



The Building Community Institute

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E-Newsletter

"The Foundation"™

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The Hand of History: Writing Our Lives

Almost one-hundred and seventy-eight years ago, two young Frenchmen came to America, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont and after their stay in our country, returned to France and penned a book in two volumes, *Democracy in America*. From that incredible treatise, one statement continues to travel from generation to generation: "America is great because America is good. If America ceases to be good, she'll cease to be great."

"Thank you for allowing me this personal moment of reflection."

As a nation, as a people, how do we ensure the "Good" to maintain the "Great?" What must we invest to get returns that meet such criteria? For me, this extraordinary political year- our political race for the Presidency of the United States of America, provides some insight. On the Wednesday evening of the 2008 Democratic Convention, I sat in front of my television and listened with tears in my eyes as the 'roll call' votes were being cast for that party's nomination to head their ticket for the next President of our great nation. And after the partial roll call and the thunderous acceptance by acclamation, I could only think of the investors, ordinary citizens of all races and walks of life who made such a return - an African-American being nominated for this high office, possible.

While the music played and the crowd went wild, and the many pundits analyzed our future, I was drawn to my past-my life in the segregated south, and a memory some fifty years ago when I was barely a teenager in the Mississippi Delta. I'll never forget the warm summer night when Aunt MaryAnn quietly and somewhat secretly walked to Mama Ponk's house where I lived. She told her to hurry and get ready because we had to be at the church on time. The two aging ladies, with this young boy nestled between them, made their way along the gravel road to Saint Marks Baptist Church in Glen Allan, Mississippi, where many of the 'colored' citizens had gathered during the midweek to raise money to send Deacon Joe Maxey to the NAACP meeting in Baltimore. **The movement to secure our rights to vote had openly begun.** I remember them being afraid and I remember men guarding the two doors to the church and nervously watching out the windows as testimonies were given and the money was raised. In my memory, I still see Deacon Maxey-this middle aged African-American man pacing back and forth on the wooden plank floor, but assuring us that we had nothing to fear, and that they were doing the right thing.

Fifty years ago they were investing in America's Future-ensuring that our country moves toward a more perfect union. The continued "Greatness" of America is still dependent upon such investors, citizens all, understanding that the 'bottom line' of the Habit of the Heart of brotherhood/sisterhood embraced, is the return that will ensure that a nation so conceived and so dedicated long endure. Our nation, our home, will survive not because of the inventory of the hard assets we have amassed, but because of the **"Infrastructure of Valued and Shared Relationships"** we have intentionally built and sustained.

The 'Hand of History' shows up every day and diligently records our actions for posterity. Now we have the choice as to what history will record...and our actions become a road map of our own making to guide us into our future and for the generations who follow. America is indeed great! The world recognizes our position today as was recognized nearly two hundred years ago. To ensure a 'positive' American bottom line, we must always embrace our personal responsibility to be the "good" that will ensure the "great". **I challenge each of you and myself to make 'intentional unselfishness' the legacy of our living that we pass along to the youth of our generation, the more than 50 million youth who are on the PreK-12 Education Corridor, for their reference when it becomes their time to take a roll call vote on the destiny of our country. Fifty years from now, their actions will be the 'stories' that the Hand of History will tell of our wise investing.**

- Clifton L. Taulbert