

# **The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r**

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dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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## **And the People Spoke**

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Everyone agrees that President Barack Obama's Inauguration Day was wonderful, uplifting, cathartic, historic and amazing, Nearly 2 million people from all the different tribes of America came together almost as one in Washington D.C. to celebrate the vanquishing of one towering symbol of inequality and injustice. Now that it is headed by a black family, the White House, the symbolic focus of American power wielded for good and evil, will never be the same.

Symbolism – yes, it's crucially important, but it's not the same as substance. Many millions of people who gathered at Inaugural celebrations in every state across this nation need much more than symbolism. They are jubilant at getting rid of George W. Bush, his administration and a whole crew of global elites dedicated to repressing and denying the human rights of workers and the poor. They are anxious to right decades of violence, torture and abuse against ordinary people who for various reasons are locked out of the American dream. They hope for unity in going forward to provide a brighter and better future. They showed us all that in their tears and jubilant cheers of celebration of America's first African American President.

There is a great thirst for leadership among people in America. They want a president who provides solutions that end the suffering of America's people. Some seem to believe that because he inspires hope and confidence, this black man will be able to protect them from the structural reasons for the problems we face, reasons which are tied up in the onslaught of the corporations and the ravages of capitalism.

But you know what? We are the only people who can protect us against those forces,

we the people. In a sense, President Obama acknowledges that every time he calls upon us to get involved. Here's how it works:

Obama addressed a lot of things during his long campaign and in his Inaugural address, but he has never directly discussed the fundamental reasons why our economy is losing so many good jobs, why so many people are being foreclosed out of their homes, why adequate medical care is so difficult to get, or why homelessness is so persistent. Americans - and in fact the world - listened intently to his assertion that we are all to blame for this crisis, and that getting our country out of this rut rests squarely on the shoulders of American workers. The greed and irresponsibility that President Obama blamed for our country's plight certainly has a role to play. But the root cause is much deeper, a structural problem in capitalism that neither major political party is willing to address. For two generations corporations have been desperately trying to cut the costs of labor. Moving jobs offshore to places where workers come cheaper is one important way that tremendously hurts American workers, because they can no longer afford to buy the things they used to help produce. Even more important is replacing people with computer-controlled machines. Those jobs permanently disappear while productivity rises - along with unemployment. The creation of a global migrant movement in search of jobs and security for their families has been another byproduct. These are huge structural problems because they shred the old industrial social contract, the idea that if you worked hard and followed the rules you could make a good life for yourself and a better one for your children, with health care and an adequate retirement. All the benefits of these job losses flow not to workers, but to investors and the top levels of corporate management. Humanity is at a crossroads.

Given the addiction of both major parties to campaign contributions from the people who benefit from this state of affairs, we shouldn't expect Obama's proposals to touch these serious structural problems.

But somebody needs to, and that somebody is us. We need to push our new president - and everyone else we know - to address these problems, and support solutions that make life better for all of us, not just for the few of us whose incomes have risen the most over the past 25 years. The comments people made during the Inauguration showed that change cannot simply be about breaking the color barrier. It has to be about advancing a better vision for America, a vision of an America where there is good health care for everyone, where everyone enjoys the most basic economic and human rights, an America FREE, from addiction, homelessness, hunger, joblessness, violence & poverty! President Obama said on Inauguration Day that every American should recognize " . . . that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world . . . " Those duties - for all of us - include pushing for that better vision.

President Obama gave us pragmatic vision of a better future, however it was the 87 year old warrior Rev. Joseph Lowery who in his benediction evoked the ages-long suffering of a people trampled by oppression and exploitation, and seeking justice. In Reverend Lowery's opening words we heard the prayerful opening lines of the last verse of the "Negro National Anthem:"

**"God of our weary years,**

**God of our silent tears . . "**

The second verse, which he did not recite, is the one that resonates with those who know the history of this struggle:

**"Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears have been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the  
slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast."**

Reverend Lowery reminded us, in the finest tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, that the most patriotic act one can do is to protest for our rights. President Obama's pragmatism and Dr. Lowery's visionary work should meet to elevate the role of poverty in this discussion. Dr. King was protesting poverty when he launched the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, another symbolic gathering of thousands between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument in Washington. And now, unfortunately, poverty is becoming one of this country's most important products.

Click [here](#) to read the complete text of Reverend Lowery's benediction.

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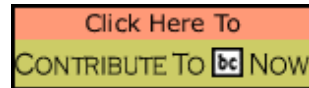
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