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100 days of Obama leadership, black pride runs high

by Thomas C. Fox



Evelyn Glore Ashford

Editor's note: As President Barack Obama reached his 100th day in office April 29, his presidency seemed to be altering the public perception of race relations in the United States, a new New York Times poll has found.

Two-thirds of Americans now say race relations are generally good, and the percentage of blacks who say so has doubled since last July. Black Americans remain among the president's staunchest supporters; 70 percent of black respondents now say the country is headed in the right direction.

NCR marked the president's 100th day in office by telling the story of a 93-year-old African-American woman who dreamed of, but never fully imagined, a black president.

Evelyn Glore Ashford, 93, is one proud woman -- and she says so without hesitation. And she says it again and again.

What makes her glow is not only that an African American is president of the United States, a truly

overwhelming reality in her life, but also that this African-American president is showing the world "he's a wonderful man," a family man who cares for his wife and children and showed special concern for his grandmother before she died last year.

"I couldn't be prouder; no, I couldn't be prouder," Ashford says, flatly unable hold back deep ethnic pride.



Born in Arkansas, Ashford migrated to Fisk University, in

Nashville, Tenn., a black institution of higher education that dates back to 1866, and whose first students shared the common experiences of slavery and biting poverty.

Ashford's teaching career took her to the first grade classes at the all-black James Milton Turner Elementary School in Kirkwood, Mo., where she spent many years before being called to be the first black educator to teach in the first grade classes at Rosehill Elementary School, also in Kirkwood, when that school was integrated for the first time.

Speaking in her apartment in an assisted living community in Overland Park, Kan., long retired now, she recalls that as an educator of young African-American students she would tell them that if they worked hard, "really pushing themselves," they could become "anyone they wanted to be."

Yet, she admits, deep in her heart she hadn't quite set her imagination on the White House. The U.S. presidency seemed a bit out of reach.

Ashford again broke a racial barrier when just five years ago she became the first African-American to settle in her assisted living center, called The Atriums.

A gregarious woman, but slowed by age, she says she always had many friends, "blacks and whites alike." "I've treated everyone the same and they've treated me that way too," she said, brushing off the notion that racism in American has ever held her back.

She said that after Obama's nomination last summer she began to wear an Obama button on her lapel. While already proud, she didn't want to make too much of it at the time. No signs; no banners; just a lapel button, she said. However, when she played bridge with her three friends at the center, she would sing Obama's praises, she said.

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On Election Day last November, she got up early, put on a special outfit and headed downstairs to vote, using her walker. She then returned to her room and started her marathon television vigil, with a few friends eventually joining her in her apartment.

She stayed glued through to the declaration that Obama had been elected as the 45th president of the United States. She stayed on to watch his acceptance speech in Grant Park in Chicago.

"You just can't imagine the feeling of pride. Of course, I was proud," she exclaimed. "Yes, I shed some tears."

"I mean I never really imagined. I told my students they could be outstanding people. I tried to impress upon them that if they studied they could become someone special. But I never really imagined I'd live to see this day."

Following the election, her son, Gregory Glore, wondered how he could capture and freeze the pride he saw in his mother. Eventually he decided to make a collage of Obama newspaper clippings, celebrating the election. He placed her photo in the middle of the collage and gave it to her prior to passing it on to his only daughter to keep as a gift of her grandmother.

"This way our family will be permanently reminded of this historic day," he said.

Just days before Obama reached his 100th day in office, Ashford's initial pride had only grown. She prays every day now that no harm will come to the president.

And how's he doing after 100 days?

While she says she likes what Obama is doing as president, it's not his politics necessarily that please her most.

"He's a wonderful husband, a wonderful father, and, you know, he took care of his grandmother before she died," Ashford said, referring to the fact that just one week before the election Obama flew to Hawaii to visit his ailing grandmother, who died one day before he was elected.

"I'm just so glad I've lived to see this day. I've always had hope that blacks would be recognized for their achievements and contributions. Now I see it's finally happening."

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