

# Inauguration: Tougaloo Students 'Caravan to History'

Contributed by The Harambee Staff -- Black College Wire  
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Read their blogs from the week-long trip

During the civil rights struggle, Tougaloo College, Jackson Miss., was known as the cradle of the movement. It housed student volunteers and leaders including Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and others, who graced the podium at Woodworth Chapel, the campus centerpiece.

To help commemorate the inauguration of the nation's 44th president, seven students in Tougaloo's Department of Mass Communication mapped out a tour of significant sites of the civil rights era to visit along their route to Barack Obama's swearing in on Jan. 20. They dubbed it "From Woodworth to Washington: The Tougaloo Harambee's Caravan to History." The Harambee is the Tougaloo student newspaper.

The trip, which began Jan. 14, includes stops in Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, Atlanta and Greensboro. The Tougaloo students will blog from each location.

The trip is being sponsored by Nissan, Terry's Installation and the Tougaloo Department of Mass Communication. It was initiated by department chair and veteran journalist Eric Stringfellow, who is coordinating the project from Jackson.

"I thought it was important to try to give some perspective to Obama's inauguration," Stringfellow said. "We are going to produce a special edition of The Harambee (Tougaloo's student newspaper) and a documentary about the trip."

Stringfellow also said Tougaloo owns Medgar Evers' home, which is now a museum, and the college and WJTV will host an inauguration viewing party there.

Melody Fisher, instructor, mass communication  
Day 7, Inauguration Day  
"Common Ground"

Yesterday, I realized how much I had in common with a few of the nation's most distinguished individuals -- Tougaloo alumni. Today, I realize I have something in common with more than 2 million others -- the need for change. Excitement was the buzz word in the air on the day of the inauguration of the first African-American President of the United States. At 4 a.m., commuters at a Metro rail station were bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Hundreds of anxious Obama supporters filled the Springfield, Va., stop ready to witness and celebrate history. We sang, chanted and even bid Bush a fond fare-thee-well, "na na na na hey hey goodbye!" Yes, the energy was all positive.

There were Americans from all backgrounds and generations: Muslims, Caucasians, Haitians, Africans, Britains and many others came together for change. The same change that every martyr and civil rights activist we studied this week fought and died to achieve. Their common ground was their mantra for change. Change from the past and present into the future. For 40+ years this change has been one of equality. Obama's inaugural address expressed his genuine interest in treating everyone with the same dignity and respect. The same courtesies our fearless groundbreakers fought for.

It was truly amazing to see a man -- who happens to be African-American -- bring together such a diverse group of people. Shoulder to shoulder, we traveled, walked and bore to frigid temperatures to confirm our selection of Commander in Chief.

Equality is no longer a dream deferred. President Obama has given us a hope in the unseen. This is a day that I will cherish forever. The long lines and surprisingly - chaos - did not diminish the reason for our coming together. For the first time I was excited about my choice for President. Not because we both share the same ethnic background, but because we are joined together by our common ground of change.

Terrance Mallory, 22, junior mass communications major  
Day 5, Sunday  
"The Real World"

This is the true story... of seven strangers... picked to live in a house... work together and have their lives taped... to find out what happens... when people stop being polite... and start getting real... "The Real World." This also has been the story of our lives for the past few days. Though we have been having such a great time and have been blessed to do so many wonderful things, I think we might have reached our boiling points. The pressure to do a phenomenal job can be

somewhat overwhelming, and having the responsibility of working in a group can be even more challenging, especially when most of the individuals involved are accustomed to working independently. I know we are merely amateurs, by some standards, but with the egos we've all been dealing with you would think we were all top of the line CNN anchors, producers, and cameramen!

It's an undeniable truth that we hit a bump in the road and lost our focus, nonetheless we bounced back and I'm confident that we will do exactly what we need to do.

