I warn you: this is essentially a political message. Now, as most of you know, the JREF is a 501(c)3, tax-exempt organization, and we may not officially be involved in matters of a political nature. Though this message was prepared by me on October 19th, it was stored until now so that the nationwide process of voting on November 4th would be over and done with – though the results may not yet have been made known as you read this. This way, we cannot influence the election in any way.

I first lived in New York City when I moved to the USA, and I first visited the state of Florida back in 1961. I won't – for now – go into all the details of that visit, but suffice it to say that I ran into serious problems with the racial segregation situation as it was at that time in the South, and I had a very hard time dealing with it. I was not then a US citizen – that honor was more than a quarter-century ahead of me – so I could not properly complain about a situation that existed in a country in which I was only a visitor and resident. I'll just say that I saw "Colored Only" and “White Only” signs everywhere in Florida, and I purposely flouted them wherever and whenever I could.

I got involved in a contractual contact row in Florida that was settled in my favor, but it somewhat soured my view of the country of which I planned to eventually become a citizen. The improvements I’ve seen take place since then are simply marvelous – not that improvements cannot be made, I hasten to add. Many collars around us hide red necks…

I travel all over the world quite frequently. And sometimes I feel that I have to make apologies for some of the actions of my adopted country, while at the same time I find – to my delight – that most folks abroad do not dislike Americans, but only disagree with many of the actions taken and/or adopted by our government. I am highly sensitive to attitudes, decisions, comments and statements that most Americans simply shrug off as perhaps offensive but not significant, perhaps because I actually chose to pursue – and earn – U.S. citizenship; I wasn’t just fortunate enough to be born within these borders. I had to earn the right to salute Old Glory and recite that pledge.

When I stood in a New Jersey courtroom before that flag in the midst of a crowd of equally-proud immigrants of varied colors, sizes, and features who were also there to be sworn in as new citizens, I saw tears streaming down many faces, and I was a little surprised, until I felt my own tears welling up and making themselves evident. You cannot imagine that moment. And when a friend of mine – just last week – came slowly down a hallway in a Miami court building towards us, his friends, with his tears streaming down, we all burst out in cheers when he simply reported, quietly, “Everything is okay. The judge told me I can apply for citizenship.” No, you cannot imagine it…

Yes, I'll get around to my point, and here it is: This present election has established a milestone for the progress of the American people, I believe. Whether Barack Obama or John McCain becomes the next president of the United States when the vote count is tallied, we have at least firmly established the fact that we have the principle of equal opportunity established and demonstrated in our political practices – and that is a glowing tribute to the quality of our progress in becoming real grown ups. Both a "person of color" and a woman were vying to move into the White House, and that makes me want to bust…

It's about time. I do not exaggerate when I tell you that every time I see kids of different skin colors laughing, playing, and generally "mixing" with one another, I almost feel that I should tell them what things were like when I saw Florida 26 years ago, and how dismayed I was when I experienced that social blunder. On my way to the airport just last week, I stopped to refuel my car and noticed two elderly gentlemen busily engaged in a game of checkers. One was Caucasian, the other was Afro-American. As I finished fueling up, one of them whooped victoriously. I glanced over and saw them reach across the table in a handshake, both of them smiling.

One of them said, setting up the game pieces again, "One more time…?"

To those gentlemen I'll say, we've come a long way. There's a ways to go, it's true, but the finish line is in sight. Let's make it more than just "one more time…"