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Democracy Across Colors and Generations



Marlie Fagan, 4, votes for the first time – and hopefully not the last. Photo by Arnold Mahesan.

In Obama win, black Brooklyn parents see a brighter future

By [Andrew Garib](#)

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Despite the cold, the constant demands of his small business, and the two-and-a-half-hour wait, Lloyd Porter took his first daughter, Maclemore Lynne Porter, one month old, into a Stuyvesant Heights voting booth with him.

“That will be one of her first memories,” Porter said.

Porter, 38, a California native, was among the first people in this tightly-knit, predominantly black neighborhood to put up a Barack Obama sign in the window of his bakery, Bread Stuy, on Lewis Avenue north of Fulton Avenue. Nearly two years after Obama launched his campaign for the presidency – after Porter, his wife Hillary, and other business and community leaders have phoned voters in swing states, made trips to Pennsylvania to knock on voters’ doors, and run fundraisers for him – Porter pulled the lever for the senator from Illinois.

“It’s really emotional,” Porter said. “I just want to lay down and cry.”

Not yet. Tonight, Porter was mostly thinking about the daughter he brought with him to vote this morning to help make real what was once only a dream – electing a black president. “I hope it makes her want to participate.”

Porter is not alone. In this Brooklyn community, young black families – and there are plenty along vibrant Lewis Avenue – see new hope in Obama and in their young children. Most of the young parents here never thought they would see a black president in their lifetime. But Obama made them see their future – and that of their children – in a new, hopeful light.

Two doors down from Bread Stuy, in the early evening, Crystal Bobb-Semple, 37, guided her customers' children – some as young as two – behind the cloak of a mock polling station to fill out presidential ballots. Bobb-Semple's small book store, Brownstone Books, hosted a children's election, encouraging local youth ages 17 and under to cast mock ballots. Her eldest, daughter Corrine, inspired the idea. Corrine, 7, showed a curious savvy about Obama's promise of universal health care. "She said, 'I think I agree, but who is going to pay for it,'" Bobb-Semple said.

"These children got it," Bobb-Semple said about her young voters. "They know the candidates, they know what they stand for, and they have strong opinions."

But this election meant more to the parents of the neighborhood and their children. "They get to see we are a country that really thinks about what's important to us," the Brooklyn native said. "When growing up, that wasn't my experience. These children are going to see that what they think really matters."

"The presidency is open to you regardless of race, and sex," she said. "They'll believe it, they'll see it."

Michelle Fagan, 38, a human resources manager, brought her two children, Marlie, 4, and Ellington, 2, to vote just before the bookstore's polls closed, at 6:00 p.m. She said an Obama win would show that her children will have opportunities that she did not think they would. "My son can do anything. My daughter can do anything," she said. "I didn't expect this in my lifetime. Maybe America really is doing better. Not that the opportunities weren't there, but they might be a bit better. They road might not be so rough."

The votes in the real election had not all been counted, but, Lyndora Jackson, 30, said Obama's victory would give her son Amir, 3, new hope and responsibility. "The message to my son as a young black man is there's no excuse," she said. "Whatever you set your mind to, it's possible." Jackson, a consultant, said she hoped her son would become a doctor or lawyer, but she wasn't pushing him either way. "By the time he's 18 or 22, there will be more opportunity for whatever he wants to do."

Barack Obama won the Kids Election with 93 percent of the vote.

Three doors to the north on Lewis Avenue, the celebration at Peaches was just getting started. By 8 p.m., the restaurant was packed with more than 100 people, and a digital projector illuminated a wall with CNN's election coverage. Co-owner Craig Samuel, 37, said his back pocket was full of bills his overwhelmed staff had printed incorrectly. But he could not complain about business. "It's busy, right?" he said with a smile. "Apparently Barack brought them out."

It was a partisan crowd. The guests, eating breaded flounder, babyback ribs and Black Angus burgers, cheered when CNN called Pennsylvania for Obama.

Born and raised in nearby Ocean Hill, Samuel was an ardent Obama supporter. This morning, he voted in the basement at P.S. 73, underneath the first grade classroom where he learned the name Martin Luther King, Jr., in a booth near the one where his mother first brought him behind the cloak to cast her ballot 35 years ago. "I flicked the switch, stared at the box with the 'X' in it, flicked the switch back and forth just to make sure, pulled the lever, exited, and started to tear up," he said.

Samuel, who had two of his own children – Tiara-Asada, 18, and Alana, 12 – pointed out the gaggle of new babies in the neighborhood bouncing on their parents' laps in the window of Peaches. "These children will never be able to say to themselves, 'I want to be the first black president'," he said. "I heard that five times a year every year of my life."

Samuel said Alana was particularly encouraged by the possibility of an Obama presidency. "She totally understands what it means to shatter a glass ceiling."

For Porter, glass ceiling shattered, the work has just begun.

"Now I feel like I've been given charge of something. I need to do something, as a citizen, to make things better." "We celebrate tonight, but tomorrow we go to work," Porter said. "The stakes are too high."

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