It has always been a dream of mine to visit the Washington area and today that dream became a reality. I can honestly say that today was one of the most fun days we've had so far. Chaperoned by our hostess/tour guide we headed to the downtown area, via train. When we arrived downtown I saw miles and miles of people as far as my eyes could see. I'm pretty sure that it was the largest group of people I've ever seen in one spot, in my life. The atmosphere in the area was clearly that of excitement. The day to celebrate a new beginning for our nation is drawing closer with each day and people have traveled from various parts of our beloved country to celebrate.

While downtown we decided to go to the inaugural kick off concert. There were so many people in line that it blew me away. I was so amazed to see all those people that I forgot how cold it was. Even though I knew at some point during my trip I would see The Honorable President-Elect Barack Obama, there was still no way to prepare myself for such an unforgettable moment. You could sense the admiration for him throughout the crowd from people of all races, ages, genders, etc. and that was truly amazing to me. I know that First Lady Michelle Obama caught slack for this statement, but I must say, I agree with her. For the first time I feel very proud of my country.

So in conclusion I have had a wonderful time here in Washington and it is something I will never forget. Though we had a rough spot I realized that it's all what you make it, and at the end of the day none of the little things matter. A wise woman (my mother,) once gave me an example that helps me look at situations in life differently. "If have a half glass of water, you can see it as either half empty or half full. In other words it's up to you to decide how you want to view life's situations. Having a positive attitude will determine the way you see a lot of things, and right now; my glass is definitely half full!

P.S. Did I mention that I got to see the White House and Beyonce Knowles today???? Priceless.

Tyler Carter, 19, freshman mass communication major  
Day 5, Sunday  
"The men I saw tonight did not impress me at all"

Wow, I just left the 100 Black Men of America's Gala/Reception and it was amazing to see how these people carried themselves. I thought I would see people who would be open to people who were not like them such as myself. Being from the South, we have been getting a lot of crooked stares since we have been here in Washington. Tonight was a magnification of those stares by being at this reception. The people were so full of themselves just because of the particular titles they hold and what organization they are from. It is disgusting to see people so flashy and arrogant. My classmate Teressa Fulgham and I went to this reception not knowing what to expect, which we would see, and how it would turn out.

We quickly found out that it was not the place for us; the people wore mink coats and extravagant dresses and just their overall airs were sickening to see. Here we are during the highlight of history getting ready to have our new president sworn in and I see black people acting this way. Everyone is speaking of "change" and how we need a change, but Obama cannot change the attitudes of us as African-American people. We are in charge of our actions and internally something must tell you that your wealth does not make you as a person.

Almost every person I saw had mink coats and they are people that I have never seen on television or in an authoritative position in the United States. Wealth was on display tonight and for me as a young black man, am I supposed to look up to you as a man? What kind of example are you setting for sons, your grandsons, African-American males in general?

African-American males are being lost to the system, streets, and other evils of the World? We are an endangered species; the men I saw tonight did not impress me at all. They spoke of their organization and what they thought about certain issues facing our world today. College tuition was one of the issues they brought up; being such a prestigious organization you should have enough money to formulate some kind of scholarship for black men and being a college student myself, I am thirsty for scholarship money but I have not seen a 100 Black Men scholarship anywhere.

None of the men I observed tonight looked like a man I could look up to; my classmate Teressa Fulgham were together the whole night and men were just acknowledging her and acted as if I was not standing beside her. Another man started a conversation with Teressa and a woman walked by with a dress hugging the contours of her frame and he completely shifted his eyes to her figure while continuing to talk to Teressa. That is totally disrespectful to her as a young woman, but as a young African-American male, I should idolize you? Why? Because you have some money in your pockets and you a part of the "prestigious" 100 Black Men club?

It's time out for acting as if money can solve all of your problems because at the end of the day if you are not happy and Jesus Christ is not apart of your life you can be the richest man in the World, but will be the saddest. I saw one celebrity at the reception tonight who was comedian Sheryl Underwood and she was pretty dressed down with no extravagant clothes on.

If she could come in grounded and not showing off the many jewels I am sure she has, why could the others not do the same thing? I also feel as if you can't be setting a positive example for our children showing them how you basically can wear any designer fashion because you have the money. By showing them this, I feel that there will be a surplus of "Sweet 16" kids roaming the world, not knowing that hard work and a healthy relationship with God enabled your wealth and that it wasn't just handed to you.

