**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ALVIN TURNER**

**UPDATE**

Hello everyone!!!! Here we are, in he middle of a typical June… sandwiched in between our wonderful and powerful **Juneteenth** celebrations and some typical, humid, sweltering heat, praying for a lot… and especially that the storms take a break, but most importantly, we are here to acknowledge a great moment in the history of St James Parish and the smashing of a very particular and oppressive ceiling, because we, as a proud, Black community, have **CHOSEN.** I want to thank you for inviting me to say a few words about our esteemed new Sheriff, Claude J. Louis, Jr. Today, we note that we, as a community, and as a voice of, by, and for the people have spoken and have elected, in a landmark choice that will go down in the history of St James Parish… and while right now, it might just seem like pretty much of an ordinary Saturday…. I promise you, it’s not… And while today also may seem fairly low key and “normal” right now, this day will be marked in the annals of history for this parish, this community, and, I’m quite confident throughout this state and country, because we’re getting some “**BIG STUFF**” done…. Today we witness the installation of the **first** black Sheriff of St James Parish!!! **GAME. CHANGED!!!**

Many of you have been around this community for quite a while… you’ve grown up here, you got your education here, you’ve found your callings, built your families, and I’m pretty sure, you’ve fought for your rights, some in ways hard to imagine, justified your existence, done your best to stand up for your freedoms, and finally… **FINALLY**, after hundreds of years, decades of strife, generations of disrespect…. and **WORSE**, we have representation. This is a very good day, indeed.

For those of you younger people here with us today, perhaps not as familiar with the deeper, more involved history of this parish, I imagine you have a pretty good idea of why this day is so important, but perhaps the significance isn’t fully grasped. While you might know some of the more recent accomplishments of these communities, it’s really important to know the deeper, more foundational history that makes this day so significant, so, very briefly, I’ll tell you.

St James Parish was founded in 1807, **TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO.** We **FINALLY, after ALL THAT TIME,** have our **FIRST. ELECTED. BLACK OFFICIAL….** I **SAID** I’d be **brief!!! (Wait for the laugh).**

In all seriousness, though, after all of those generations of being in the majority, yet consistently, historically, politically, culturally, being subjected to relentless oppression, we **FINALLY** have one of **US**, someone we can identify with, someone who is a powerful, educated, dedicated, and most of all, **QUALIFIED**, in a position of authority, and it’s someone with whom we can identify. **FINALLY**, we are represented by one of our own, and what a fine agent of change he is and will be!! This represents a tremendous evolution in the politics and culture of St James Parish. While the younger members of the community are, hopefully, now on the path to discovery and finding their own ways to make a difference in this “**New Age of St James**,” many of you folks have been around, have seen and remember what it’s been like for generations… coming of age in the sixties, seventies, or even later, we persevered through the various ages and stages of the civil rights movement. We were subjected to lip service, inequities, and injustices perpetrated by the “Old Guard.” We must now all work together to insure that Sheriff Louis’ tenure is one of fairness and wisdom, one in which the power of the **LAW** is upheld, where people feel seen **and** heard, where more minorities pledge their integrity and see to it that a positive, equitable, **FAIR** system is upheld. We’ve come to a positive bend in the road. It is up to **ALL** of us to support a government that works **FOR** us and **WITH** us, one that does not expect or suggest that **ANYONE** do what the law does not allow.

So who is this person, this man, chosen by the people?? Claude J. Louis, Jr has been elected as the first black sheriff of St. James Parish. He is the first parish-wide black elected official. He also happens to be an esteemed colleague and trusted friend of mine and has been, for the past thirty years, and while his professional résumé and life accomplishments are impressive, I must say that his integrity and character speak volumes to his substance as a fine human being.

