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Americans, Canadians jubilant in wake of Obama's presidential win

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Among curious Canadians and expatriate Americans alike, anticipation turned to jubilation Tuesday as those who gathered in living rooms, churches and pubs across Canada bore witness to Barack Obama's historic presidential victory.

In Toronto, more than 500 people jammed a popular restaurant in the city's Little Italy neighbourhood for a partisan cross-border gathering hosted by Democrats Abroad Canada.

"Being black, it means a lot," Eric Williams, a Canadian resident whose parents are from New York, said of Obama's win.

"I don't think I can sum it up in words. It's especially important for my parents' generation for civil rights. To see this in their lifetime is the most amazing thing."

"About 100 people who were gathered at the Imani Family Full Gospel Church in Montreal erupted with joy when Obama's long-awaited victory was finally declared".

Tears soaked the cheeks of Obama supporters as they sang and danced in the aisles. Many clasped their hands together and prayed, while others hugged each other tightly to share the historic moment.

"From my experience in America, I never expected I would live long enough to see something like this," said 74-year-old Lawrence Edwards, a Montrealer of Caribbean descent who migrated to Canada in 1961.

"This is a momentous occasion".

For many of Obama's most ardent supporters, it was over almost as soon as it started.

"That's our next president!" one woman in Toronto yelled when TV commentators declared an Obama win in the key state of Pennsylvania.

People wrapped their arms around cardboard cut outs of Obama and children wearing Obama T-shirts darted around a room festooned in red, white and blue.

"This is a moment in history," said Judy Keeler, waving an American flag, and sporting a star-spangled headband and matching necklace. "This is going to effect change not only in America but the world."

Keeler, a writer originally from New York, but who has lived most of her life in Toronto, said Canadians should see Obama as an example.

"He is the American dream. He is the personification of it. This man doesn't come from wealth. He has worked hard all his life and to see a black person and his wife and family in the White House is amazing."

Hugh Johnson said he was on hand to watch the results because he feels a shared bond with the African-American community in the U.S.

"It's a historical milestone for me and my people - I'm a black Nova Scotian, and our racial history is similar," Johnson said.

"I wanted to be here tonight because I knew there was going to be a real buzz."

Gail Brown intently watched the big screen in the moments before Obama's win was declared.

"It shows to America, to North America, to the world that a black man can inspire people," Brown said.

The 33-year-old Canadian living in Toronto said she has been motivated by the politics change in the U.S.

"Although Canada is multicultural there isn't anyone in Canadian politics who inspires, we can see some of myself in."

In Winnipeg, Obama supporters flocked to Phase II Cabaret, a Caribbean bar in Winnipeg west end, to watch history unfold.

"A black president is the best thing for the U.S.," said Byron Cooke, the bar's owner.

"The U.S. is one of the most powerful nations in the world and Barack is going to be the king".

Despite the elation, celebrants like Edwards had to concede there were mixed feelings about the extent to which an Obama victory would bring about lasting, substantive change.

"It's very sad to see that it's taken our people this long to come out of the darkness and into a new light," Edwards said.

Yvonne Rhoden, a Jamaican-born Montrealer, said Obama's win represents hope for people around the world.

"This is proof that we're all one," said Rhoden, an enthusiastic Obama supporter who was one of the rowdiest people in the church for most of the evening.

"I always knew that one day the road was going to take that turn, and it has taken the turn."

In Vancouver, a group calling itself Canadians for Obama jammed into the Yale Town Brewery to watch the returns roll in.

Group co-founder Ajay Puri said he called about 1,000 Americans during the last three days of the campaign, urging them to get out and vote.

One woman he reached in Las Vegas asked him, "My God, now are you guys voting in the election?"

Others expressed a desire to migrate north of the border if McCain managed to eke out a win, Puri added.

"Obama's got a lot of people expecting a lot from him," said Chuck Wooten, also a member of Puri's group.

"But I think there will be some generational change and I hope he does clean up Washington and get rid of some of the corruption currently there."