

# Tribune Sunday COMMENTARY

## John F. Kennedy's 1993 inaugural address

Inauguration day crept up so cruelly, cold you could understand how it killed William Henry Harrison. I could see George Bush's face, weathered, worn, wrinkled to somewhere between Walter Mondale and Abraham Lincoln. The boyish good looks were no more. The lease on his personal picture of Doran Gray had expired the same day as his lease on the White House.

Bush kept pursuing his thin lips against the cold as he watched the chief justice administer the oath of office to the young man in the high silk hat and tails. A light wind atomized bursts of freshly fallen snow across the vast field of expectant faces. Was it the sun or the new president's words which caromed off the airborne crystals and transmuted the most, icy air into a multimedia assault on the senses? Was I there, or was I dreaming?

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I stand before you today as aware of the pain in the nation as I am of the closeness of the coldness gripping my breath. The dank hand of doubt today clutches the throat of the country that seemed so very sure of itself such a very short time ago. Somehow, a great spirit has been dulled by the accumulated demons of the day. The greatest nation of the century now sits beggarly by with time on its idle hands. I have walked the breadth of this land, have talked with its women, sat down with its men, seen the faces of their children touched by this cruel winter of misfortune and want.



**ANDREW  
BARBANO**

I have felt the hungry hands eager for labor, lusting to create new wonders of worth for the world to see. I pledge this government and this president to filling those extended hands with the tools and the fire with which to forge a renewed nation.

With clear heads on our shoulders and purposeful resolve in our hearts, we shall proceed to refresh and renew our national promise. We shall reach back only to take what is good from this wondrous century while leaving behind its legacy of dismemberment and doubt. Our progress has only paused, not passed into the hands of others.

Can the United States continue to lead in a world where every little group pursues only narrow self-interest? Yes, but only by honest example. Let us not be so arrogant as to think we deserve nationhood simply because we were born in a united country. That union was twice birthed in blood and preserved by fire. We must not let it become extinguished in the sea of self-doubt which afflicts a woefully large number of our brethren around the globe. Yes, the price of freedom is eternal

vigilance. Liberty walks free only with responsibility.

I have walked amazed through the streets of Los Angeles and so many other great cities, cities today perhaps in name only. Have we become a country in name only? Have we collectively turned to making islands instead of bridges? Everywhere, I have witnessed people erecting fences and building barriers between themselves and others who might look or speak or dress a little differently. This is the anti-work of permissive minds and idle hands.

Our great-grandfathers well remembered Rustiantown, Germantown, Italiantown, Chinatown and the myriad little enclaves which seasoned the great melting pot of the once and future America. Have we reduced that bubbling talent to celebrate our diversity in a bountiful feast of opportunity and unity? Have all the expensive repairs to the venerable Statue of Liberty been in vain? Do the huddled masses at her feet yearn not so much to breathe free as to find shelter? Is her cloak so frayed it can no longer give warmth and sustenance to the future as embodied in our children?

Can we be so blind to the common desires and aspirations which have lived here for millennia? Think back and ask: What brought everyone to these shores? Even Native Americans whose ancestors came here 10,000 years ago, all—all sought a better life in a fresh new world.

We have soiled that freshness first-stepped upon ever so gingerly by our forebears. The wounds upon the land are deep and cruel. Only loving stewardship can restore it to respect.

This century, for all its miracles, has been a century of death and destruction. For every penicillin, we have spawned a Chernobyl or Love Canal. Such costs increase at an increasing rate. It is known only to the Almighty how many wonder drugs have been aborted by mankind's careless stripage of his legacy in the name of progress and prompt paper profits. How many cancer-curing taxols patiently waited to be discovered within some nameless Pacific yew or rosy periwinkle, only to be burned or bulldozed before bearing fruit?

The government of this country has too long been removed like a stain from the fabric its people. Rather than being woven from the same warp and woof, it has too often chosen to be a government only of and for itself. The treasury has been looted and national purpose perverted by tarnished knights inventing dragons to slay.

How many died in those pursuits? How many children were never born because their mothers and fathers died as children themselves?

This country has been a magnificent and rambunctious child, stumbling through a tumultuous adolescence. What we have lacked in grace, we made up in muscle, deter-

mination and sheer will. But the nation has paid dearly for overuse of the iron fist and underuse of the open hand. Much of our inheritance lies feld and fallow, excused in the name of expediency in lusting for better bombs. We have paid dearly for those misguided messengers of death. At places like Rocky Flats, Colo.; Hanford, Wash.; Fenald, Ohio and Beatty, Nev., we continue to pay the human costs of making, possessing and disposing of weapons which have only succeeded in destroying our lineage. Now, we must pay again to cure this deadly comedy committed in the name of making a safer planet. Let that price be paid, but let this be enough.

The promise of this vast and wondrous land is still alive in our hands. Shall that promise live or shall we let it die? Let the word go forth from this time and place that our future shall be one of eliminating want, of subordinating greed, of serving true need, of succumbing to the better angels of our nature. This president extends his open hand in this cold season of wishes for hope. I ask all within the sound of my voice to bring forward all which lies within you for the good of a nation which cannot long survive without you.

To this great work let us once again pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor. *Andrew Barbano is a Reno-based syndicated columnist. Barbwire by Barbano originates each Sunday in the Tribune.*