

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**The larger meaning of Obama’s Inauguration.** More than anything, the January 20<sup>th</sup> Inauguration of President Barack Obama in our nation’s capitol was a day of hope realized, a day *when the heavens rejoiced*. It was a time of unstinting unity and coming together, a time when the world seemed to pause—if for only a day—and rejoice in surreal splendor.

It was more than a mere happening. It was a richly symbolic event, symbolic of a purification and redemption of the American spirit. No matter who we are as Americans in 2009, it’s important that we grasp the symbolism and the attendant meanings.

As the truth shall set us free, we must be bold and humble in telling the truth about ourselves. Our nation’s role in slavery has forever been a malignant cancer in our soul. From its inception in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, its story has been a shameful one.

Its darkness and evil have diminished us all; and, sadly, we’ve known it from early on as well as through the buoyant days of our Founding Fathers. Certainly, they knew slavery was wrong ... but felt that without an awful compromise, our nation’s birth story could not have been written.

They may well have been right, but at an awful price.

As we declared our independence as a nation and began to grow—acquiring new land and new wealth—slavery’s insidious reality gnawed away at our national conscience. At last, there was no way out save from a horrific civil war, a war that brought us to our knees as a nation; and then the decades of segregation and Jim Crow rule that followed.

From the civil rights movement of the sixties, spearheaded by Martin Luther King, Jr. and symbolized in his famous *I Have a Dream* speech in August of 1963, gradually, incrementally, we’ve been inching forward; making progress and seeking, however haltingly, to redeem ourselves of this wrenching and insidious wrong.

**A landmark event.** It is in this backdrop that President Barack Obama’s Inauguration was a landmark event.

As he laid his left hand on the sacred text (the revered Bible of Abraham Lincoln), and spoke the words of the presidential oath, how many thousands, even millions of voices sounded out across our nation and the world? *Never thought it would happen ...not in my lifetime.*

As the tears flowed and memories upon memories were evoked, it was a sacred moment. A moment suspended in time when, somehow, we were all elevated to a higher place. To a place where we were a little more redeemed and a whole lot more hopeful.

Part of the symbolism of the event unveils the unflinching truth, rooted in our past and yet—while sustaining us over years of struggle—alive for us today; the foundational truth that good will triumph over evil and virtue over deceit; that generosity will rise higher than the clenched fist of greed; that the exalted morality of divine purpose cannot be diminished, and that the voice of an enduring *peace with justice* will never be silenced.

**Embracing the future.** At the end of the day, we are all Americans. And at our best—Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and non-believer (all that we are)—we have within us the capacity and the will to embrace the highest ideals of our Constitution and our most sacred biblical writings.

We have it within us to aim high, to reach high, and to live out—together—the true meaning of our creed. At this dynamic juncture in our nation’s life story, let us resolve—each of us—to stand up and do our part.

The words of the presidential oath have been spoken; hope is all about and possibility is everywhere. With the right spirit and the right purpose, we can lift our nation once again to a more lofty place; a place where all the people of the earth are seen, valued and dignified, no matter anything about us.

With God’s guiding hand upon us, *we the people* can do great things. Let the words of Abraham Lincoln echo through the years (words from his Second Inaugural):

*With malice toward none and charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right ...*

And let Martin Luther King’s dream be realized and every man, woman and child be drawn into its glow ...

*That one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be a plain, and the crooked places made straight; and the glory of the Lord will e revealed and the peoples of the earth shall see it together.*

Let the heavens rejoice, indeed!