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Workers in Washington place Biden-Harris inauguration banners on the inaugural parade view

Workers in Washington place Biden-Harris inauguration banners on the inaugural parade viewing stand across from the White House Jan. 14. (CNS/Erin Scott, Reuters)



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Inaugural addresses are almost always a disappointment: The person giving it has an impossible job, becoming head of government and head of state, two jobs that demand different rhetorical approaches. In American history, there have been only three truly great inaugural addresses, all three of which came at times of political crisis. In 1801, after what remains the nastiest campaign in American history and a constitutional crisis that ended up costing Alexander Hamilton his life, Thomas Jefferson handled the first ever transition of power from one party to another with his splendid "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists" speech. Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address is the finest statement of American civic religion in our nation's history, and it is almost impossible to imagine it being surpassed. Finally, everyone remembers Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural address for its famous line, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." But I am partial to the speech’s closing, which I think captures the spirit of patriotic confidence

progressives need to reclaim:

> We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

I hope those words are very much on Joe Biden's mind as he takes the oath of office tomorrow.

Relatedly, at The New York Times, Nicholas Kristoff calls Biden's recovery plan "Rooseveltian" and especially praises it for including efforts to lower the poverty rate for children, which is not related to COVID-19 but is a moral stain on our country. There is so much that can be accomplished in terms of the common good if Biden remembers his pledge to be the president of all Americans.

In The Washington Post, Michelle Boorstein looks at Biden's Catholicism, featuring quotes from NCR and NCR-friendly experts. I confess a naughty thought: I am looking forward a little bit to the ways that Biden's very public and regular Catholicism drives some of our conservative friends bonkers.

From Politico, a report on the struggles at the Democratic National Committee. Holly Otterbein details the hangover left by President Barack Obama's dreadful decision to erect a parallel organization to the DNC, and concern that Biden's campaign manager, Jen O'Malley Dillon, may not have learned the lessons of that failure. Incoming DNC Chair Jamie Harrison, however, is a grassroots guy. I hope it occurs to someone to have both Dillon and Harrison sit down with the last really splendid head of the DNC, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean.

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At CNN, the oldest extant painting of an animal – 45,500 years old! – is of a warty pig. Huh? I thought those early cave paintings were always of a bull. Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete had an exquisite rumination on bulls in cave paintings at the beginning of his book *God at the Ritz*. Next month, I will be part of a remembrance of Albacete at the New York Encounter. Details to follow. We will be sure to talk about warty pigs.

From Radio Free Europe, a beautiful collection of color photographs of pre-communist Georgia made by Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky. The primitive technique required three photos of each subject but the results are astonishing. The variety of the landscape is unmatched and its beauty ranks in the Top 10.

From Deadline, a profile of the documentary "Landfall," by director Cecilia Aldarondo, which looks at how the people of Puerto Rico recovered from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Because of the pandemic, I have not seen the documentary, but if it counteracts the false narrative of Puerto Ricans as helplessly waiting for handouts, I hope it wins the Oscar and we all get to see it.