

“The Inauguration and King’s Historic Speech”

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By Star Parker

RESTON, Va.—I have written often that there is a common denominator in our deeply divided nation. That is the general sense that something is wrong.

The points of departure among our large and diverse population are the perceptions about what the problems are and what must be done.

In this spirit I ask, as many have over recent days, what message we might take from the coincidence of the inauguration day of Donald J. Trump as America’s 47th president with the national holiday honoring the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It is interesting to note that in 1964, shortly after King’s famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial, and shortly after the assassination of an American president, 77 percent of Americans said, according to Pew Research, that “they trust government to do what is right just about always/most of the time.” The percent expressing this sentiment in 2024 was 22 percent.

The percent expressing trust in government, per the Pew survey, spiraled relentlessly downward from 1964, and, despite ups and downs, it never again got even close to the 77 percent of 1964.

However, parallel with the spiraling down in trust in government has been a spiraling up in the growth of government.

In 1964, per the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, federal government expenditures took 17.3 percent of our GDP.

In 2024, federal government expenditures, per the Congressional Budget Office, took 23.9 percent of GDP.

Can it be an accident that the more Americans have come to rely on government, the more Americans have allowed government to take over an increasing percentage of their lives, their trust in government has dramatically fallen?

Common ground between the appeal of Donald Trump in 2025 and the appeal of King in 1963 is that both were about the pressing need to be faithful to the founding principles of the country.

Trump's MAGA message in 2025 is that the nation has destructively strayed from these principles. King's message in 1963 was that the country failed and was failing to live up to those founding principles.

However, common ground for both was and is concurrence about the validity of those founding principles—a free nation under God—and the critical importance of being true to them.

What we do know is what the Civil Rights Movement became, and what became widely understood to be the road to racial justice in America, was a great departure from King's words and appeal in his "I Have a Dream Speech."

How can the sad irony be missed when today Al Sharpton wants to lead boycotts against corporations shaking off their DEI—diversity, equity, inclusion—programs when the most memorable line of King's 1963 speech was his dream that one day his children would be judged by the "content of their character" and not "by the color of their skin"?

A great point of inflection occurred in the 1960s, much under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson, where the Civil Rights Movement became a platform to direct the whole nation to the new god of big government.

It has grown and grown, and here is the meeting point between MAGA and King's dream.

The false god of big government is hurting all Americans. We're all drowning in it and damaged by it.

The "I Have a Dream Speech" was really a pastor's sermon, and the National Mall became his church.

The substance of it is equally relevant, whether you see it about Making America Great Again or about Making America Great like it was meant to be.

Restoring sanctity of life, liberty, and property. Understanding that the source of our creativity is our Creator.

In King's words, "And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true."

And then we will join hands and sing "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."