

# Federal Glover: Inauguration of President Obama brings tears of joy

By Federal Glover

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IT DIDN'T MATTER that I bundled up as best I could with long johns, sweater and a thick wool overcoat on top of another coat, earmuffs and a wool cap with earflaps. The frigid 20-degree cold still seeped through. Growing up in California, I cannot get used to the winter weather of Washington, D.C.

On top of it all, I was losing body heat because of the tears streaming down my face. Witnessing the inauguration of the country's first African-American president caused waves of emotions to sweep over me.

Barack Obama was a speck in the distance, but I had a better view than most even though I was one of those unfortunate visitors who had purple tickets and were turned away because I was unable to get through the mass of humanity in front of me.

I never cried so much in my life or so openly in front of strangers. The tears were for all the people who had made sacrifices to get where we had come as a nation on Jan. 20. President Obama is the fruition of the struggles of thousands of my elders.

Some of the names are well known, such as Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., whose memory we celebrated the day before the inauguration.

But I think also about the thousands who in the 1950s and 1960s joined the fight for equality when doing so put their lives at real risk and whose names will not be entered in history books — those who braved high-pressure fire hoses, police batons and snarling dogs, and those who died at the end of rope, so this day could happen.

I thought of the three college students, two of them white, who were murdered for their work registering black voters in the South; Martin Luther King's dream; *Brown v. Board of Education*; the bombings and lynchings in the South; flaming crosses in the middle of the night; and three little girls who were killed in a church bombing.

I thought also of my working-class parents who raised me in Pittsburg and were able to send me to college; Taylor Davis, one of the few African-American City Council members, who mentored me in my political career; and Herb White, who was the first black council member in town.

There are dozens more, including the pastors, grandparents, teachers, other community leaders and nameless others who watched out for the African-American community and its children.

I remember as a junior high student watching from across the street, the black students at Pittsburg High who out of rage over King's assassination protested the only way they knew how in 1968, hoping that their anger was heard by the community.

I thought of Medgar Evers, who in 1963 was assassinated in front of his house in Mississippi because of his work in the Civil Rights Movement. After his death, his family moved to Pittsburg, where some of his relatives still live.

I remember, too, getting elected as student body president by a largely non-black student body. Serving with me was my best friend Joe Canciamilla, a white man I call "my brother."

The road to this audacious moment was long and stained with blood. It is a day many of us thought would not happen in our lifetimes.

The feeling of hope generated by Obama's candidacy was best expressed in the faces of young African-American kids around me as they looked up at the podium to see their newest role model. I noticed I was not the only one crying tears of pure joy.

I was sharing this day with strangers, but this exhilaration was a common bond that will forever link us.

I think of my own granddaughters, who like Obama's daughters will grow up without the yoke of victimhood and the heavy history that sometimes weigh down some African-Americans and keep them from achieving their dreams.

Those children can dare to dream of becoming president of the United States, can dare to believe in the continuously evolving promise of America, and can dare to state that our nation has moved closer to King's dream of a society where they will be judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin.

Because I was in Washington, D.C., I couldn't be here on Martin Luther King Day, but I heard reports from my staff that the successful observances in Pittsburg and Antioch were glimpses of what we can become. Good people of every race and ethnicity were at the Creative Arts Building and El Campanil, hungry and eager to be part of a positive statement about who we are and who we want to become as a people, as a society.

Jan. 20 — one glorious day — will not cast off the weight of slavery or overturn its legacy of bigotry and poverty. Nor does it mark the end of overt hate and racism. The next generation of African-Americans will continue to suffer the slights and injuries of discrimination.

But Obama's swearing in shows even the cynics among us that we have traveled far to reach this defining moment in our journey. With our new president, the barriers look less insurmountable. The evils, we can now say with certainty, now have an opposing force.

Yes, it will take us some more time, but I am confident that together, all of us as Americans, will eventually get there. And when we do, we'll shed more tears together.

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