



The Somerville News



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Winter Hill is in the White House

George P. Hassett

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On top from left Jason Marges, Claire Redfield and, below, Evan Wexel were three of hundreds of Tufts students who marched from campus to Davis Square Tuesday night singing "America The Beautiful." Photo by George P. Hassett

Winter Hill, after decades of infamy as a capital of gangsterism, took the White House Tuesday.

Barack Obama, who lived in a basement apartment at 365 Broadway from 1987 to 1990, became the first black president as Democrats reversed decades of Republican power in a nationwide political shift.

However thin it may be, Obama - who was raised in states across the country and whose worldview was shaped in New York City and Chicago - still brings a piece of Winter Hill with him into history.

He lived in the neighborhood made famous by Irish gang wars in the 1960s and an infamous criminal syndicate in the 1970s and 80s while he attended Harvard Law School. Besides accumulating \$400 in parking tickets that went unpaid until last year, Obama excelled at Harvard from his little spot on Broadway.

In his last year of law school, Obama became the first black president of the Harvard Law Review, one of the most exalted clubs at that esteemed institution and, for the first time, found himself in the media's crosshairs.

"A burst of publicity followed that election, including several newspaper articles that testified less to my modest accomplishments than to Harvard Law School's peculiar place in the American mythology, as well as America's hunger for any optimistic sign from the racial front-a morsel of proof that, after all, some progress has been made," Obama wrote in his



Boy, there were a lot of people voting on Tuesday. 1995 memoir.

Book deals were offered and, imagining he had something to say that the world should hear, he accepted. In his last year of law school Obama, likely at least in part from his Somerville apartment, began to reflect on his life, craft its narrative and offer his voice to a national discussion. Those reflections would become "Dreams from My Father" his extraordinary first book.

Though Winter Hill may have been the site for some of his growth as a leader, it is unlikely Obama, as a Harvard law student, had any extended contact with the Somerville community.

"I don't think Barack was hanging around any of the bars on Broadway," said Ward 4 Alderman Walter Pero. "Although he probably did shop at the Star Market."

Obama's win should mean as much in Winter Hill - a working-class community that has seen rapid change since he left in 1990 - as it does anywhere. And if he keeps his campaign promise to bring change to this country, at some point in the next four years it'll reach the 1,200 tenants who live in the Mystic Avenue housing development near Interstate 93.

The 455-unit complex is a short walk from where Obama lived as a Harvard student. It is unclear how much contact he may have had with the home's tenants but their eyes are focused on him today. Especially the young ones: on Saturday night a group of teenagers who live on Mystic Avenue and participate in the project's Books of Hope writing program read their work in Harvard Square and addressed Obama's rise.

The four girls, Haitian-American teens, told The Somerville News, they remain skeptical of his ability to deliver true change to neighborhoods like theirs. "I don't trust any politician," said Jessica Massy, J-Mass to her friends. "The color of someone's skin doesn't change that."

In addition, they're worried about his safety. "I don't think he'll be safe, racism isn't gone," said Keisha Jean-Louis.

The deep symbolism of Obama's win, however, still reached them. "Obama sparked a lot of dreams," said Maishka Antoine, 14.

"He lived in a basement apartment on Broadway. That's like saying one of us could be president," Keisha said.

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