

They came from near and afar for 'History in the Making'

Written by Jamisha Purdy, NNPA Special Correspondent
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) - In high school George Bacon had to fight. He fought for equality and justice when his hometown school was desegregated. Decades later, Bacon this week prepared to witness the manifestation of what he fought for as Barack Obama is sworn-in as the first African- American president.

Blacks, Whites and people of all races from communities across the nation gathered in



Washington, D.C. to witness change in America. The cost of the trip, the struggle to attend events, the blistering winter weather, nor distance could deter people from what many dubbed the greatest moment in African-American and American history. For Bacon and his wife, Delorise, the 13-hour drive from Memphis was worth it.

“My parents had to go through harassment or possibly be killed just to vote,” Bacon said. “All of this is what our parents and grandparents fought and died for.”

Similar memories of segregation and discrimination lay in the forefront of Eloise Bridges' thoughts.

“I had to drink at a water fountain that said ‘colored’ because I couldn’t get a drink of water in public anywhere else,” she said. “I sat in the back of the bus because that was the only way we could travel.”

Instead of dwelling on the past, Bridges looks forward to the change and the realization of her dreams. She followed Obama from his train tour of Baltimore on Saturday to the District.

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“I went through the discrimination in the south, but now I’m so happy,” Bridges said. “This is a new day for our children and our grandchildren and I believe that Obama will make a difference like no one before.”

Watching the inaugural events on television wouldn’t suffice for some die-hard Obama fans like Jeanne Costa who flew from New Bedford, Mass. There are no words to describe her emotions as she spoke of the president-elect. But for Costa, her trip to the nation’s capital is incomplete.

“I wish he could be here,” Costa said of her deceased father. “My father fought for civil rights all of his life. He was 6 foot 5 and he was an athlete, but he would have been as emotional as I am right now.”

After Obama’s historic win, flights and hotels in the District were quickly booked.

Asha Porter planned his three-hour drive from Mount Laura, N.J., last November. “As soon as they announced that Obama was the president-elect I started planning,” Porter said. “I wasn’t going to miss this.”

But booked hotels, bustling gas and flight costs didn’t stop last minute tourists from jumping on the band-wagon.

“I wasn’t convinced that we should come down here because it was going to be so crazy,” said Maplewood, N. J. resident Bill Silberg. “But my wife and son pretty much laid it out and made it clear that it’s history in the making and we needed to be here.”

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Kim Brent didn't have to travel far. As a D.C. resident and third grade teacher at Avalon Elementary School, Brent said the experience will help her become a better educator.

"I wanted to represent my students," she said. "I only teach my students what the history books tell me, now I'm able to teach what's happening at this time and my students can relate because they are a part of that."

The cold weather Chicagoan Juanita Franklin said nothing could have stopped her from coming to D.C.

"This is the most important thing I've ever attended," she said. "It's a new experience. The country is going to look at [African-Americans] differently; the world is going to look at us differently. It's just sad that it took so long."

James Caple, also a Chicago native, agreed. "We have arrived. We finally have a strong Black family that's looked upon as strong, influential, yet regular people that will give us and represent true liberty. "

Bridges remembers the sense of freedom she felt after shopping in a department store and eating in a restaurant for the first time.

"This sense of freedom feels like that time," Bridges said. "Obama is going to make this country free like it's never been before."