

Are these the six most influential black people in the world?

By Giordano Fenzi



INFLUENTIAL:
(L-R) Geoffrey Canada, Lamido Sanusi, Cory Booker, Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Bineta Diop

Well, that's how Time magazine rates them

MOST PEOPLE probably think that US president Barack Obama is the most influential black person in the world, but he barely makes it onto Time magazine's list of the 100 most important figures. Some of the 100 are celebrities, others are not. A school reformer is ranked higher than Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, and a mayor of a city with less than 300,000 people comes before royal couple William and Kate, and US president Barack Obama. So, who are the most influential black people in the world and how are they ranked?

Geoffrey Canada, school reformer – Number five

THE MOST influential black man in the world is a school reformer, according to Time. He is ranked higher than one of the youngest and most famous entrepreneurs in the world, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

Geoffrey Canada, 59, has shown the world that education is the surest path out of poverty. He founded the Harlem Children's Zone Project in New York, which provides a cradle-to-career continuum of high-quality neighbourhood schools and support services for disadvantaged children. The project is based on the simple idea that you cannot separate where kids live from where they learn. The Harlem centre follows the academic careers of youths in many block areas of Harlem. The New York Times described Canada's project as 'one of the biggest social experiments of our time'.

The Harlem Children's Zone Project is a template for President Obama's Promise Neighborhoods programme.

Lamido Sanusi, banker – Number 11

NIGERIA IS in the spotlight for the violence that is characterising the post-electoral period, but the second most influential black person in the world is Nigeria Central Bank governor Lamido Sanusi. Sanusi, 50, took up his position in June 2009, and immediately sacked the chief executives of eight banks. He said he was cleaning up not just banking but all of Nigeria. Death threats have prompted him to employ armed guards. Nigeria is sub-Saharan Africa's most populous country and one of the richest in oil.

Cory Booker, mayor – Number 19

“A GENIUS. He is compassionate, committed, charismatic and generous of spirit. He defines ‘servant leader’.” These are the words that Oprah Winfrey used to describe Cory Booker. A member of the Democratic party, 42-year-old Booker became the 36th mayor of Newark, New Jersey, and the third African-American mayor of that city. Booker was elected mayor in 2006 and was confirmed again in 2010.

Since Booker has been in charge, crime statistics have dropped significantly in Newark. The city now has its lowest murder rate since 1959, and March 2010 marked Newark's first murder-free month in over 44 years. “I have watched him give bear hugs as frequently as other politicians shake hands,” Oprah said of Booker. “He is a man of, for and about the people.”

Michelle Obama, first lady – Number 22

SHE DOESN'T need to be introduced. She is the first lady, or, as she called herself, the “first mom”. She was placed at number 22 on the list, before the recently married royal couple William and Kate (40), French president Nicolas Sarkozy (32), and even before her husband Barack Obama (86). In February 2010, Michelle, 47, started her Let's Move campaign to end childhood obesity in the United States, and convinced her husband to establish America's first Childhood Obesity Task Force. Pop star Beyoncé recently sang a promotional song for Michelle's campaign, called Move Your Body.

Oprah Winfrey, television pioneer – Number 50

SHE IS a regular on Time's annual list. Oprah has already been listed nine times, more than any other individual, including the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and Bill Gates. This year she ranks higher than David Cameron (58) and Barack Obama (86). The Oprah Winfrey Show is the highest rated talk show in American television history, and its final season will be screened this September. Oprah, 57, has been placed before heads of state because, as CNN founder Ted Turner wrote, thanks to her contribution, ‘the channel revolutionised the news based on a good idea, good people and a lot of inspired guesswork.’

Bineta Diop, mobilizer – Number 98

BINETA DIOP founded Femmes Africa Solidarité, a non-governmental organisation whose goal is to enhance the role of African women in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in the continent. Diop, 61, from Senegal, is executive director of the organization, and through her campaign for gender parity is empowering women to play a leading role in African development.