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The greatest American story ever told:

Barack Obama

The 44th President of the United States

By Jae McKrae - www.fayettevillepress.com

Tuesday, November 4, 2008, will go down in history as "The greatest American story ever told," and you'll always remember where you were the night Senator Barack Obama was elected President. How unfortunate President-elect Obama's grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, did not live to hear the announcers say, "Senator Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States." Her influence over Barack Obama's life made him what he is today. Madelyn Dunham passed away on the eve of the election, November 3. According to President-elect Obama, "She was the person who encouraged us and allowed us to take chances. Our debt to her is beyond measure."

Was America ready?

We saw much of the media focus on race, while others questioned whether or not America was ready for a black man to be President. I would have preferred, "Is Barack Obama ready to be President?" However, when you pin it down to a person's race, you are saying that another African American down the street who has no credentials and no direction and purpose, and Obama are equal. With that kind of mindset, it's easy to understand the reaction from those who didn't support Obama. However, the next few days the negative energy should have dissipated; your favorite golfer missed the putt, your favorite tennis player couldn't cut the mustard.

It's a victory for all who supported Obama in his quest. We are well familiar with America's history when the only safe haven for African Americans was home or dreaming of being home—a haven from the cancer of racial hatred. This cancer kills the spirit of many to this day and remains resistant to chemo-therapy. Although America's racial history is horrid, thanks to the Civil Rights Era and persistent Americans—of all ethnicities—for easing the pain and making it possible for Barack Obama, not only to run, but also, be elected the 44th President of the United States.

It was all in vain, but did you grow tired of, "Can America be ready for a Black President?" I could never grasp what that actually meant. How could Americans get ready for a Black President? Study Motown's list of greatest hits…Identify the members of the Sugar Hill Gang…Recite the lyrics to James Brown's "The Big Payback"…Do the Bankhead bounce without spilling juice on the carpet…Learn how to clean chitterlings! I know they're all stereotypical, but you get my point.

I guess the answer to the aforementioned question was 'Yes we can'.

It started in Iowa

During the primaries in Iowa, the residents shocked them, when they voted for the 'Black guy.' Then, the Black guy had a name —Barack Obama. In Pennsylvania, it was reported that one in five voters said the race of the candidates was among the top factors in deciding how to vote. I did not make this up — race matters. It's been noted that these episodes of racial uproar against Obama and other African Americans have nothing to do with race. It's all about party affiliation. Okay, stop right there! When Bill Clinton was elected President—did we hear about hate groups increasing their membership or stories about African Americans being attacked? For those who can remember, when Jimmy Carter was elected, was it like this? Why do hate mongers suddenly feel it is okay to uncover their true feelings? When Africans came to this country they were brought here to be enslaved forever. It was supposed to be permanent, not for a few days or months, but forever. Furthermore, in Virginia, if a slave master killed his slaves it was a punishable crime, because if he destroyed his own property he must have had good reason. Besides, had slavery never happened, there really would have been no real purpose behind the headlines — "The first African American President." Isn't it bizarre that how African Americans as a people are treated in 2008 is a direct result of treatment and a mindset that started in 1619. So, when a descendant from that past rises above the history of racial hatred and becomes the 44th President of the United States, it is the greatest American story ever told.

President-Elect Barack Obama

Tuesday, November 4, 2008

As the votes came in, I couldn't help but think about what that night meant to those who grew up during that era of Jim Crow and separatism. Like many of you, I bounced from networks ABC, CNN, and Fox news for coverage of the Presidential race. Then, later that night when you read the screen "Barack Obama is the 44th President of the United States," somebody passed out! I know somewhere in America, they did! Indeed, it was a magical night. The biggest victory was realizing that people of all races and nationalities elected Barack Obama to be the 44th President of the United States., voters who didn't look like him felt he endorsed their sentiments regarding the direction of this country. What a night to remember.

