



The Promise of Youth: Future generation of leadership

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Having and appreciating the privilege of this space, I can't let this moment in world history go by without comment. And so my column is not about Westchester real estate, this month, but about Westchester's and the country's future generation of leadership. Future presidents, senators, congressmen, mayors, community organizers and, perhaps a few real estate tycoons.

My primary "day job" is working as a public relations and marketing communications consultant. I always try to apply these skills to my real estate practice, as well. I try to write compelling letters to prospective tenants and buyers. I compile detailed fact sheets on my listings, beyond just pictures and dimensions. I attempt to "spin" the demographics of a neighborhood to put "location" in its most positive light including, paraphrasing the title of this month's column, "the promise of the future."

While getting my morning fix of WNYC, my local public radio station, and while fretting about my looming column deadline, I got two inspirations. One was a promo for an interview later in the day with comedian Joan Rivers and her conviction that facelifts allow aging women to stay in the game longer. That reminded me about the column I was going to write about Valhalla-based landscape architect Daniel Sherman and how he's giving "facelifts" to some "grand old ladies," older apartment complexes in Westchester and Fairfield Counties. I decided to put this on hold until February. My other inspiration was stories I was hearing about some ordinary and extraordinary people who made it to Washington to experience first-hand the excitement of the inauguration:

* 105-year-old Ella Mae Johnson of Cleveland was determined to see the swearing-in of the first black president. But friends and family were concerned about her being able to withstand the long wait and cold. So her nurse zipped her up, from nose to toes, in a bright blue quilted and padded sleeping bag. Her special inauguration "gown" drew the attention of hundreds, not to mention national radio.

* The residents of "N St. Village Women," women down on their luck, were invited to attend the People's Inaugural, thanks to the largess of Virginia businessman and philanthropist Earl Stafford. Stafford spent \$1.6 million to make their attendance at the ball possible. He also set up a boutique of donated beaded gowns, jewelry, shoes, purses, and suits for men.

As for millions of others of all political stripes, this was a special day for me personally. I have not felt this encouraged and optimistic in nearly a decade. And so I had to celebrate it, accordingly. Without any effort, I got my PR client, Monroe College, to agree to rent the ballroom of the local Radisson Hotel in New Rochelle. I wanted some great visuals for our guests to wave when the cameras rolled. I knew that the local media would be in attendance and I was not disappointed.

But it was the energy of the college students in attendance, The Promise of Youth, that seized the day for me. Mostly African American or Hispanic and first-time voters this past Nov., the students were both boisterous and respectful. When the hundreds of thousands of witnesses on the Washington Mall were asked to stand when VP Biden was administered the oath of office, hundreds

of us in the Radisson Hotel, 251 miles away, also stood out of respect and in silence. And then we erupted into cheers and tears. The scene was replayed with even greater enthusiasm when already President Barack Hussein Obama, it happened automatically at noon even without the swearing in, was called up to the podium. We stood, we cheered, we teared. And when President Obama acknowledged now former President Bush and former VP Cheney, a polite round of applause punctuated the air of our own "Inaugural Ballroom."

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