

THE DECREE

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BHM: Students Reflect on Historic Obama Presidency

With “Black History Month” in mind, Decree staffers conducted an informal survey of African-American, and African, students to elicit their reflections on Barack Obama’s eight years as president.

“To have an African-American in the White House was a blessing,” said Beverly Anaele. “It showed that Americans can see past the false perception of skin color and the stereotypes that come with it.”

Many students felt inspired by Obama’s election and his performance in office. He was seen as a trail blazer. “It meant a lot to me because it showed it’s possible to have an African-American as president,” Cy Andrews said. “It can be done. It really encouraged me. It was a very big deal.”

Justin Brown agreed that President Obama became a strong role model. “It gave the African-American community a drive,” he said, and a sense that “anything is achievable.”

James Parrish said Obama’s election filled him with excitement. “It made me think that I could be anything I wanted to be and I could one day tell my kids a

black man was president,” he said, noting that the president was quite inspiring. “Obama could have said walk to the moon and I would’ve been the first in line.”

“Hope” was a word used by Olivia Smith in reflecting on the meaning of Obama’s election. “Having a minority in office brought us closer to a more diverse government,” she said. “For my family and me, Obama gave us hope that we have a voice and a chance to make it to the top.”

Antonia Bunch was in fifth grade when Obama won his first term in 2008. She called it an unforgettable experience. “I was just starting to understand the history being made,” she said. “It was refreshing to see someone whose skin is the same color as mine accomplish something so spectacular.”

Sainabou Jallow described a similar experience. She spent election day 2008, surrounded by family, at an aunt’s house in the West African nation of Gambia. “We stayed up all night to watch it live on TV,” she recalled. “When he won, everyone was crying. I wasn’t quite sure why it affected the

adults so much, but I found myself crying too. Through the eight years of his presidency—two of which I spent as an international student in the U.S.—I’ve realized exactly why it was important.”

Obama’s history-making presidency was not lost on Veon Byrd. “We’ve come a long way since segregation and slavery,” he said. “Now we’ve had an African-American president for two terms.”

Brandon Leake was grateful to live at the time of the first African-American president. In thinking about the past eight years, he paid tribute to African-American figures like Dr. Martin Luther King who helped blaze the trail.

Of Obama’s presidency, J.C. Freeman said, “It made me proud to see a difference in the United States.”

Keilah Alston said, “What it meant to me is that it’s possible for blacks to have power in a system meant for us to ‘stay in our place.’”

Sidney McCall said that Obama was a transformational figure whose influence extended beyond American borders. “Coming from a race of historically mar-

ginalized people, he overcame racism and prejudice to rise above the hatred and become one of the most memorable individuals in world history,” she said.

Like McCall, Jerome Little remarked on the adversity Obama faced during his time in office. “He had to deal with a lot of critics, mainly because of his race,” Little said. “But he continued to stay focused and determined.”

While acknowledging the history made by President Obama, some respondents noted that considerable work remains for achieving equality and harmony. “It (Obama’s presidency) meant that America is not how it used to be decades ago,” Jaylon Johnson said. “But even though an African-American was in office, it doesn’t mean racism is gone.”

Most interviewees praised Obama’s record of achievement. Many cited the Affordable Care Act, aka “Obama Care,” as his signature achievement. Others noted the draw-down in troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, the killing of Osama bin Laden, and improvements to the economy after he inherited a national recession.

“As president, you have to take on all the dirty work left by the previous president,” said Smith. “Obama came at a time of recession and left us with a lower unemployment rate and more consumer confidence.”

Bunch appreciated the decrease in the jobless rate that coincided with Obama’s tenure. “He lowered the unemployment rate, which affected my family tremendously,” she said.

Besides citing a decrease in the unemployment rate and other accomplishments, Ishmail Harris pointed out

that President Obama “maintained good relations with other countries.”

In her survey, McCall listed all the aforementioned accomplishments and enumerated others. “While no individual’s perfect,” she said. “I think President Obama’s two terms were successful. Not only did he bring America to the table on climate change, he legalized same-sex marriage, pardoned individuals who had received life sentences, regulated big banks and made countless agreements around the world.”

Among the criticisms leveled against the Obama administration, Jallow called attention to the high number of deportations that occurred during the president’s two terms.

Though a fan of Obama, Parrish was critical of the 44th president’s efforts in trying to help African-Americans. “I feel he didn’t do enough for the black community. When all the murders of innocent black men took place, Obama rarely spoke out about them,” Parrish said, expressing particular dissatisfaction with the response to killings in inner-city Chicago, Obama’s hometown.

McCall concurred that there were “hiccups” along the way, but feels that the president was calm and unifying in response to crisis. “People still lost their jobs, young African-Americans were racially profiled, shootings took place, and soldiers died, but in every dark moment the president brought us together.”

(This story was reported by Jessica Brown, Diamond Fogg, Sydney Jackson, Johnathan Pickler, Mary Reynolds, Santanlia Scoggins, Quinn Tobias, and Toni Tutt.)

Manning Twins Exemplify ‘Student Athlete’

Brittany and Tiffany Manning enter their final season as members of the softball team and exemplars of what it means to be a Wesleyan student-athlete.

Identical twins, the Portsmouth, Virginia natives play side by side in the Bishops infield, room together, take the same classes and even share a major, criminal justice. After graduation, both hope to work in law enforcement. Brittany wants to work in probation/parole or the court system; a computer information systems minor, Tiffany said her “dream job” is to serve with the state bureau of investigation or FBI.

The two began playing on travel teams at age 12 after beginning with T-ball seven years earlier. For the Bishops, Brittany Manning (.403 batting average, 23 RBIs in 2016) plays shortstop, while Tiffany (13 RBIs) is the starter at third base.