Sheriff Louis, Jr, has made an encouraging, trustworthy, and inspirational figure in the history of this community. He is a 1982 St. James High School graduate. He followed high school with his service in the United States Air Force from February 1983 until he was Honorably discharged in June 1995, after having left his mark in the Security Police Specialist/Law Enforcement field. Through the early part of his adult life, my friend never lost sight of the importance of family, how it’s at the root of all that inspires love, faith, dedication, support and perseverance, and has been blessed with a wonderful wife, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, four children and four grandchildren. Sheriff Louis is currently serving as the Pastor at Greater Deliverance Full Gospel Ministry (13890 South Spruce St., Vacherie LA). … and **WAIT**!!!! As if all of these accomplishments aren’t enough…. Which we all know can make a person tired just **THINKING** about how much one person can possible achieve, the list of Claude Louis’ gifts and experience keep going!!! He has achieved thirty-seven semester hours through the Community College of the Air Force in the Criminology field, six and a half semester hours with the Wayne Community College in Criminology and twelve semester hours with the American Intercontinental University in Business. Upon joining the St. James Parish Sheriff's Office in February 2003, he attended and graduated from the Peace Officer Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.), a thirteen-week course and, upon completion, was tasked with the honor of delivering the graduation speech. While he started out as a Patrol Deputy, he was then promoted to Detective within the Criminal Investigation Division. He rose through the ranks as he was promoted to Lieutenant/Captain over the Criminal Investigation Division and the last promotion bestowed upon him the title, Chief of Operations as a Major. While in his active tenure with the Sheriff's Office, he proudly served as the President of the Louisiana Forgery and Fraud Investigators Association, a one year term, and was attached to the United States Secret Service task force. He also graduated from the National Command Staff College. He has been involved in interactive communications and investigations with Local, State, and Federal entities, conducted various speaking engagements at our local elementary schools, high schools, career technology center, and senior citizen centers on subject matters ranging from Bullying and Suicide Prevention, to fraud schemes. (**Do you want to make a little joke and say**), This man has **CHOPS**!!! (**And wait for the laugh**). Think of it this way, Claude Louis has been integrally involved in the St James Parish Sheriffs Department for over twenty years. He’s worked, trained, taught, ministered, enforced, and problem solved at just about every level required to safeguard the well-being of the people in this community and beyond, and he has always done so with enthusiasm and commitment. I think you would all agree that any one of us would be hard pressed to find a person as educated, dedicated, or as prepared to serve as our newly elected Sheriff.

Ultimately, Sheriff Louis is a powerhouse. He’s accomplished so much to serve his community, and that’s fantastic, but there’s more to consider… he’s great, but he can’t function alone. It is people like this man that inspire action and participation…. Who out there, in today’s audience or further, are wondering if **YOU'RE** the person to exercise **YOUR COMMITMENT** to this community??? It’s taken us **TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN YEARS** to get where we are today…now imagine… with partners … in **you**, think of how much further and faster we might go. Use this “red letter” moment to heed the call.

We are in an election year. It’s no secret that many of our rights and freedoms are in jeopardy… **STILL**. Each one of us has **ONE** voice, **ONE** vote. Think of how the commitment of Sheriff Louis inspires you and really consider how you intend your voices and votes to be counted.

Many people have preceded us in the generational fight for equality and a place at the table. It’s beyond disconcerting to think that, in this day and age, we palpably feel the threat of losing the rights and freedoms that have taken hundreds of years to attain. It’s discouraging and frustrating to think that there are still people out there that find it useful to send false information spreading dogma concerning authoritarianism and racial supremacy… this is going on throughout the country… not just in the South. The time has come to take a stand and follow the good works of the people we know who care enough to lead us in a positive direction. We know, when we get together, our combined voices blend to make beautiful music. It’s time to take our voices… and our votes…. to bring collective strength to all the communities and all the parishes and all the cities and all the counties and all the states to show just what we are made of. We’ve run out of time. Many of us have probably heard that the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run, then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, **you have to keep moving forward**.”

With the election of Sheriff Claude J. Louis, Jr., we have shown that we are capable and willing to move forward but we **CANNOT** lose sight of the fact that this is a **BEGINNING**…. Just one step. It’s the beginning of the rest of the path we must take in order to establish true equality.

I’m proud to be a part of acknowledging the massive contribution that my friend, Claude, J. Louis, Jr. has made, and I am even prouder of the impact he will make on the future of this community. I am sure I speak for our new Sheriff when I say, the more partners that join him to form and preserve an equitable future for all…. the more our voices are heard in unison for the greater good of all, the stronger and more impactful our message, the greater our parish, county, and state will be, and as we all know, that would be a very good thing. It’s possible. Let’s do it!!! Thank you all!!