

Black Dons roll back home

By Kyle Taylor

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My, what a long way we have come.

African-Americans in 2014 are afforded liberties that were unimaginable decades prior, a time when it was impossible to conceive the thought of a black man as Commander in Chief.

If you could knit the black experience from each of those decades, it would no doubt make a colorful quilt, each image vastly different from the other.

Such a unique blend was on display at Loyola Blakefield Nov. 1, the first day of Black Catholic History Month, when black alumni of the all-boys prep school returned to the Towson campus for a reunion. Men who were Dons when John F. Kennedy was in the White House interacted with those who probably have never used a cassette tape player – definitely a sight to behold.

As a 2001 graduate, I often found myself with conflicted feelings about the “school on a hill.” As a student, I disliked it. I was a black kid from West Baltimore mingling with mostly white kids who lived in places such as Towson, Perry Hall and Hunt Valley; a fish out of water dropped into an environment where very few people looked like me, talked like me or dressed like me. I wanted to be at a school with people with whom I could readily identify. In short, I wanted to stay in my comfort zone.

Comparing my experience with some older graduates was an eye-opener. Kenneth Montague was the first African-American to attend Loyola Blakefield, graduating in 1960. I assumed he would say his experience was difficult, stressful and maybe even terrifying, but my assumptions were wrong.

✖ “I never had any antagonistic attitudes from any of the students or faculty,” said the retired attorney, who served in the Maryland House of Delegates and was State Secretary of Juvenile Services in the Ehrlich administration. “I did everything everyone else did and was just a student in the class. If I did the work, I passed; if I didn’t, I failed.”

Montague said he never felt the pressure of his race riding on his success, a sentiment shared by Baltimore City Councilman Carl Stokes.

✖ A 1968 graduate, Stokes said he remembered hearing a few fleeting racial comments from faculty members, but none from students. Rather than feeling burdened by being the only black student in his classes, he embraced it.

“I felt I made a contribution, because sometimes I was the voice of the black

experience in the class,” Stokes said. “I came to Loyola for an education, not to fight a battle.”

Both Montague and Stokes said they had a great experience at Loyola. Reflecting on my time there, I would have to say it was not as bad as I first thought, quite possibly because of men such as Montague, Stokes, Ralph Moore Jr., Reginald Boyce and others who broke down barriers for black Dons such as myself, so that we could get a quality education that would pay dividends down the road.

As it is our duty to see that other young black men get the same opportunities we were blessed to receive, a scholarship has been established.

Boyce worked and coached at Loyola during my time there, and was one of my mentors. He always told me that my moments of discomfort would all be worth it in the end.

I’m not sure he knew how right he would be.

Kyle Taylor is a parishioner of St. Ambrose in Park Heights.

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