



REVEREND DR. AL SHARPTON

Rev. Al Sharpton is an internationally renowned civil rights leader and founder and President of the National Action Network (NAN). For decades, he has dedicated his life to the fight for justice and equality, turning the power of dissent and protest into tangible legislation impacting the lives of the disenfranchised. Former President Barack Obama has called Rev. Sharpton a “voice for the voiceless” and a “champion for the downtrodden.”

In fact, during President Obama’s presidency, in a profile of Rev. Sharpton on CBS’s 60 Minutes, Rev. Al Sharpton was called President Obama’s go to Black leader.” Today, Rev. Sharpton continues to be on the front line of civil rights and social justice cases as he serves as a “voice for the voiceless.”

According to a recent article in *The Atlantic* (January 14, 2019) “Rev. Sharpton occupies a distinct space. Other than Barack Obama, there is no better-known black leader in the country, nor one with bigger reach: The National Action Network has 100 chapters across America, and Sharpton himself hosts a radio show on 70 stations every weekday and a TV show on MSNBC on Saturdays and Sundays.”

As host of MSNBC’s “Politics Nation that airs each Saturday and Sunday from 5-6 p.m. EST,” and a radio host with three different shows, Rev. Sharpton also leads a civil rights group that has 111 chapters and 7 regional offices across the United States. He hosts “Keepin’ it Real,” a three-hour nationally syndicated daily radio show, and a national Sunday radio show titled “The Hour of Power.” Additionally, he hosts a Saturday action rally from NAN’s Harlem headquarters which is broadcast live on Impact Television and WLIB Radio.

As head of NAN, Rev. Sharpton has taken the teachings of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and applied them to a modern civil rights agenda. He has been a tireless advocate for everything from police reform and accountability to protection of voting rights and education equality. A 2016 *Vanity Fair* profile described him as “arguably the country’s most influential civil rights leader.”

It was Rev. Sharpton and NAN that raised national awareness around draconian new voter laws in many states and modern mechanisms of voter disenfranchisement. In both 2008 and 2012, the African American vote was pivotal in getting Barack Obama elected, and Rev. Sharpton was instrumental in encouraging voter registration and engagement. He was a fierce advocate for health care reform and implementation of the Affordable Care Act, as well as criminal justice reform, some of which was adopted by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

Rev. Sharpton and NAN work tirelessly to bring national attention to the startling trend in police brutality in the United States. The Reverend and NAN were the first to organize a rally to protest the tragic death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who was shot by a neighborhood watch volunteer as he walked home with a bag of skittles and an iced tea, and NAN called attention to the cases of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, thus launching the Black Lives Matter movement. When 18-year-old Brown was fatally shot by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo., Rev. Sharpton organized a peaceful rally, delivered the eulogy at the teen's funeral, and reaffirmed his continuous call for police reform while urging calm during the tense climate.

NAN stands alongside families in their difficult quests for justice and police accountability. In the Garner case, Rev. Sharpton and other civil rights groups put pressure on Governor Cuomo, which eventually led to the appointment of a special prosecutor in New York City to investigate police killings of unarmed civilians. It set a precedent and standard for the rest of the nation to emulate.

In 2015, when a gunman murdered nine African Americans during Bible study at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., Rev. Sharpton traveled to Charleston immediately to speak at some of the victim's funerals. In Florida, he delivered the eulogy for 31-year-old Corey Jones, who was shot and killed by an off-duty officer as he waited for assistance on Interstate 95 after his vehicle broke down. And it was Rev. Sharpton who spearheaded the call for a special prosecutor after 17-year-old Laquan McDonald was shot 16 times in Chicago.

“Change doesn't happen overnight, but it happens as long as we don't purposely give our power away,” stated President Obama at NAN's 16th annual convention. “Every obstacle put in our path should remind us of the power we hold in our hands each time we pull that lever or fill in that oval or touch that screen. We just have to harness that power. We've got to create a national network committed to taking action. We can call it the National Action Network.”

Rev. Sharpton and National Action Network have been on the frontlines of advocacy for people of color, immigrants, the LGBT community, women, the poor and all disenfranchised people, and 2017 marks NAN's 26th anniversary of social justice work, activism and fighting for equality.

Born on October 3, 1954 in Brooklyn, N.Y., Rev. Sharpton began his ministry at the tender age of four, preaching his first sermon at Washington Temple Church of God & Christ. Just five years later, the Washington Temple Church's legendary Bishop F.D. Washington licensed his protégé, Rev. Sharpton, to be a Pentecostal Minister.

Rev. Sharpton's civil rights career began almost as early as his ministry. At 13, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. William Jones appointed him Youth Director of New York's SCLC Operation Breadbasket, an organization founded by Dr. King in 1971. Rev. Jackson says Rev. Sharpton was a boy prodigy who had a mind like a sponge—absorbing everything.

