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 WELCOME TO THE 9TH ANNUAL STATE OF THE BLACK UNION!
 

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Thank you for joining us in New Orleans for this year's conversation. We come to the Crescent City to refocus the nation's attention on Katrina and the continued effort of this city to restore and rebuild homes, businesses, and communities. Yesterday we convened over 1,000 volunteers to participate in a day of service. In partnership with the Lieutenant Governor's office, Habitat for Humanity, the National Wildlife Federation, Hands-On New Orleans, the New Orleans Recovery School District, Trinity Christian Community Center, and T.R.I.P. USA, our volunteers worked hard to help build homes, reforest the wetlands, paint schools, and beautify communities. Although New Orleans will not be rebuilt in a day, we can be assured that with the vision, effort, and our continued commitment it will one day return.

This year's conversation is entitled *Reclaiming Our Democracy: Recasting Our Future*. For the past nine years we have discussed the issues that are of utmost importance to the African American community, including health care, economic empowerment, the political process, and how we as Black people define the African American agenda. Today, we will discuss implementing that agenda and the accountability we have to ourselves and to our community to see it through.

Since the release of the *Covenant with Black America*, we have journeyed across this country to discuss and listen to African Americans about how they are individually and collectively actualizing this movement. We've heard from many who have focused on the issues important to them. They are taking personal responsibility to make a change in their families and in their communities. Now we must focus on how we hold our future leaders accountable to *The Covenant*.

Today and throughout the next nine months, we will have the opportunity to document and examine the candidates' positions and determine the best man or woman for the job. But it doesn't end there. In January 2009 and for the next four years, we have the responsibility to *continue* to hold our leader accountable to address our issues, repair a broken system, and create an America as good as its promise.

Keep the Faith,