By being here up North and seeing what I saw tonight, you would think that the recession is only affecting the South. 2009 is the year of new beginnings, a fresh start, and hardships to the roads of future bliss and blessings for the people of this nation. But as an African-American male, I feel that these men should step up and delve deeply into the meaning of what their organization is and reach out to us more than ever before. There are many more young black men who just need that extra push, extra motivation, and father figure to help them reach that next level, and I just feel from what I saw tonight that we as a PEOPLE -- not just the 100 Black Men -- must do better to get more of us off the streets and keep us from being statistics.

Jerry D. Watson, 22, senior interdisciplinary humanities major  
Day 3, Friday  
"Lord, give me strength"

That's about all I can ask for after the day I've just had. The day started off well, with our hostess making a wonderful breakfast. From there it was off to Howard University. Driving from Virginia to Howard was awesome for us, me especially because I had the chance to share the knowledge I have about the area with the group. Some members of the group said it was their first time being here. Along the way, we passed the Pentagon, Jefferson Monument, Washington Memorial, and many "Welcome Mr. President" signs and banners, and the streets were filled with Obama's supporters.

Everybody was energized and pumped to get out of the car and get to work. Then it started, rather than us doing the job we were sent to do, we got sidetracked with being GREEK, and for some of you who are not sure what I'm talking about; I'm saying being a part of a Black Greek Letter Organization. Most of the organizations were founded at Howard. It was so surreal for me to be on the campus, where my organization, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc was founded -- particularly in this moment and time, with the election of our first African American president. Phi Beta Sigma just celebrated its 95th Founder's Day, a legacy of "Brotherhood, Scholarship, and Service." It was organizations like this one that helped pave the way for the President-elect. Most of the students with me are in one of one of the nine organizations.

Between going to the different plots, we raced to nearby buildings to warm our frozen bodies. After about two hours of doing this we realized that we had not truly dressed for the weather; and needed to power up our gear with a detour to the mall.

Back at the house our professor gave a pop quiz, well, not an actual quiz -- more like a lemon squeeze a.k.a. heart to heart. I guess she could tell there was some tension among the group. With days of being in a group, never with a minute to yourself, that is expected. So we all got a chance to express our feelings and views. And though it seemed to get worse before it got better, it was WELL NEEDED! It wasn't until tonight that I learned how my co-worker/classmates felt about me. They look at me as a leader, not just as another student. They admire my work ethic and passion for the art. It wasn't until then that I realized this trip has so many different meanings and purposes for each one of our lives.

Teressa Fulgham, 20, junior mass communication/print journalism major  
Day 2 Thursday, Jan. 15  
"Mr. Dunn's History Lesson"

Today we stopped at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. It was the first black church in Birmingham. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church not only known for being one of many Civil Rights headquarters, it is also the place where four little girls lost their lives on September 15, 1963. It was on that tragic day that a bomb went off at 10:22 a.m. At the church, I met 81-year-old James Dunn. He is a native of Birmingham and has been a member of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church for more than 50 years. As my colleagues were continuing to collect footage, I was able to just sit and talk with Mr. Dunn. Although he chose not to talk with me about the day of the bombing, he did share other information that wasn't as hard to talk about.

He told me that he tried to register to vote for the first time when he was 19. During that time, he couldn't because

of poll taxes and silly questions asked such as “How high is high”;

Because Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a Civil Rights Headquarter, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with many others, came by frequently. Mr. Dunn shared with me how they would sit on the porch and talk when he was in town during those days.

He had a job at Winn Dixie during school, and became the 1st black manager in the southern region. Although this was very important and historic, it was not easy. Blacks didn’t always show him respect and whites showed him no respect in the store.

Dunn told me how blacks could not get insurance and when they needed health care, they were sent to the basement. Some people even died from being scald to death by the water dripping from the pipes. He told me how during the marches the police would release the dogs to attack them and use water hoses. I know I’ve read it time and time again, and I’ve heard about it but it was something about the way he talked that brought tears to my eyes.