Reactions

I heard across the country several workers were prohibited from celebrating. Some never before mentioned clause in the employee handbook was enforced. As hot as this election was, everyone was talking about it, at work, in the grocery, the bank, and you know in the barbershop… everywhere. Then the next day, in the work place, there was nothing! Before now, do you recall any business preventing their employees from being jubilant following the results of an election—especially one of this magnitude. Around the world, other countries celebrated Obama's victory. President Bush said, "President-elect Barack Obama's rise is a triumph of the American story. It will be a stirring sight to watch the Obama family step through the doors of the White House." Linda, a corporate executive said, "My initial reaction was for my daughter. She's 17 and college bound. She has an interest in politics, and with Obama winning the Presidency, and with Hillary opening more doors by doing as well as she did…" Then she went on to talk about her parents. "I was excited for my parents as well. My mom reminded me of how things were when she first came to Fayetteville and what occurred when I was little. I could tell you dad, who is in his mid 80s, felt proud. I was almost in tears! I've often wondered how he survived Jim Crow. So, tonight, it was victory for him. I was happiest about that." Seventy-one year old, retired school teacher, Velma said, "I just had to sit down. I felt like calling my mother, and she's been gone for years. That's just how much of an impact it had on me. I remember growing up thinking this day would NEVER come. Jesse Jackson once said it best, 'From the out house to the White house.' Did you know slaves built the White House?" *

Connection to First Family

When you saw the Obamas grace the stage, and stood before that massive crowd of supporters, did you quickly embrace them as family? It is a glorious day when people who don't look like you turn to you because you reverberate their sentiments. It is a glorious day when, even through the malevolent racial past, Americans can feel pride in this country knowing that they all came together to elect a man who represents a once condemned people. November 4, 2008 will go down as a glorious day for all of America. Rest assured, President-elect Barack Obama still feels the weight of the world. It's not over; it's just beginning. Most important, he is preparing himself for all the political games, media, ridicule and scrutiny that lie ahead.

Obama addresses supporters

When Barack Obama addressed the tear-stained mass of admirers and supporters, he proclaimed, "We are not red states and blue states, we will always be the United States of America." Now that he is in the most powerful position in the country, doesn't hope for a brighter tomorrow feel good? Let's also hope because of Tuesday November 4, 2008, we won't ever return to a Black America or White America. More resounding, we will always remain the United States of America with hope that today's youth will live in a more racially acceptable America—free of sudden outbursts from any racial hate group. Now, because of President Barack Obama, maybe, just maybe, they will.

The Fayetteville Press Newspaper welcomes the First Family:
Barack, Michelle, Malia Ann and Natasha (Sasha) Obama, and puppy.

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Fayetteville maintains diversity on the bench

Judge Toni S. King District Court Judge

by Jae McKrae
www.fayettevillepress.com

Attorney Toni S. King, of Miller, King & Clouse Law Firm, took the oath for District Court Judge, Thursday, March 5 in the Law Enforcement Center with a capacity filled court room of colleagues, family, and friends looking on; her parents were also there to witness every word. The crowd flowed into the hallway, and the courtroom doors were open to listen to the swearing-in ceremony. Superior Court Judge E. Lynn Johnson did the honors at the Law Enforcement Center

Gov. Bev Perdue selected Toni King in February to replace outgoing Judge Cheri Beasley, who left the District Court bench last year in December after being elected to the state Court of Appeals.

Toni's colleague and former law partner Sherry Miller introduced her, and even shared King's prior accomplishments. Then, she told the story of how they met. Attorney Sherry Miller, of Miller, King & Clouse, said the two met when Miller worked at Rogers & Miller Law Firm, and Toni was there as an intern. "I was impressed by her competence and knowledge," she said. Atty. Glenn Adams said, "We've watched her grow and mature not only as an attorney, but also as a person, and we're proud to have her as our newest judge." Other also thought back to their first encounter with Toni.

Photo by JJ Jones

Judge Toni S. King

Took the oath for District Court Judge, Thursday, March 5 in the Fayetteville, NC Law Enforcement Center

Sherry Miller reflected on what King endured to reach judgeship. Toni King was born in Korea, and lived there before the family relocated to North Carolina. Living in Cumberland County, King also attended middle school and high school here. When her family moved to Germany, and after graduating from high school, King headed to Durham for a degree from North Carolina Central University. Then it was on to NCCU's School of Law. In 2000, she came back Fayetteville to practice law.

Visibly shaken with joy, Toni King said, "You've embraced me and I appreciate it, and I promise to carry out justice and maintain integrity while on the bench. I hope I continue to make you all proud." King later thanked everyone for coming to share in the moment.

Chief District Court Judge Beth Keever welcomed King to a group of judges and said the group needed some diversity. "Cumberland County is a very unique county. It's a very diverse county, and King's placement on the bench made it "more representative of the community we serve."

