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Maya J. Pope-Chappell
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By Maya J. Pope-Chappell
Special to the AmNews
Published: Sunday, November 2, 2008 9:04 PM EST

Dolores Epps, 58, can’t wait to vote next Tuesday in the 2008 presidential election but she’s worried about the rest of her day. The 58-year-old says that she will turn on her favorite TV station so that she doesn’t get anxious about the outcome. She’ll wait to hear what she hopes are joyous screams from the halls of Isabella in response to an Obama victory.

"I’ll be a nervous wreck," said Epps, a Harlem native who is recovering from hip replacement surgery at Isabella, a nursing home in Washington Heights. "I hope it is spectacular."

Like so many older African-Americans, Epps never believed a black person could become president in her lifetime. Now she and others feel their day has finally come.

"It gives me great pride as a black man in that the Lord allowed me to see something come to pass that I never thought I would see," said Rev. Dan Craig, 63 of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

"I’m a lot more optimistic then I ever was before.”

Craig grew up in the racist south of Selma, Alabama and moved to New York after graduating from college.

"I grew up in the days when you had to ride in the back of the bus. In spite of the fact of what the Constitution said, we still were not given the right to vote. We got the right when I was a young man," he said.

While he’s confident about Obama, Craig doesn’t want Democrats to take his vote for granted.

"As soon as people were in power, we didn’t hear from them and they had no particular interest in us until it became time for another election and then they pull out the same tired old lies, dust ‘em off and tell them to us again. And expect us to run to the polls and vote for them.”
Craig is confident about his vote for Obama, not because of his race but because he believes the Illinois senator is the best candidate.

"I'm voting for him because I think he's head and shoulders above [John] McCain. Maybe people will start to listen to what is being said and vote their interest as opposed to voting along racial lines," Craig said.

Sallie Montague, 72, who grew up on in the poor in North Carolina agreed.

"When I vote, I'm voting for somebody that I believe can really help the country. Otherwise, I wouldn't vote. I believe Obama, is a good man. He's a good candidate," Montague said.

All agree it's been a nation of firsts, with Obama's nomination and the campaigns of Sen. Hillary Clinton and now vice-presidential nominee Gov. Sarah Palin. What they want to see is real change.

"I'm hoping that this means a change in the way we as the people of the United States look at each other. I'm hoping that we're getting closer to the point where, as Martin Luther King said, that we will be judged not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character and by the content of our abilities when matched against someone else on a level playing field," Craig said.

Obama will not be able to change everything, Epps said.

"He's not going to make a million changes," the grandmother of five said. "He's gonna make enough changes so the next guy will have to carry it on, whether he's black, yellow, green, or white. It doesn't make any difference. He's gonna have to keep it going."

Craig agreed that Obama can't do it alone but still sees him as a beacon of hope.

"I'm not looking at Obama as a messiah. He can only do so much. Even if he doesn't win, and I believe he will, he says to me that there is hope for our young people. There's hope for us as a nation."

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