Long-time coach John Brackett praised the two sisters for their contributions to the program. “They’ve been an absolute joy to coach,” said Brackett, claiming he could tell the two apart within days of their arrival. “Both Brittany and Tiffany have such great personalities. They always have a smile on their face. Not only are they talented softball players, but they’re two of the best students on the team.”

Second-baseman Peyton Hyler described “Brit” and “Tiff” as fine teammates and outstanding leaders. “They’re always the first ones to pick each other up,” she said. “They’re great role models to the underclassmen. Our friendship will always hold a special place in my heart.”

The Decree conducted an interview with the Manning twins prior to the season:

Q. Who was born first and is that sister more mature and worthy of additional respect?

BRITTANY: Tiffany was born first. I guess I would say that she’s a little more mature than I am. She acts like she’s way older than me when she’s really only two minutes older.

TIFFANY: We were two minutes apart so I always tease Brittany about being older than her. Both of us are mature, but my mom told us that when we were younger, I was more of the dominant twin and Brittany was more of the follower. I feel like in some respects that’s still true today.

Q. What was the toughest age for you two, as twin sisters?

BRITTANY: I don’t think there was an age that was really tough, but she may think a little differently.

TIFFANY: The toughest age was probably when we were six. In school we were always put in the same classes, but in first grade they put us in different ones. Brittany cried every day until they put us in the same class again.

Q. Of the two of you, who is your mother’s favorite?

BRITTANY: Tiffany is definitely my mom’s favorite because they act very similar. I’m more of my dad’s favorite.

TIFFANY: My mom always says she doesn’t have a favorite because she loves both of us the same, but I would say that I’m



Brittany (left) and Tiffany Manning.

Photo by G. Wallace.

usually everyone thinks we’re alike until they really get to know us.

Q. Tell us the best story of mistaken identity.

BRITTANY: One time we were at the mall shopping and Tiffany checked out before I did. When I was finally ready to check out, I walked up to the register and the cashier had the most confused look on her face. Tiffany walked up behind me and the woman finally realized that we were twins. She thought that I was Tiff and that she had gone and changed clothes and was checking out again. It was pretty funny.

TIFFANY: During softball games, anytime someone gets to third base, they always ask if we’re twins. They say that everyone in the dugout tries to figure out if we are or not.

Q. What do you like most about your sister?

BRITTANY: I love a lot of things about Tiffany, but if I had to pick one thing, it would be her personality. She’s my best friend and she’s such a great person, inside and out. She would do anything for the people that she loves and that’s what I admire most about her.

TIFFANY: I can’t really choose just one thing because I love her so much, but I guess if I had to it would be the fact that she’s my best friend and she’s always there for me. It’s very comforting knowing that I will always have her by my side.

Q. Who drives when you travel back and forth to Virginia?

BRITTANY: Tiffany always drives when we travel because I feel like I suck at driving. She likes to joke on me about it all the time.

TIFFANY: I drive everywhere, all the time. It’s because she doesn’t like to drive. One time when she was younger, she hit the gas instead of the brake, so our parents prefer that I drive.

Q. Try to think of a specific incident when another person assumed that, because you look like your sister, that you must be like her in other ways.

BRITTANY: Sometimes people assume that just because Tiffany and I are twins that we have the same taste in music, style, and things like that when we really don’t. We have two totally different personalities.

TIFFANY: At first everybody always assumes we’re alike because we’re twins. We do like most of the same things, but our personalities are completely different. I can’t think of a specific incident but

usually everyone thinks we’re alike until they really get to know us.

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Bishops Fall in First Round to Peace

Ferrum, Va.—William Peace avenged a recent loss to the women’s basketball team, eliminating the 4th-seeded Bishops from the USA South Tourney, 66-60, on February 18.

The Bishops shot just 29.7 percent from the field, eight percentage points lower than during their late-season surge. KeChae Parker led the team with 15 points; senior Alexis Fitzgerald scored 11 in the final game of her Wesleyan career.

Tyler Mercer, Susannah Sykes and Makayla Ray led the Pacers, all scoring in double figures. Ray was a force inside, making six of seven field goals and scoring 16 points.

Before the game, Coach Artina Trader had urged her team to play tough against Ray, a freshman, who made 8 of 10 shots in an earlier matchup. “We talked about forcing her into more situations where she has to shoot from outside, instead of getting layups,” Trader said.

The first-round defeat was only Wesleyan’s second loss in its last seven games. The team

finished 13-13 overall and 8-6 in the conference.

Besides improved shooting—36 to 38 percent field goal percentage—Trader credited tighter defense for her team’s success in February. “We changed defenses the second time we played a conference team,” she explained. “We’re a ‘man to man’ team, but in the second matchups, we often ran a 1-2-2 press to slow down the other offense as well as a 2-3 zone, and teams weren’t prepared for it. Zone defense forces teams into taking jump shots. So we had to rebound and allow only one shot.”

The Bishops earned the fourth seed with a thrilling victory, 80-76, over William Peace in Raleigh on February 12. In that game, NCWC’s deep bench wore down the Pacers, as the Bishops exploded for 35 points in the fourth quarter to erase an eight-point deficit.

“Our depth enabled us to play a few different lineups based on what we needed at a particular time,” Trader said. “To finish

the game at William Peace, we had four guards and a post-in. The plan was to go with a quicker lineup and see if we could negate their post play. With our deep lineup, we were fresher at the end of the game.”

Wesleyan players were clutch at the foul line, making 17 of 22 shots, as two Pacer starters fouled out and a third played the waning moments with four fouls.



Along with teammate KeChae Parker, Timyra Staton (above) was named a second-team all-conference performer after leading the Bishop to a fourth-place seeding in USA South basketball tourney. SI photo