

**Keynote Address given by the  
Honorable Willie B. Kennedy at the  
Bayview Opera House 1/20/2009**

***Living The Dream***

Lift every voice and sing, Til earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with a harmony of Liberty; Let our rejoicing  
rise high as the listening skies, Let it resound loud as  
the rolling sea. Sing a song full of the faith that the  
dark past has brought us,

Sing a song full of the hope that the presence has  
tought us, Facing the rising sun of our new day  
begun; Let us march on til victory is won.

I never thought much about the meaning of the lyrics  
of the song Lift Every Voice And Sing.

Which was written by James Weldon Johnson nor did I know what he had in mind when he wrote the lyrics in 1900, until the election of Barack Obama on November 4, 2008.

It was written as a poem and was publicly performed by 500 children at a segregated school as part of a celebration for President Lincoln's Birthday on Feb 12, 1900. Actually the words were written by Mr. Johnson to introduce their honored guest Booker T. Washington. Mr. Johnson's brother John Rosamond Johnson set the poem to music in 1905.

The second verse tells the story best as to treatment slaves endured over the years:

Stormy the road we trod, Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died; Yet with  
a steady beat have not our weary feet Come to the  
place for which our fathers sighed? We have come  
over a way that with tears has been watered, We have  
come treading our path through the blood of the  
slaughtered, Out from the gloomy past Til now we  
stand at last Where the white gleam of our bright star  
is cast.

Let us to-night give thanks and praise for the many African Americans and others, who paved the way, culminating in the election of a black man who took the oath of office today and is now the 44<sup>th</sup> elected President of the United States of America.

Now what does that mean to have a black man as our President?

Let me tell you first what it does not mean. It does not mean that we can become complacent and take for granted that he can heal all of our ills and problems. If you have kept up with the news and listened to the many problems he has inherited, we

will understand that it will take time for President Obama to keep the many promises he made to us. Nor does it mean that we will all become employed. Neither does it mean that his cabinet will be filled with all blacks. So let us not start saying the he has done nothing for black people. Remember he has the entire United States to deal with and satisfy. Just have faith that he will do the right thing for everyone. To me President Obama's election means that God has heard our cries and God has made it possible through Obama to heal many ills that face America today.

His election has hopefully erased from the minds of those who judged all blacks by the worst of us.

It will, I hope, make the world look upon Black people as human beings and respect us as God's children, on the level with all other human beings, with the same intellect and intelligence as every other man woman and child.

It means that the voice and dream of Dr Martin Luther King is still being heard 41 years after his death, and it has taken 54 years since the bombing of the church in Birmingham, Alabama. With the killing of Emmitt Till, the assassination and lynching of

numerous of our brothers and sisters. We can say we have come over a way that with tears has been watered. It means that with lifting our voices we have caused earth and heaven to ring, ring with the harmonies of Liberty.

President Obama's election has helped put even more meaning to the phrase “ I am somebody”, That I can be whatever I strive to be.

Having President Obama as President gives me pride in being an African American in the United States of America. I am hoping that all of my Black brothers and sisters, young and old feels the same and that we will put away our guns and stop killing each other.

Pull up our pants and stop showing our bellies, and start preparing ourselves to be hireable for the jobs President Obama has promised.

I urge all youth to stay in school, learn all you can to prepare yourselves to become contributing adults, raise families and live the American dream and be prepared to take advantage of everything America offers.

I want our youth to understand, that you don't have to act, dress, and use fowl language to be noticed. You will be noticed because of your skin color. You will be respected

Because you respect yourself and each other. So clean up your act and become the beautiful people

you are because you are precious in God's sight, lets  
live that way.

Then we can truthfully say that out from the gloomy  
past that we stand at last where the white gleam of  
our bright Star is cast. We can now through the  
realization of hope live the dream of Dr. Martin  
Luther King, Jr. through President Barack Obama.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who has by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path we pray  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God where we  
met Thee,  
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we  
forget Thee  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand  
May we forever stand,

True to our God, True to our Native land.

God Bless you and Keep Living the Dream.