



Karon Thompson cries at Valois Cafeteria, Obama's favourite breakfast spot in Hyde Park Chicago.

Picture Getty

## Harlem sings a song of pride

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**"T**his is a great time to be alive" yelled African-American, Anthony Parker over the crowd cheering "Obama, Obama" at the giant screen outside the State Building in Harlem.

Nothing rivalled the outpouring of pride here at the most famous African-American centre in the nation. New Yorkers packed into the freezing streets in unprecedented numbers to witness the culmination of the most expensive inauguration ever and one of the nation's most historic moments — the swearing in of the new face of the United States of America.

"I'm just so proud, I've no other words" said Rozetta Barbee, 61, who grew up in North Car-

olina riding the back of the bus. "He's inspired everyone."

Chris Wilson, a Harlem native, wished his father was still alive to see this day. Tony Wilson was a jazz musician and a member of the Black Panther party here during the civil rights era, when Harlem thrived as the centre of art, music and activism.

On the day after Rev Martin Luther King Jr's birthday, they believed Obama had finally realised the reverend's dream. One man cried, two women hugged each other whispering "we made it".

Few here forgot that King's birthday only became a national holiday in 1983, or that their 44th president was moving into a house built by slaves, and into a job in which 12 of his predecessors would have considered him property. No one forgot King's words that America had given "the Negro people a bad check".

The diversity in the bustling

crowd that cheered, laughed and waited for the much-anticipated inauguration, was evidence that Obama has taken the country beyond race and divisiveness.

"He acknowledged the reverend but he could bypass all that and act like he wasn't black, he was just a man running for president," said Wilson, who responded to the call for unity and service that was consistent throughout the presidential campaign.

Harlem welcomed people of all race, age and class into a crowd united in common purpose.

Those desperate for change heard the inspirational speech they craved. Everyone needed a Lincoln or a Kennedy or a Franklin D Roosevelt to give them a meaning greater than themselves and to "begin the work of remaking America".

Yesterday Obama made this promise. After today, only time will tell.