

AMANDA GORMAN MADE SILVESTER BEAMAN SAD, JOE BIDEN HAPPY, AND JOHN LEWIS DANCE

"<https://youtu.be/lI1c-Lbd4Bw>

The saddest person on the Inaugural stage was not Mike Pence, the outgoing Vice President. Indeed, after what he had to put up with from Trump for the last month, he's probably relieved if not outright happy. The saddest person was not Amy Klobuchar or other presidential hopefuls who came up short during the primaries, who no doubt imagined themselves as the person taking the oath of office today. The saddest person on the stage today was the Reverend Doctor Silvester Beaman of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, Delaware.

The happiest person on the stage was President Joe Biden, but it's not because he was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States of America. It's not because the inauguration went off without more violence. It's not because he can finally *do* things to address all the problems he and we are facing, which had to have been incredibly frustrating as the transition floundered and foundered and blundered its way to today. It's not because he accomplished what Beau wanted him to do.

The reason Beaman was so sad and Biden was so happy is this: Biden finished before Amanda Gorman spoke and Beaman had to follow her. Honestly, I half expected Beaman to step up to the microphone, ask "Can I get an Amen?", and then drop the folder with his prepared benediction and sit down. Don't get me wrong: Beaman's words were good, but he had to know that he was following something epic.

When I saw Gorman come down the Capitol steps wearing her yellow power coat, her bold hoop earrings, her bright red wrap around the

powerful tight braids atop her head, I just sat back and smiled. Michelle Obama looked great in her purple, but she was a member of the audience today. Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez both made their entrances before they picked up the microphone, and were fine, but Gorman *owned* those steps in a way that no one else did today. Seeing her enter reminded me of AOC stepping onto the House floor in her power red suit as she prepared to respond to being called a “fucking bitch” by Florida Congressman Ted Yoho. Before Gorman opened her mouth, it was clear that she had Something To Say and it was going to be good.

And make no mistake: she did, and it was.

It was incredibly powerful for three reasons. First, Gorman was unapologetically herself: young, African-American, articulate, and proud of all three. She did not cast herself as Maya Angelou or Robert Frost, two earlier inaugural poets. She spoke with the rhythms of rap that are the language of her generation and her community, embracing the whole heritage of Africans on this continent, and conscious of her power in this moment.

Second, Gorman was unflinchingly honest. She spoke of the ugliness of our history at times, at the tragedies we have been through, and the reality of what is going on right now. There were no pious platitudes to paper over the pain that far too many have had to deal with for far too long.

Most of all, Gorman was unimaginably hopeful. If she owned and possessed the four centuries of pain poured out on the Africans brought to this country in chains and their descendants who lived through slavery, official Jim Crow, and unofficial oppression, she also owned and possessed the strength that carried them through it all, forcing this country to slowly and painfully look at its past, decide to change, and actually make those changes begin to come to be.

But while democracy can be periodically
delayed,
it can never be permanently defeated.
In this truth, in this faith we trust
for while we have our eyes on the
future, history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption.
We feared it at its inception.
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour,
but within it, we found the power
to author a new chapter,
to offer hope and laughter
to ourselves so while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over
catastrophe?
Now we assert:
how could catastrophe possibly prevail
over us?

We will not march back to what was,
but move to what shall be
a country that is bruised, but whole,
benevolent, but bold,
fierce, and free.

We will not be turned around or
interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next
generation.

Our blunders become their burdens.
But one thing is certain,
if we merge mercy with might and might
with right,
then love becomes our legacy and change
our children's birthright.

And with these words, I thought immediately of
John Lewis, the happiest person *not* on the
stage today.

Gorman was not mindlessly repeating the words of
an earlier generation of activists, but building
on them. Just as the 23 year old John Lewis
spoke on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in
1963, so the 22 year old Amanda Gorman stood at

the other end of the Mall, on the steps of the Capitol in which John Lewis served until he died, and she is taking this nation one more step forward. She isn't asking permission to do this, or suggesting this be done. She is declaring reality: we will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation.

I am glad that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris defeated Donald Trump and Mike Pence. I am relieved that we have made it through the transition between the election and today. I am still shaken by the insurrection of January 6th and what may yet lie ahead on that front. But I am dancing in my living room right now, and am convinced that John Lewis is dancing in heaven today, because in Amanda Gorman we see that the good troublemaking goes on.

How could catastrophe possibly prevail?