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From: "Jarrett, Valerie" <valerie.jarrett@who.eop.gov>
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fw: BAW (Cottman): Obama Promotes New Plan For Black Neighborhoods, Mentors Young Black Men

From: Lewis, Kevin S.
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Obama Promotes New Plan For Black Neighborhoods, Mentors Young Black Men

Black America Web
By Michael H. Cottman
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President Barack Obama has a bold plan for uplifting black America and the White House wants African Americans to know it.

Sitting inside the White House this week, I listened to Valarie Jarrett, the president's senior adviser, speak passionately about Obama's ambitious goal to rehabilitate 20 poor communities across the country where black people have struggled for years.

The plan to renovate some of the nation's most devastated black neighborhoods is part of a broad strategy to help improve the quality of life for many black Americans and includes Obama focusing on a myriad of challenges facing young black men as he begins his second term in the White House.

Obama will travel to the South Side of Chicago on Friday to speak with 16 black male students who are growing up poor, troubled, and some without fathers in their lives.

The students, who attend Hyde Park Academy High School, are part of an anti-youth violence program called "Becoming A Man" (B.A.M.) that teaches at-risk students about violence prevention, accountability, self-determination, positive anger expression and respect for women.

"This is very personal for him because he didn't have a father," Jarrett said of the president during a one-hour session at the White House with six African American journalists. "He was raised by a single

mom so he knows the challenges.”

“I think he takes his role as a mentor very seriously and he leads by example,” said Jarrett, perhaps the president’s most trusted White House confidant. “He goes home for dinner every night; he is a present and involved father.”

And, Jarrett added: “The president might say that at some point in his childhood he may have been at risk too so hopefully they will identify with him.”

Jarrett said the president chose to deliver his speech at the Hyde Park Academy High School because the neighborhood is a mile from his home — a predominantly black community of poor residents, urban blight, and unemployed black men, but it’s also an area that has seen progress in recent years with new housing and banks.

And meeting with young black men who are at-risk, Jarrett said, will serve as a profound moment in Obama’s presidency.

“Children today are growing up thinking it’s perfectly normal to have a president who is African American,” Jarrett said Thursday. “Eight years of having a black president is going to be a good chunk of their childhood. And that’s good for the country.”

Some could argue that Obama’s choice to speak directly to black male teenagers represents a sea of change in the way the White House promotes its black agenda.

When asked about the president’s perceived reluctance to discuss race publicly, Jarrett said the White House plans to do a better job communicating its social and economic policies to the black community.

“We’re not afraid to say this is going to help black people,” Jarrett said.

On Friday, Obama will also address 700 students at the Hyde Park school in a speech that will touch on his push for gun control legislation, urban gun violence and the senseless murder of 15-year-old Hadiya Pendleton. Pendleton was shot and killed on Jan. 29 when a gunman opened fire on her group of friends who were sitting in a Chicago park. She performed at Obama’s inauguration just days before she was murdered. The two suspects who were charged in Pendleton’s murder are black men.

Earlier this week, the White House invited Hadiya’s parents — Cleopatra and Nathaniel Pendleton — as guests for the president’s State of the Union address. During his speech, Obama introduced the issue of urban gun violence on a national stage while skillfully linking his gun control lobbying to inner city crime. Chicago’s homicide rate continues to soar, the consequence of urban gang violence.

As I walked along the White House grounds this week, I was reminded of how a black, progressive-thinking president can have such a profound impact on the lives of the nation's black citizens just by showing up for a simple conversation.

It makes a difference because Obama is willing to look black boys straight in the eye and listen to their concerns; it makes a difference because Jarrett is in the room when issues about urban revitalization are being discussed; and it makes a difference because First Lady Michelle Obama hails from the South Side of Chicago and brings a black sensibility to the West Wing.

I'm not suggesting that one visit to Chicago will suddenly revive the black community overnight, but if the president can turn around just one life on Friday, then it's well worth the trip. It's also a good start to four more years in office and I'm hoping the president will spend even more time mentoring young black men during his tenure.

"These young men will have an opportunity to meet with the president of the United States and talk to him about the challenges they face in life and look to him as probably one of the best role models they will ever meet," Jarrett said. "It's a great opportunity for them and a great opportunity for the president."

In the weeks ahead, as the president settles into his second term in the Oval Office, look for the White House to share more about its plans for uplifting black America with Obama leading the way.

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