

HBCU Marching Bands Headed to Inauguration

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FAMU, Grambling among 5 picked to perform in inaugural parade

Florida A&M University's Marching 100 and Grambling State University's World Famed Tiger Marching Band will participate in the historic President's Inaugural Parade on Tuesday, January 20, 2009.

They will join other invited parade participants including the marching bands from Hampton, Delaware State and Howard universities following Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony on the Capitol steps as the 44th President of the United States.

"I am honored to invite these talented groups and individuals to participate in the Inaugural Parade," Obama is quoted as saying in a news release sent out by the Presidential Inaugural Committee.

"These organizations embody the best of our nation's history, diversity and commitment to service. Vice President-elect (Joe) Biden and I are proud to have them join us in the parade," Obama said in the news release.

Julian White, FAMU's department of music chair and director of bands, said he received a telephone call during rehearsal on Dec. 5 informing him that the Marching 100 had been selected to participate in the inaugural parade, according to a news release from the FAMU office of public relations. "When I heard that we were selected, I immediately asked them to repeat it again," White said. "I put them on speakerphone and put the phone to the microphone so that the entire band could hear the invite. As soon as the band members heard the invitation, they went berserk. They were screaming and shouting. They started calling and sending text messages to their family and friends informing them of the wonderful news."

This appearance will be the third time the award-winning FAMU band will perform in a presidential inaugural parade. The band participated in both of the inaugural parades for former President Bill Clinton. The World Famed also has been invited to an previous inaugural parades, marching in President George W. Bush's first Inauguration and former President Bill Clinton's 1999 Inauguration.

"For Florida A&M University to be a part of such a historical occasion is truly an honor," said James H. Ammons, FAMU's president. "This nation will have an opportunity to see once again what we all know — the Marching 100 is this nation's most talented, dynamic and innovative university band."

White also said he is "proud and elated" that the 420-member band has been invited to participate in the historic event. "It is an honor to have the opportunity to represent the university, the City of Tallahassee, and the State of Florida. The invitation to President-elect Obama's Inaugural Parade is by far what we are most proud of. We would like to thank our President Dr. James H. Ammons who has supported us every step of the way."

Ralph Jean-Paul, student president of the Marching "100," echoed White's sentiments.

"Words can not express how we feel," said Paul, a senior from Miami majoring in music education with a concentration in performance. "We consider this to a great privilege for the band to be part of this historical event." Howard University's Showtime Marching Band, led by John Newson and Kelvin Washington, received the news around noon on December 9. "The university had been sure that we would receive the offer to march, but we were awaiting confirmation," said Drum Major Franklin Nesmith. Organizations wishing to participate in the parade submitted an application to the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee (AFIC), which then assisted the Presidential Inaugural Committee in reviewing all of the groups' applications. A total of 1,382 organizations applied to participate. The World Famed sent in a sound clip, video, and photos as part of their Inauguration package. "They said we had one of the best Inauguration packages submitted," said Steven Jackson, a World Famed member and current Grambling State SGA Vice President.

White said the Marching 100 sent a DVD of the band's marching performance as well as audio clips. A 50-page media kit also was sent highlighting the numerous accomplishments of the band over the years.

"It was a hard job to condense so many years of accomplishments into just 50 pages," White said.

This article contains information from articles by Darryl D. Smith in the Gramblinite, Jennifer Lewis in The Hilltop, The Famuan and the FAMU Public Relations Office.