chapter of the NAACP could not be located for comment late yesterday.

The National Action Network, headquartered in Harlem, also has chapters in Detroit, Miami and Baltimore.

A three-month jail term for trespassing on the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques has served to increase Sharpton's national profile in recent months.

At home in New York, however, he was heavily criticized for not doing more to help Democratic mayoral candidate Mark Green in his unsuccessful bid. Sharpton said he decided to sit-out the general election after he said Green supporters used unethical campaign tactics to defeat Fernando Ferrer in the Democratic runoff.

Green's loss to Republican Michael Bloomberg was especially embarrassing to the party in a city where registered Democratic voters outnumber Republicans by a ratio of 5-1.

CITY_21MC100_011833019

NYC-WTC_000414970