

Joy, tears, a sense of history in the making

By David Abel, Globe Staff | August 29, 2008 | City reaction

Throughout the long speech, they nodded and watched in agreeing silence. And then at the end, they rose to their feet, clapped, cried, and roared in thundering approval.

A kind of rapture overcame the 50 people on the second floor of the **Yawkey Club of Roxbury** last night as they watched Barack Obama become the first black candidate to be nominated for president by a major political party.

Rob Gibson couldn't stop the tears, which flowed from the moment Obama took the stage to the moment he walked off. Forty-five years before, to the day, he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and watched as Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the nation about his dreams.

"Just extraordinary . . . fabulous," said Gibson, 63, of Roxbury. "I never thought this would be possible."

Fifty-four years after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation and 34 years after a judge required busing in Boston, African-Americans across the city rejoiced as they watched Obama address the nation from the Democratic National Convention in Denver.

Earlier in the day, outside the post office in Dudley Square, from the bus station to the stores along Malcolm X Boulevard, there was a sense among young and old, black, Latino, and white, that history was in the making.

A sleep-deprived Meherat Tolera walked several blocks from her job at a gift shop to an outdoor stand in Dudley Square, where she paid \$2 for the last Barack Obama button. She handed over \$20 for a T-shirt featuring an idealized postage stamp with the candidate beside King and another with a reprint of Obama appearing on the cover of Time magazine.

"Tonight means so much, so much," said Tolera, 26, of Cambridge, who has stayed up to watch every night of the convention, even though she has to be at work by 4 a.m. "He represents so much for this country."

Denise Williams, 47, stood on Malcolm X Boulevard in her own Obama T-shirt, which featured one of his quotes: "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time."

She could hardly contain her excitement.

"It's hard to believe this is really happening," she said. "I've watched every night of the convention, and each night has gotten more exciting. I've never been this excited about an election."

To mark the occasion, groups around the city organized convention parties.

The **Boys and Girls Club of Boston** expected about 100 people; Haitian-Americans rented out the Belle Cuisine restaurant in Dorchester; and a local radio station planned to host hundreds of Obama fans at the NuVo Kitchen and Wine Bar in Roslindale Square.

"This is history, our history," said Lisa Eloi, 37, of Stoughton, who planned to help register voters at Belle Cuisine. "Even if he doesn't make it into the White House, I feel as if we have already won. He really makes hope come alive."

Before Obama took the stage, Bobbie Boykin, 48, of Dorchester, at the post office, searched for words to express her excitement.

"I'm speechless," she said. "I can now really tell my son that he can be anything he wants to be. I wish my grandparents - who couldn't even vote - could see this day."

At the outdoor T-shirt stand that helps raise money for Metro Boston Alive, Gregory Davis, the director of the substance abuse program, said the Obama shirts have outsold King, Malcolm X, Tupac Shakur, even the Celtics shirts.

"People want to remember this moment," Davis said. "They want to know that despite all our struggles, we were able to watch someone of color be nominated to be president."

Gregg Burnett still couldn't take his eyes off the TV well after Obama and his wife left the stage.

"This is something I never thought could happen in my lifetime," he said. "I'm so energized. But this is just the start of a long road ahead."

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