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Final Edition

**President Obama; Grant Park in world spotlight again -- but this time throngs celebrate 'overwhelming' moment of history**

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Forty years later, the world again watched Grant Park on Tuesday to see history created.

Instead of cringing at war rioters and club-wielding National Guardsmen, America cast aside centuries of racial prejudice and elected its first black president.

"It's been a long time coming, but tonight because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America," Barack Obama said to cheers in Grant Park.

The Harvard-educated favorite son of Chicago's South Side swamped John McCain in a historic landslide driven by the nation's ruined 401(k)s and its disgust over the Iraq war.

On an unseasonably warm night, more than 100,000 revelers stood shoulder to shoulder in Grant Park to mark arguably the city's most memorable political event ever and bear witness to Illinois sending its first leader since Abraham Lincoln to the nation's highest office.

The presidential race that took two years to play out effectively ended at 10 p.m. when the Associated Press and the television networks declared Obama the winner over McCain.

The announcement set off euphoria at Grant Park, where a sea of Obama supporters that included luminaries like Brad Pitt and Oprah Winfrey waved American flags, hoisted life-size cardboard cutouts of Obama and pumped their fists in the air.

At places like Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the home church of slain civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr., the reaction was the same: amazement that only a few decades removed from segregated housing and restaurants, a black man will be president.

At 10:20 p.m., a gracious McCain strode before supporters in Phoenix with his wife, Cindy, and vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin to concede the campaign to Obama and acknowledge the social importance of the election's outcome.

"We have come to the end of a long journey. The American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly," McCain said, sparking boos in Phoenix but cheers among the Obama faithful watching the speech on jumbo television screens at Grant Park.

"This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African Americans and the special pride that must be theirs tonight," McCain said.

Almost from the point that polls began closing on the East Coast, it became apparent Obama was surging to a likely win as he defeated McCain in traditional Republican states like Ohio, Virginia, Florida and New Hampshire.

At the same time, Obama successfully defended Pennsylvania and Iowa from falling into McCain's hands after the Republican tried to eat into Obama's lead in the polls there during the campaign's closing days.

Obama, who only four years ago toiled as an obscure state senator in Springfield, capped a stunning political ascent that will culminate when he is inaugurated the nation's 44th president on Jan. 20, 2009.

The outcome left a city and even some of Obama's closest friends almost speechless, facing the strange sensation of how "President Obama" rolls off the tongue.

"This is just completely surreal, completely overwhelming," said state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias.

Obama paid tribute to McCain, and had warm words for his family, especially his grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, who died Monday.

"Sasha and Malia, I love you both more than you can imagine, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House," Obama said.

"And while she's no longer with us, I know my grandmother is watching, along with the family who made me who I am. I miss them tonight. I know that my debt to them is beyond measure."