The new District Court Judge Toni King is of African-American and Korean ethnicity.

Congratulations District Court Judge Toni S.King.

Bill Hennessee: Black History In Practice

By Val Jones
www.fayettevillepress.com

On February 7, 2009, Fayetteville lost a part of its history. In fact, black radio in general lost a part of its history with the passing of the legendary William "Big Bad Bill" Hennessee. It seems sadly ironic and yet strangely fitting that this pioneer of radio transcended just days after his 75th birthday right at the beginning of Black History Month.

Bill Hennessee was black history in practice..

Bill worked nearly half a century in radio. His name and voice became synonymous with the radio station 1600 AM WIDU. He later became known as the voice of the Fayetteville State University Broncos football team.

More importantly to this writer and broadcaster, Bill Hennessee was my mentor and hero in the world of announcing. WIDU-AM and D105-FM served as my introduction to the world of Urban broadcasting.

But let's go back to 1965. I was around 9 when WIDU changed its Top 40 format and made its debut as an R-n-B station. Even as a little child, I remember the excitement and pride everyone in the black community felt. Finally, we had a station of our own! But not just any old station that would just play a lot of hip music and "jive-talk" its way into appeasing a captive audience, WIDU was a "community" station…with Bill Hennessee and others hosting community events in OUR community, broadcasting the games of Fayetteville State University and more.

It was history in the making!

And this little round man with one of the most powerful and distinctive voices and personalities on this side of the planet would begin his legacy of opening doors for every Black radio personality who would ever grace the area's airwaves.

Dynamic…dignified…diligent…determined…destined…

These are just a few of the terms to describe William "Big Bad Bill" Hennessee.

Humble. Yes, this great man was as gracious and humble as he was talented. But don't think you could run over the man! I could tell you stories of those who tried who lived to regret it. Yep, that's my hero…and my role model in broadcasting. With over 25 years in this business, I've known so many more with far less talent than Bill whose egos couldn't fit inside the entire Crown Complex. But Bill Hennessee was always giving, always willing, always sharing, always caring.

And did I mention "versatile?" It was he and Bob Gaye who taught me to always remain versatile. Never pigeon-hole my style or voice. And while some would tell me my voice sounded a little too "white" for the Urban format, Bill Hennessee and Bob Gaye welcomed my ability and determination to be ALL I could be instead of settling for the box others wanted try to fit me in.

Is there no wonder I thought of this man as my radio "dad?" In the area of broadcasting, he was everything I would strive to be. And with both my parents gone, in many ways, he was the one I wanted to most make proud. Every time I would see him and he would give me that great big smile and hug, I could tell that I had.

There's so much more I could say. However, the comment of my "big brother mentor" of radio, Bob Gaye, says it all: "It's a sad day in radio." Not just Black radio…not just Fayetteville radio…but radio…period!

A little history lesson regarding Bill Hennessee: Bill was the first announcer to go on the air when WIDU dropped its Top 40 programming to go soul and gospel on Jan. 2, 1965 — thereby making it the first black program station in Fayetteville.

When Fayetteville State University began broadcasting its football games for the first time on WIDU around 1968, Bill was the play-by-play person.

Bill was the first black to serve on the board of the North Carolina Sportscasters Association back in the late 1960s.

Oh, and another first: He was the first man to give me a job in Urban radio. That's why I call him my "radio dad." I was honored to follow in the steps of those I admired listening to on the radio: "Big Bad Bill" Hennessee, Kip Anderson, Righteous Randy, Bob Gaye, Dr. Don Reid and Bunny English.

Hey, I'm talking Black History here, y'all!!!

Bill taught me and folks like Bob Gaye about the "Hennessee Rule;"— help others to help others.' Bill Hennessee was able to teach us things we could have never learned in a classroom or from anyone else. He taught us how to be role models and mentors instead of just mere radio personalities. He taught us the personal as well as the public side of professionalism. He taught us how we can be Black, proud, hip, cool, versatile, dignified, intelligent and compassionate at the same time.

If you want to know what mark did Bill Hennessee leave in Fayetteville? Look at WIDU…and remember it is because he was. Look and listen to every black radio announcer…and remember we are because he was. Look at your local sports announcers…and remember that they are because he was.

William "Big Bad Bill" Hennessee was indeed black history in practice.

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