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Letters

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Dear Sirs,

I am writing to commend you on making THE BOULÉ JOURNAL accessible on-line. Although I do not know any of them, it is nonetheless inspiring to read about the professional and social activities of your many accomplished members. Unfortunately, we do not have a comparable community here in Canada.

Best regards,

*Kathy C. de B. Provost, B.A. (Hons) M.A.
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Mr. President. Those two words have a majestic ring and become even more clarion when the person to whom we are referring is Barack Obama, the first African American to be elected President of these United States. The succession of vowels in his name makes music and enhances the flow of naturalness: “Mr. President, Barack Obama.”

Who is this leader who burst upon the political scene just twelve short years ago and has now become the most important person in the free world?

Some years ago Nat King Cole asked the question, “Are you real, are you warm, Mona Lisa?” I pose it again. Mr. President, are you real? Mr. President, are you warm? I go a step further: Mr. President, are you human?

Barack Obama brings to the table an abundance of gifts. He is intelligent, articulate, suave, knowledgeable, charismatic, attractive, young, well educated, family-oriented, considerate, kind and more. Does any individual emerge with these many gifts except that they be bestowed upon him by the gods? He is of men most fortunate. Was he sent to us through providential intervention? Has he been sent to lead us out of “a thousand Egypts”? Has he been sent for just such a time as this? Or is he the embodiment of the poem “Second Coming,” wherein William Butler Yeats writes, “Surely some revelation is at hand; Surely the Second Coming is at hand.”

His tenure will not be an easy one, despite the fact that more people in Washington, D.C., and around the world witnessed his inauguration than witnessed any other in history. His road will be strewn with thorns and thickets and “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” and his decisions will be gut-wrenching and soul-searching – and the consequences of them far-reaching. But hope springs eternal with his

inauguration, for if any human being is equal to the arduous tasks that lie ahead, it is Mr. President.

His election, pure and simple, was based on inclusion. Obama tried, and quite well succeeded at, involving as many people as he could in his campaign. He wanted the least, the left-out, the disenchanted to become a part of the political process. He succeeded, and the rest is history. Nor has he stopped there. He has already begun a movement, “Organizing for America,” that will seek to include the views of ordinary people in the determination of which way this country must go. A democracy demands that all of its citizens be heard. He has started on that path. And he passionately embraces education – for indeed, a democracy also demands wisdom and vision of its citizens.

There are early signs on the horizon that President Obama will succeed. His cabinet choices reflect a man who is not afraid to surround himself with the best minds available. There is no progress without ideas. And there are no ideas without bright minds to create them. President Obama does not fear intelligence, nor is he reluctant to seek it out and use it for the greater good.

So at the dawn of a new era for the United States and the world, we should all join in wishing President Obama a successful administration. We should approach this newfound occasion with radiant optimism, strong in the knowledge that any problems created by man can be solved by man; strong in the knowledge that everything we are or hope to become is the product of our reasoning minds; and finally, strong in the knowledge that God’s work on this planet must truly be our own.

Hail to the chief, Mr. President!

*Archon Huel D. Perkins
Grand Historian, Alpha Xi Boulé*

ON BECOMING

I am an African American who was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1928. My early childhood was filled with something beyond racism – just plain meanness. From that beginning, fast-forward to 2008: Remarkable! That an African American would be nominated for President of the United States was a hope beyond my wildest dreams. I certainly never expected to witness this event.

This election signals the distance between conditions that sanctioned racism and meanness in 1928 and those that sanctioned the nomination of now newly elected President Barack Obama for that position of leadership. I don't think white America realizes yet how much this will positivize the black community, especially our youths. I sense a growing movement to dispel the "No, you can't" nuance to "Yes, I can." I extrapolate this movement as one that, in time, will raise the level of achievement in education, reduce crime and move America closer to that more perfect union.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, the presidential race exposed the last vestiges of racism. A significant number of voters declared they would not vote for Senator Obama for racial reasons. Pity those whose insecurities allow negative weighting of race to interfere with recognizing the critical qualities needed to solve America's problems both here and abroad. Although President Obama's election marks a breakthrough, racism is still alive and well.

Frankly, I would have voted for Senator Obama if he had been blond, blue-eyed and snow-white. I have voted for men who don't look like me for President all of my voting years. For the first time I had an opportunity to vote for a man with judgment and leadership my country needs to move forward who happens to look like me. White people have always had this privilege and sense of entitlement. This may not serve America well, as the core of our values seems to be sameness, which engenders bigger problems abroad. Our struggles with difference must be overcome.

I am also concerned for President Obama's safety. I fear at least an attempted assassination. Providence brought him to us, and I pray that providence will cover his back and front. Come on, America! We can become that more perfect union!

*Archon Alphonse Haley Carter
Gamma Xi Boulé*

Archon Carter is the former dean of Hampton University's School of Business.

Dear Archon Burns:

Through a stroke of good fortune or providential intervention, I secured tickets to the inauguration of President Barack Obama. In reflecting on Tuesday, January 20, 2009, I can honestly say that, although I walked miles to and from the Capitol grounds and sat for hours in 20-degree weather, it was a wonderful, moving, once-in-a-lifetime experience. I felt so good to be a seated witness to the realization of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream.

Before I left Cambridge, Massachusetts, Boston University Radio (WBUR) invited me to comment on the inauguration. (Go to <http://election08.wbur.org/2009/01/essay-because-they-were-there-we-are-here.html> and then click on the arrow beneath "By David Evans" to hear the actual commentary.) At the end of the commentary, the producer played one of my favorite Negro spirituals, "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," and it was difficult to contain my emotions.

Best regards,

*Archon David L. Evans
Beta Beta Boulé*

BECAUSE THEY WERE THERE, WE ARE HERE

To visit Washington, D.C., without lodging seems irresponsible, if not reckless, given the millions expected for the inauguration, the almost nonexistence of housing in the area, the typically cold January weather and strict crowd-control measures in place since September 11.

I hope, however, that persons of influence in Greater Washington will try to understand the history and emotional undergirding of what is essentially a pilgrimage for many of these committed travelers. This is especially the case for African Americans who remember the Jim Crow laws. I am told that busloads are coming from the Deep South for the spiritual fulfillment of being in the same space with the first African American to take the oath of office as President of the United States.

It reminds me of a story told to me by my grandmother, a native of Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, who died in 1955 at age 94. She said that her mother, a former slave, described a similar black pilgrimage in 1864 or 1865 in a southern border state held by Union forces. News circulated among emancipated slaves that a train rumored to carry Abraham Lincoln would pass through the area in a few days. Many ex-slaves were so moved by that possibility that they walked forty to fifty miles just to see the train on which they thought he was a passenger. That recollection captures the spirit of many African Americans who will trek to Washington on January 20, 2009.

Thousands of these travelers are in the sunset of their days, with long shadows falling toward the east. They are what we used to call they-were-there people. They were there in Little Rock in 1957 and in Nashville in 1960; they were there in Birmingham and on the National Mall with Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1963; they were there at the bridge in Selma in 1965, and, in the case of the Tuskegee Airmen, in the skies over North Africa and Europe in World War II.

Because they were there, *we are here* as a more principled nation that was able to elect Barack Obama the forty-fourth president of the United States.

*Archon David L. Evans
Beta Beta Boulé*

Commentator David L. Evans lives and writes in Cambridge. He is senior admissions officer at Harvard University, which offers five scholarships in his name for students who have overcome hardship. Ω