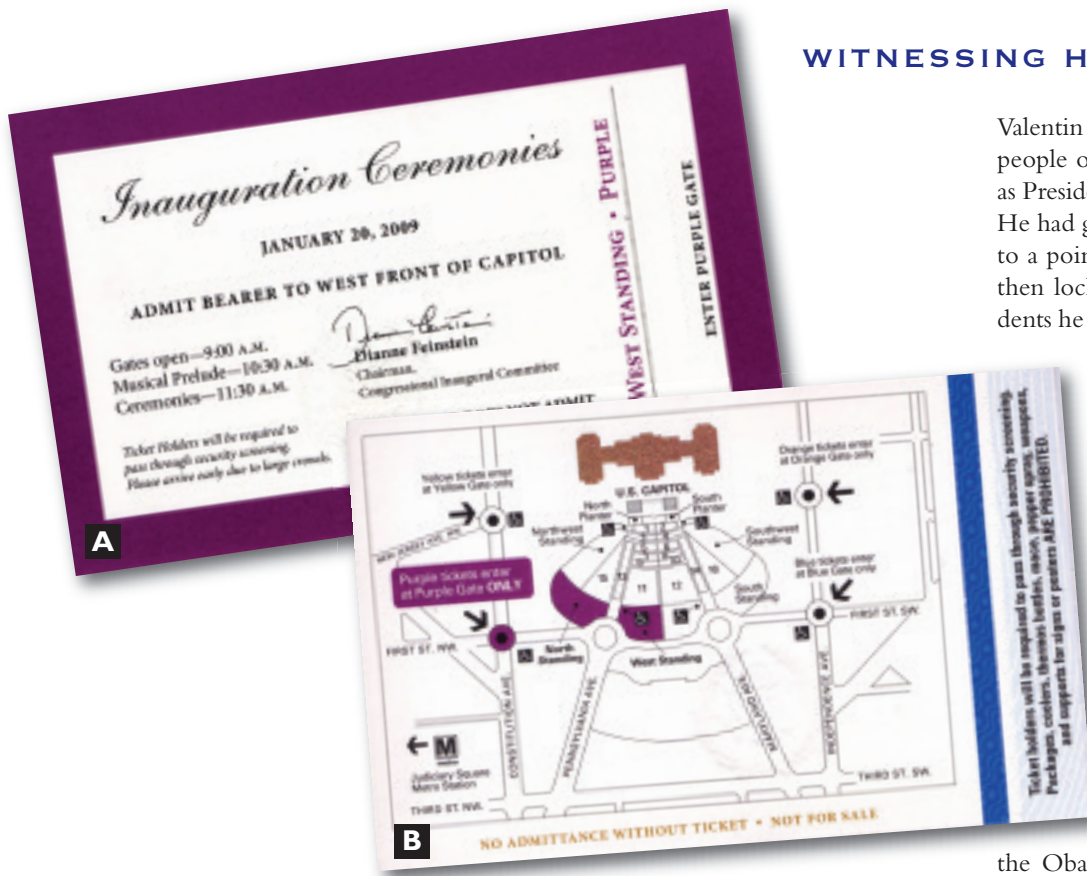


WITNESSING HISTORY



Valentin Hernandez '11 stood in a sea of people on the National Mall and listened as President Obama was sworn into office. He had gotten up at 5 a.m., boarded a bus to a point 20 minutes from the Mall, and then locked arms with the group of students he was traveling with before melting into a crowd of nearly 2 million people.

Invited to attend the inauguration by the Presidential Youth Inaugural Conference, Hernandez says he made the trip to witness “a truly amazing event in American history. I felt such a sense of pride in my country as I walked the streets of Washington, D.C. Obama is living proof that America is a truly diverse nation made up of people from all backgrounds and walks of life.”

Now, three months later, the Obama administration is focused on stabilizing the economy and making good on campaign promises. The impact of January 20, however, is still fresh in the minds of many Exonians who, like Hernandez, braved the D.C. crowds or watched from one of the broadcast locations on Exeter’s campus.

Jackie Weatherspoon, wife of Russell Weatherspoon '01, '03, '08 (Hon.); P'92, P'95, P'97, P'01, religion instructor and dean of residential life, described the crowds as “a vortex of people moving towards the events. I couldn’t move my arms the crush of people was so bad.” Despite this, she says, “Witnessing this day ranks up with getting married, having children and grandchildren. I wanted to be at this event to say I was there, I saw it.”

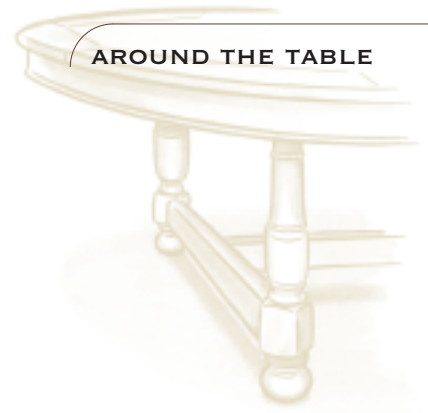
The Weatherspoons were surprised by “the aura that came off of that vast throng of people,” Russell says. “Beyond their numbers, their spirit was so joyful, so full of patience and so full of generosity. It felt like it was a physical thing; it was palpable. And there was also a sense of incredulity: that the country had elected this person of African descent and that so many of the adults [present] had lived through the period when it seemed like it wasn’t going to happen in their lifetimes.”

During the ceremony, Harold Brown '74;



(A,B) A map of the mall with color-coded standing areas was printed on the back of every ticket. (C) Jack Herney’s U.S. History class was one of many to focus discussion on the inauguration that day. PEA created a special class schedule to allow students to watch the key ceremonies on a large screen in the Assembly Hall.

NICOLE PELLATON



COURTESY OF VALENTIN HERNANDEZ

P'95, P'99, P'03, P'05, director of alumni/ae affairs, was ambushed by his emotions. "As Aretha Franklin was singing 'My Country 'Tis of Thee,' juxtaposed with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, all the brewing emotions that led me to make the trip triggered an avalanche of tears, sourced in joy, sorrow and pride," he says. "When I became aware of my state, I looked up and saw that everyone around me was crying. Just then, a young man put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'It's all right, brother, let it flow, let it flow.' I will forever remember that feeling."

On Exeter's campus, hundreds of students and dozens of faculty watched and celebrated the inauguration on large screens in the Assembly Hall and Phelps Academy Center. "The air was electric in the Assembly Hall," says Molly Hassell '09, an avid Democrat who volunteered on both the Edwards and Obama campaigns. "Students and faculty alike were riveted to the screens and holding on to every moment. I kept thinking about how I would remember this inauguration for the rest of my life, and how I will pass on this story to the generations after me."

Max de La Bruyere '09, a Democratic Club co-head who worked on the Obama campaign for months, says: "For the first time in my life, I look up to the president as a leader, a role model and a problem solver. I look at the news full of horrible stories and believe that my government can fix them. I've always been excited by politics and government. Since Inauguration Day, I have been excited by what I realize America can do."

—Famebridge Witherspoon



COURTESY OF MAJOR GEN. RICHARD ROWE

(D) Valentin Hernandez '11 says he has an optimistic view of the future with President Obama leading the country. Hernandez went to D.C. as part of the Presidential Youth Inaugural Conference. (E) One Exonian had a big role to play on Inauguration Day. Major Gen. Richard Rowe '69, chair of the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, briefs the Obamas and Vice President Biden at the Capitol. Rowe directed all ceremonial military support for the day's events.