

# South Bend Tribune

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## Viewpoint: A people's perspective of the state of our union in South Bend

**Darryl Heller** South Bend Tribune

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One year ago today, the chief justice of the Supreme Court gave Donald Trump the oath of office and swore him in as the 45th president of the United States. During his inaugural speech, Trump described our country in apocalyptic terms: “Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities, rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation, an education system flush with cash but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge. And the crime, and the gangs, and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential.”

With him at the helm, he promised, America will be strong, wealthy, proud and safe. In short, as he declared throughout his campaign, he would make America great again.

This was troubling to many people, including myself, who heard these words in the context of a campaign that was grounded on division, false and misleading statements, misogynistic boasts, promises steeped in racism and xenophobia, and a perspective that clearly showed disdain for the poor.

For those who were at the receiving end of Trump’s bombastic claims — black and brown people, women, members of the LGBTQ community, and immigrants from non-western European countries — America’s greatness has always been conditional and fragile. There was no “again.” We viewed America’s greatness as an aspiration.

Thus, one year ago, in response to what we recognized as dark clouds gathering across the horizon, a coalition of organizations and individuals came together to host “The People’s Inauguration: Voices for Justice and Inclusion” here in South Bend. Held at the Islamic Society of Michiana, the day brought a diverse group of people together that spanned identities of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, (dis)abilities and countries of origin. The overall purpose was to promote unity and make a clear statement that we not only believed in the words that King wrote from a Birmingham jail, but that we were collectively willing to assert through our actions that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

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Recognizing that the inauguration was just the beginning of a rocky and troubling journey, the organizations that planned the People’s Inauguration continued to meet and eventually formed the Michiana Social Justice Coalition. And, as feared, the past year has been fraught by a cascade of corrosive and racist statements coupled with regressive policies and political choices that are not only cynical in their promotion, but destructive in their practice.

These have ranged from selecting a secretary of education whose primary focus has been to dismantle public education, an attorney general with a troubled history on race relations whose latest efforts are to rekindle the racist war on crime and drugs, and the list goes on.

We’ve seen tweets to ban transgender volunteers in the military sent without consulting the military. Another tweet that equated people who were engaged in lawful and peaceful protest with white supremacists and Nazi sympathizers served as an indication of where this president stood on race. The derision in which this president holds people of color was most recently confirmed by his thoughts on immigration, which can only be interpreted as a desire to ensure that the United States maintain a white majority population.

This is all simply to say that a year after being sworn into office, the promise to make America great again has not materialized. In fact, America has diminished in the eyes

of the world and in its commitment to the most vulnerable of its citizens. The motivation and concern that led to the first People's Inauguration here in South Bend has deepened. We, the members of the Michiana Social Justice Coalition, feel that it is necessary to restate our commitment to unity, inclusion, and justice by hosting The People's Inauguration II. Today, we will gather once again at the Islamic Society of Michiana at 4 p.m. and give a people's perspective of the state of our union.

**Darryl Heller is director of the Civil Rights Heritage Center at Indiana University South Bend.**