At the age of 16, Rev. Sharpton founded the National Youth Movement, Inc., which organized young people around the country to push for increased voter registration, cultural awareness and job training programs. It was at that time that he forged a friendship with Teddy Brown, the son of the “Godfather of Soul” James Brown. Tragically, Teddy was killed in a car accident and in the months that followed his passing, James Brown took Rev. Sharpton in as though he was his own and they developed an inexplicable bond. Rev. Sharpton was shaped by his surrogate father Mr. Brown who taught him, “You can't set your sights on nothing little; you got to go for the

whole hog.” Young Sharpton went on the road later with James Brown, and for several years, he also served as the Director of the Ministers Division for the Rainbow Push Coalition under Rev. Jackson.

In 1991, Rev. Sharpton founded NAN to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality or gender. NAN works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. King, and today the non-profit organization boasts over 100,000 members and employs dozens.

Long before combatting police brutality became a mainstream issue, Rev. Sharpton was on the front lines marching and leading the call for justice – even risking his own life while doing so. In the 1980s, following the death of 23-year-old Michael Griffith, who was chased by a white mob onto a highway in Howard Beach, Queens and hit by a car, Rev. Sharpton led massive rallies through that very neighborhood even as angry onlookers hurled racial slurs at him and the protesters. The City appointed a special prosecutor and eventually the nine attackers were convicted.

In 1991, Rev. Sharpton was preparing to march in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn in another demonstration following the horrific death of 16-year-old Yusef Hawkins, who was shot and killed by a White mob, when a man stabbed Rev. Sharpton in the chest with a knife. He survived the attempt on his life, forgave the assailant, asked a judge for leniency for the man’s sentence and even visited this individual in jail. Despite the traumatizing experience, Rev. Sharpton pressed on and continued his life’s mission of fighting for justice and civil rights for all.

Whether it was bringing about reform to the NJ State Police following the shooting of three young Black and Latino men on their way to a basketball game, or voicing concern over the arrest, rush to judgment, and conviction of the Central Park Five, Rev. Sharpton has always put a spotlight on societal ills even if he was standing alone while doing so. Other cases that he has been at the forefront of include Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Patrick Dorismond, the Jena Six, Sean Bell, Omar Edwards, Ramarley Graham, Kendrick Johnson and many more.

Through NAN, Rev. Sharpton has organized campaigns on ending gun violence, pushing for worker’s rights, eliminating unjust policies like stop-and-frisk, fighting for more women and minority owned businesses, a minimum wage increase, education reform – he even embarked on a national education tour with former Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich at the request of President Obama – arguing for the protection of voting rights, immigrant rights, pay equity for women, gay and lesbian rights and a plethora of other causes.

Today, though the challenges at hand may have changed, the need for activism and the need for a champion of equality are just as necessary as they were in the past. Rev. Jackson recently remarked that Rev. Sharpton didn’t burn out, but rather, he kept remaking himself, all the while working as diligently as ever – often up to 16 hours a day. In the Vanity Fair piece on Rev.

Sharpton, Jackson said: “He didn’t just happen to be a leader. He really meant to be one, and he has pursued getting enough power through relationships to achieve his purpose.”

Whether it was his noteworthy Presidential run as a candidate for the Democratic Party in 2004, his contribution to end U.S. Navy exercises in Vieques, Puerto Rico, or his ability to hold people like radio host Don Imus accountable, Rev. Sharpton has continually used his ingrained talents to fight for what is right. His stance on behalf of the disenfranchised has taken him, in his own words, “from the streets to the suites”.

It is because of that unique ability to maneuver in various circles that Rev. Sharpton understands the dynamics of what it takes to be a true leader who never forgets where he or she came from. He has received praise and acknowledgment from all ends of the political spectrum for his work throughout the decades. Even former President George W. Bush has stated, “Al cares just as much as I care about making sure every child learns to read, write, add and subtract.”

Rev. Sharpton regularly preaches about the importance of political participation. With everything from Supreme Court nominees to issues like voting rights, criminal justice reform, abortion rights and much more on the line, he continues to remind people of the significance of civic engagement because at the end of the day, all decisions directly impact the citizenry. As Rev. Sharpton has tirelessly shown the world with his life’s work, we must be the change we wish to see.

In March 2016, Rev. Sharpton was honored with the “Mandela Legacy Hope, Success & Empowerment Award” in recognition of his long history of achievements in advancing civil rights causes around the world. Connecting the dots between domestic challenges in a global context, Rev. Sharpton often addresses international audiences and issues impacting people around the globe. In 2015, he delivered a resounding speech on civil rights, race relations and more at the prestigious Oxford Union in England. At the end of his speech, he received a 10-minute standing ovation.

Rev. Sharpton was educated in New York public schools and attended Brooklyn College. He has an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Bethune-Cookman University, Virginia Union University and an honorary degree from A.P. Bible College. He resides in New York City and has two daughters, Dominique and Ashley, who are both active in NAN and with his radio and television shows.