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Attending the Obama Swearing-In By Peter Gamble BlackCommentator.com Publisher

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It was an amazing experience. It was chilled-to-the-bone cold, standing like a member of the March of the Penguins for the six-hour wait for things to get started. I wondered if I would be able to hold up. By hour four, I was in severe discomfort from the combination of wind and well-below-freezing temperature that had frozen solid the Capitol Reflecting Pool, along with my nose.

I was one of the approximately two million people in the crowd who experienced the swearing-in of Barack Obama as our 44th President.

Fortunate to be staying at the home of family members, I arose at 2:30am, ate a quick breakfast and packed sandwiches and the few items inauguration security permitted. No bottle larger than 12 ounces, no knapsacks and no folding chairs. Yes on double-layered clothing, yes on a fleece blanket, yes on the extra-warm gloves I thought I'd never wear. Yes, I got up at 2:30am because the parking lot of the DC Metro subway stop I planned to use opened at 3am and by all predictions, its 3,600 spaces would be filled before 4am. This sounded ridiculous, but I knew for sure that driving a car into the city would be more so.

However, as I approached the entrance to the parking area, a sign on the highway said the lot was full. Holy crap! It was only 3:15. My hope that the sign was really just a joke was dashed as I got closer and encountered a line of cars, well over a mile long, filled with people who did not believe the sign either.

I did not have an official plan B, but remembering a conversation with a neighbor, found another Metro stop where the parking lot was nearly empty. Glory hallelujah! Now onto a crowded train filled with joyful folks who each just wanted to be a physical

witness to history.

The people on the subway had something in common with all the rest with whom I huddled and bided my time for more than six hours. We shared a delight for the change from the very-soon-to-be-former President George W. "expletive deleted" to President Barack Hussein Obama. Our solidarity blurred all lines of race, geography, class and gender. We sang and joked, exchanging stories about working as volunteers on the Obama campaign and tried to outdo each other with expressions of joy over the departure of you-know-who. We shared blankets, snacks and ever more elaborate descriptions of our pop sickle toes. Later, we laughed when the announcer said, "please be seated" because in the "back to back and belly to belly" area of the cheap seats, the only "seat" was the seat of one's pants.

We also shared our reactions to music, song, speeches, prayers and expressed hope and concern over the issues we most want Obama to address and support. A few declared certainty about what they expect Obama to accomplish, but only the "low information" folks were blissfully confident. From pre-dawn until the opening music, we discussed and debated how effective Obama will be. The media couldn't cover this; every time a camera or microphone came past the crowd, most people cheered for Obama, grinned and waved. The throng of thousands, however, did not spend the vast majority of time acting like a gathering of carefree, jolly individuals. The current condition of the domestic economy, the state of our justice system and the post-Bush hegemonic world of American terror sent sporadic shivers of reality through me between the cheers.

Despite rules of decorum, whenever an image of Dubya or Dick appeared on the Jumbo-tron, and the reality of those twins of terror being gone from their thrones grasped the collective consciousness, thousands spontaneously erupted in song. It sounded like the whole world was lifting up voice and opinion:

Nah, nah, nah, nah
Nah, nah, nah, nah
Hey, hey, hey
Good - Bye

Yeah, juvenile and in incredibly bad form, so why did it feel so good? No one in the crowd near me appeared to be bothered by the rudeness of the song; if anything, everyone seemed to be reveling in the delight of insulting the man who had so betrayed his office. Later, when comparing the taped coverage of the day from C-Span and MSNBC, it appeared C-Span did their best to adjust the audio so as not to broadcast much of the singing. Even after the event was over, C-Span continued to broadcast music while the crowd slowly moved away from the Capitol and the ex-president's helicopter took a turn around Washington, the canned music cleverly covering over the thousands of shouts of "Good riddance", "Goodbye", "Go back to Texas" and "Get the hell out of here."


Whether one attended the inauguration, watched it on TV or missed the whole thing, we can celebrate this as an historic moment. However, those who have been and will always be a part of the movement for social justice, economic justice and peace know hope, alone, is not enough. Much work remains so we can bring about the change this country so desperately needs. We can't sit back and wait for our goals to be met. We must strive to do everything within our power to encourage, help and push President Obama toward those principles.


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BlackCommentator.com Publisher, Peter Gamble, is an award-winning veteran of twenty-five years in broadcast journalism. He has been the publisher of BlackCommentator.com since its inception in 2002. Click [here](#) to contact Peter.

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