

At Second Inauguration: Obama Focuses on Inequality: 'We were made for this moment'

Written by Hazel Trice Edney

Wednesday, 23 January 2013 00:00



On the birthday holiday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President Barack Obama, America's first Black president, was inaugurated for a second time boldly declaring on the steps of the U. S. Capitol that it's time to take up the quest for equality where King and others left off.

"We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths - that all of us are created equal - is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth," he said. "It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began."

He continued, "Each time we gather to inaugurate a President we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution. We affirm the promise of our democracy. We recall that what binds this nation together is not the colors of our skin or the tenets of our faith or the origins of our names. What makes us exceptional - what makes us American - is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Standing before nearly a million flag-waving people packed onto the National mall as millions more watched around the world by TV and the Internet, President Obama articulated an aggressive agenda after being sworn in with his hand on the "traveling Bible" of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The speech, punctuated with applause from the massive crowd, was peppered with references to issues of inequality, hinting at a social and civil rights agenda that he will likely address over the next four years.

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- “Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we

commit to one another must be equal as well,” he said in obvious reference to the same sex marriage debate.

- “Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote,” he said, referring to the revelations of extremely long lines of people who waited hours to vote on Election Day, Nov. 4.

- “Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country,” he said in reference to immigration reform, long pushed by the Latino community.

- “Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm,” he said in reference to gun violence that has disrupted the lives of children across America. The President has recently taken up the issue of gun control after the massacre of 20 kindergartners in Newtown, Conn.

He did not specifically mention African-American people by race, it was clear that the disparities of Blacks are on the mind of the President. In addition to using the King Bible, he invited Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of assassinated civil rights leader Medgar Evers to pray the invocation. The 50th anniversary of Evers' assassination will be June 12 this year. Evers, 37, was a civil rights activist and field secretary for the NAACP in Jackson, Miss., when he was shot in the back by a White supremacist while walking from his driveway to his house.

In concert with the President's speech, Evers-Williams prayed for diversity and also focused on people who are still woefully affected by inequities.

“We ask, too, almighty, that where our paths seem blanketed by [throngs] of oppression and

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riddled by pangs of despair we ask for your guidance toward the light of deliverance. And that the vision of those that came before us and dreamed of this day, that we recognize that their visions still inspire us," she prayed. "We ask that you grant our president the will to act courageously but cautiously when confronted with danger and to act prudently but deliberately when challenged by adversity. Please continue to bless his efforts to lead by example in consideration and favor of the diversity of our people."

Other special guests included the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir of New York, which wowed the crowd with the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Super star Beyoncé' rendered a soul-stirring version of the National Anthem.

Temperatures were in the 30s, but not nearly as cold as four years ago. Still the crowd remained riveted on the President and First Lady Michelle Obama who were cheered by the hundreds of thousands on the mall every time they were shown on the Arbitron.

"I'm ecstatic and thankful to God to witness it a second time around," said Wanda Montgomery, a retired school teacher, who traveled from Lexington, Ken. "He's a people president for all people and I'm in agreement with any decision he makes."

The President, whose tone was much more confident and bolder than four years ago, indicated that since the war era of Afghanistan and Iraq are ending, America will quickly establish a now focus inward once again.

"This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resolve and proved our resilience. A decade of war is now ending...An economic recovery has begun...America's possibilities are limitless," he said. "For we possess all the qualities that this world without boundaries demands: youth and drive; diversity and openness; an endless capacity for risk and a gift for reinvention. My fellow Americans, we are made for this moment, and we will seize it - so long as we seize it together."