

Message From the Grand Sire Archon

A HISTORIC MOMENT MEANS NO MORE EXCUSES

Whether your candidate won or lost, the November 4, 2008, election was historic. Imagine a black man elected president of the most powerful nation in the world. As Barack Obama said, “only in America.” On the eve of the election, I traveled back to my birthplace in rural Arkadelphia, Arkansas, to be with my 86-year-old mother and to share what we hoped would be a victory that would live forever in the minds of those of us who are descendents of slaves and in the hearts of all who swim in the river of freedom. My return “home,” at least metaphorically, is probably not unlike many of the returns that you made on Election Day.

Having already voted by mail, my mother and I spent Election Day watching TV pundits as we reflected on the grinding racism in Arkansas in 1960, the year I escaped to California to live with my sister. We remembered the sizzling hot fields where we picked cotton from sunup to sundown; we talked about the segregated voting facilities where she and my late father voted; we reminisced about the small two-room segregated elementary school where I received my early education; we recalled the “colored” water fountains where we were forced to receive comfort; and we spoke of the restaurants that refused to serve us. Finally we regretted that I had had to leave in 1960 to take my own freedom ride to California – in the back of the bus.

With evening approaching, the pundits revved up their rhetoric about the likely winner, and we became more excited, but still worried whether the United States was ready to elect a black man President. When the unimaginable actually happened, at exactly 10:00 P.M. (CT), and Senator Obama was declared President-Elect, my mother’s first response echoed that of countless others: “I never thought I would live long enough to see this day come. We got a Black President! Thank you, Jesus!” This was a dream come true!

As your Grand Sire Archon, I hope this historic event spurs to action our theme of “Boulé men doing great things.” Today we rejoice and pay homage to those who struggled to get us to this point, but what about tomorrow? Our journey has not ended; perhaps it has just begun. I feel a new urgency that the Boulé must take advantage of this historical moment and find ways to lead in opening wide the doors of opportunity for those who are on the “road to nowhere.” The late Archon Percy Julian articulated our duty. More than four decades ago at our 27th Grand Boulé, Archon Julian referred to our Founders as “Faultless Prophets” who challenged us to “lead...black Americans, who are denied the rights, justice and freedom of all American citizens.”

Barack Obama’s election renews that challenge. His achievement will be diminished if we do not join with him in a very active way. The plight of our young black males continues to worsen. Our educational system continues to leave too many of our children unprepared to compete in a global economy. Our correctional system incarcerates almost 1 million blacks and our health-care system overlooks 47 million people who are without medical insurance. These and other challenges mean that “Boulé men doing great things” must become a reality. Therefore I call on each Archon and member boulé to embrace and support



Grand Sire Archon Robert L. Harris

our current Fraternity goals. First, each member boulé is asked to have an active social-action program. Second, each member boulé, where feasible, is requested to look for opportunities to expand the Boulé into new areas. Unfortunately, some member boulés have ignored expansion opportunities into new areas, and most regrettably, have failed to initiate highly qualified younger members, thus losing an opportunity to energize themselves. Third, as a Boulé, we must do more locally and nationally to place our voices into the arena of public-policy issues germane to our communities and to our nation. Last but not least, it is imperative that every Archon financially support our Boulé Foundation because it provides a mechanism for funding programs that uplift our communities.

Finally, let me be clear: Equality still remains an elusive goal for too many Americans. While November 4, 2008, showed that most things are possible with hard work, perseverance, intelligence and determination, we as a fraternity know that we often have to be smarter and work harder to make our dreams come true. Nevertheless, this is what is expected of us and of our member boulés as we celebrate the election of our 44th President. Individually and as a fraternity we know that the election of Barack Obama means we have no more excuses!