We talked about the only black motel in Birmingham- the G.A. Gaston Motel. One day the motel was bombed while he was there. After the bomb a race riot broke out and he could not go home for three days because the streets were blocked off.

Mr. Dunn told me about how his friend was beaten really badly. Then they threw salt on his open wounds. I really began to cry because it was so hard for him to talk about these things, but he continued sharing with me because he knew it was school and he wanted to help. The entire time he kept saying “I know I’m not much help, but you can ask me questions and I’ll do my best to answer.” I kept telling him he was a big help.

2008 was my first time voting for president. I was so excited about being able to vote for Barack Obama. But think about people like James Dunn, who lived to see the day and was able to vote for Barack Obama. When I asked him about voting for Barack Obama, he just looked at me as if he was at a loss for words. Then he told me that he didn’t think he would see the day, but he is glad that he did. “It’s a beautiful thing,” said Dunn.

I was so glad I met Mr. Dunn today. Just being able to talk with him was so special because he shared firsthand information that no textbook could ever teach. He spoke with passion and humility that I will never forget.

Tyler Carter, 19, freshman mass communication major  
Wednesday, Jan. 14, 9 a.m.

I feel that we as African Americans have come a long way in today’s society. The National Museum for Voting Rights and its historical artifacts place you in the shoes of those blacks who struggled just for the right to vote. Seeing the artifacts made me feel their struggle, and I now understand how important it is for me to exercise my right to vote. This year was my first time ever voting and I am proud to say that my vote helped to put an African-American president in office.

We as African-Americans should be thankful for the tedious and selfless acts that our ancestors endured to get blacks the right to vote and I feel that we as a people don’t always take advantage of this power we have. I know of an African- American male who did not vote because he felt that his vote would not count. This makes everything that our ancestors worked for null and void because it was as if they worked and slaved for this right, but it is not being exercised by everyone. This must change; last year on November 4, our voices as a people were heard.

While visiting the National Museum for Voting Rights, the Negro spiritual, “We Shall Not Be Moved” rang through the halls of this historical landmark. On November 4, 2008, the voices of African-Americans were not ignored nor moved. For the next few years to come, we cannot, we shall not, and we WILL not be moved.

Crystal Daniel, 22, senior mass communication major

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 6:27 a.m.

I have butterflies. I’m very excited and a little scared. This will be my first real experience where I’m performing professionally on my own with other students in my department. However, I am confident I will apply what I know and incorporate the new things I will learn along the way. I have been waiting for an opportunity such as this. I’m very grateful and blessed for Eric Stringfellow, who is my advisor, Ms. Melody Fisher, Tougaloo Staff, Channel 12, Nissan, my colleagues, and all other contributors who made this trip possible.

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 12:03 p.m. (Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery)

I’m standing here looking at the statue of the legendary Rosa Parks, known around the World as the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.” Parks, who was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a

white man in Alabama, committed an act of civil disobedience, but to African-Americans it means something much greater. I'm here at this state of the art museum which is built in tribute to the legacy Parks created and also a major landmark. I'm revisiting how her actions changed the paths of segregation in America and how her actions birthed the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Through my course of thought, and humbled pride, bright yet beaming in my soul, I'm contemplating the day Barack Obama will be sworn in as the first black man and 44th president of the United States of America. So many emotions and happy tears are boiling inside, ready to explode because I look back at the life, morals, and the fight that Parks and others stood for to gain equality for African-Americans and now I look forward to Obama transforming the future of America, one with more highlighted black leadership. It just feels so wonderful to feel this type of connection with our past, our heritage, our culture, and to revisit and imagine we have lived what our ancestors once did. I just have the utmost respect and internal as well as eternal pride to travel great distances to stand for a cause and stand in the place my ancestors dreamed we would one day be.

Ja'Leasa Walden, 19, sophomore English/mass communication major

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 9:36 a.m.

