

They say the one surefire way to stop a healthy conversation is to bring up religion or politics. The next few minutes will test that old adage... But this is not an advocacy for a certain position on gun reform, tax laws, budget cuts or any other buzzy political issue on the tongues of our representatives. This is a reflection on a day that has done more to shape my young mind than any book in Widener or lecture in Sanders ever has. That day was the 21st of January of this year in the shadow of the United States Capitol.

I was fortunate enough to attend this year's Inauguration and receive some incredible access to the day's pomp and circumstance; it's truly surprising where you can get when you tell people you have a "secret service underlay". In fact, a seat 50 yards away from the President of the United States may be considered more than just incredible access. For me, it was an opportunity, a chance to engage with my surroundings, truly appreciate the magnitude of the situation and of course, display an unabashed level of braggadocio on Instagram.

Sure, waiting in sub-freezing temperatures for four and a half hours isn't the most glamorous way to spend a Monday morning, but when the President reached the apex of his address I began to understand the importance of my experience.

The apex of the president's speech utilizes the pronoun "We" in a special way. One must recognize that this "We" has come to include so many more groups that this society used to push to the edge. For me, this "We" represents how far we've come as a collective people. This "We" represents a more inclusive society that is moving closer and closer to a fairer and saner existence.

But the progress we've made cannot be taken for granted. Blood has been spilt for the cause of inclusion, lives have been lost to help propel America to where it is now and to honor those who are no longer with us, we must see it as our generation's duty to continue the progress upon which we have already made great strides.

Amidst the power of the canonical 21 gun salute and the thick of Americana a few revelations were made that day: Nick Cannon is incredibly short; Steve Harvey is a very likable presence; Julian and Joaquin Castro, identical twin politicians from Texas, look exactly the same and will be the next big political force in Washington; Senators with cowboy hats look hilarious and shouldn't be taken seriously, Beyoncé sounds better live than you can imagine and Katy Perry is very attractive in person. But these are revelations devoid of powerful substance that seem quite trivial at this point. The real epiphany of that day came when I struck up conversation with the woman sitting next to me, Daphne.

An immigrant from the Caribbean, Daphne came to this country as a teenager. She worked hard her whole life, struggled to find employment after college, but now works as a successful financial management analyst three blocks away from the Capitol. Her story was inspiring and her general enthusiasm for her seat in front of 800,000 people was endearing. What was most striking though

was the realization that barely 50 years ago she couldn't have sat there because of the color of her skin. In fact, just fifty years ago there were laws in place to deny her from exercising the basic right of voting. That "We" the president championed in his address represents where she is today and where those like her can go in the future. That "We" represents Richard Blanco, the openly gay Hispanic poet who delivered his piece at the same podium as the President of the United States. That "We" represents you...and that "We" represents me.

Nothing can atone for the crimes this country has inflicted on its own people, indeed a laundry list of unthinkable travesties, but we can look to the progress we've made and what Daphne's story, Richard's story, our story, represents for so many people and be happy that we appear to be moving in the right direction. The Constitution does not assume perfection, in fact it presents the people with an opportunity to strive to make a more perfect union. We must take an active roll in the ascent to that level of perfection,

of course a plateau we may not ever reach. But we must continue moving forward, progressing in our levels of inclusion and love, for we do not go through this life alone. Only together will we find solace in our attempt to form a more perfect union and only together will we accomplish great things as a nation.

Thank you.