"The same hands that pick cotton can now pick a president"

To the eye Selma, Alabama seems to be a quiet, peaceful and homely town, as I look around the downtown area I realize at one point in history it was not this peaceful and calm. Selma is full of a history and is a very vital milestone in the historical journey of this nation. The citizens take pride in the community and stand firm in their belief of equality.

Sam Walker, 55, the national consultant for the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, enlightened me on how "Bloody Sunday" and the march across The Edmund Pettus Bridge is the reason why we are allowed to vote. "The primary reason we have an African-American president is because of what happened in Selma, even though it took 44 years for the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. to come true, we still have a long way to go, this is only the peak of the greatness America will experience," Walker said during a tour of the museum.

As a young African-American woman and exploring the museum, I saw slogans that were used to stop African-Americans from voting such as "How many bubbles in a bar a soap?" The questions asked were mere insults to a voter or even a person's intelligence. My first instinct was to say "WHAT!" But in my heart I acknowledged the humility of the people, the humbleness and sincerity that they shared in accomplishing a communal goal, the right to vote.

In the museum, I found myself overwhelmed when I viewed a mock prison cell. One of my peers, Tyler Carter, shared this experience with me. We read a roster where people were arrested for "parading without a permit". I found that to be ludicrous, but that is because I have always had the freedom to wander as I please.

There was a wall in the museum, "I was there" wall, in which love ones or people who actually participated in the march could write on sticky pads and post them. Some of the experiences written were "I was not there but my grandmother was beaten on that march." Some brought tears to my eyes, while others stirred up a tad bit of angry. With the wind blowing in my hair as I walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, a sense of pride filled my heart that people unselfishly actually jeopardized and sacrifice their lives for the people in later generations to be able to vote and be treated as equals. "The same hands that pick cotton can now pick Presidents" is a statement that shows the sacrifice that was made by previous generations for the current generation now. It may have taken 44 years for the first African American president to be elected to serve this country as the 44th president, but the journey along the way makes this experience well worth it and adds a happy ending to the African American experience.

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The Tougaloo students will be blogging and reporting for Black College Wire throughout the trip.

The students who are on the trip:

Tyler Carter, 19, a freshman mass communication major with emphasis in journalism and broadcasting. He is the weekly sports writer, this is his first year writing for the Tougaloo Harambee.

Crystal Daniel, 22, a senior mass communication major from Tyler town. She serves as the paper's senior editor and edits its editorial page. Her area of emphasis is print journalism. Daniel is a four-year Harambee veteran and served briefly as editor last year. As a freshman she was among a team of Harambee staffers who traveled to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans to produce a Hurricane Katrina edition. Last summer she was involved in a research program at the University of Mississippi.

Carmen Farrish, 20, a junior mass communication/broadcast journalism major from Edwards. Farrish, who spent the summer as an intern at WLBT-TV 3, will be responsible for daily updates for the Harambee Online, which is hosted on the Tougaloo College website. She has served in several capacities for the Harambee since her freshman year.

Teressa Fulgham, 20, a junior mass communication/print journalism major from Jackson. She spent the summer in a research program at the University of Minnesota and will spend next summer studying in South Africa. Fulgham, who served briefly as managing editor last year, will be in charge of the paper's layout and design.

Terrance Mallory, 22, a junior mass communication major from Minneapolis, Minn. He has served as a staff writer for the Harambee and currently serves as an anchor for Harambee TV. Mallory also does graphics for the newspaper and does production for the television station. He has interned at the Cytec Corp. and currently does marketing for the firm.

Ja'Leasa Walden, 19, the Harambee's managing editor. She is a sophomore English/mass communication major from Gautier and last year served as a staff writer for The Harambee. She is overseeing the inaugural coverage for the student newspaper and plans to attend law school after graduation.

Jerry Watson, 22, a senior interdisciplinary humanities major. Watson directs the production of Harambee TV. He was a finalist for the Collegiate Broadcasters Inc. award and plans to attend Boston University for graduate school.

Instructor: Melody Fisher, Mass Communication, Tougaloo College