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Clinging to the spirit of MLK on Trump's inauguration day

January 21, 2025

By **JENNIFER SMITH**

Black leaders in Boston grappled with two conflicting realities on Monday – national celebrations of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Donald Trump's return to office.

There is an "ironic juxtaposition between the aspirations of the civil rights movement and the realities of where we are today," said Nicole Obi, president and CEO of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, on [The Codcast](#). Obi and Imari Paris Jeffries, executive director of Embrace Boston, discussed the inauguration just before the long weekend, emotionally and practically readying for a potentially tumultuous next four years.

"We're thinking about joy," Jeffries said. "How do we anchor the upcoming inauguration with justice and joy, thinking about what it means to enter what could be some stressful years with the

requisite joy to persevere and to keep on keeping on?"

Two of the three members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation who chose not to attend the inauguration – Sen. Ed Markey and Rep. Ayanna Pressley – [opted instead](#) to attend MLK Day events.

"Dr. King did tell us that organizing is our most powerful weapon," Pressley told attendees at a Roxbury event. "And as we face the challenges of another Trump presidency, we will need radical love and your cooperative spirit now more than ever."

Markey pointed to tech billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg's invitations to Trump's inauguration as symbolic of the administration's priorities.

"While every family in America... sits around their kitchen table trying to figure out how to pay the monthly bills, those three white men will be up there sitting next to Donald Trump. This is not a coincidence. This is a call to action," Markey said.

Work continues regardless of the president, Obi said. The economic council was formed after a [2015 "Color of Wealth" study](#) that found white Boston households have a median wealth of almost a quarter million dollars, while Black household median wealth sat at just \$8. While Black business owners are wealthier than other Black residents of the area, Obi said, they still struggle with access to capital and some buyers still will not buy from Black-owned firms, she noted.

"We know that it's critically important for us to work on economic development and that the administrations come and go," Obi said. "I feel like there's a through-line on the work that we need to do. I think we have to be particularly vigilant around particular attacks on the work that we're doing. But the work has been consistent for us. We've made some progress. We now need to be very intentional about how we're moving forward, what we are looking to stop, delay, or mitigate in the work that others might be doing to stall the progress that we intend to continue to fight for."

BECMA [programs](#) include support for Black businesses with issues securing capital, encouraging use of Black vendors, and increasing Black business representation on local boards and commissions.

New from Commonwealth Beacon

OFFSHORE HEADWINDS : Bruce Mohl reports that the Italian company that had planned a \$300 million project in Somerset to build cables for the offshore wind industry [is pulling the plug on the venture](#) as Donald Trump returns to office with a vow to shut down the country's offshore wind sector.

OUR BAD : The state has agreed to [repay the federal government \\$2.1 billion](#) over 10 years to settle a case

that emerged after it was discovered that the Baker administration had mistakenly used federal pandemic money to pay unemployment insurance claims. Chris Lisinski of State House News Service has the details.

OPINION : Colette Phillips says [a measure of grace is called for](#) in dealing with the awkward calendar coincidence that had MLK and Donald Trump sharing the spotlight yesterday.

The president's cabinet picks, who are working their way through confirmation hearings, are once again mostly white, with only three nominees of color, though [more gender-balanced](#) than his slate in 2016. Scott Turner, who was executive director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council during Trump's first term, is the president's lone Black nominee and [his pick to serve](#) as secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Trump has made reference to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the past, [claiming](#) he had more attendees at his "Stop the Steal" rally before the protesters marched toward the Capitol than at the civil rights leader's "I Have a Dream" speech.

In his prepared remarks on Monday, Trump made only one reference to King, in the context of his Black and Hispanic support. Trump made inroads into nearly every demographic group in the 2024 election, but the overwhelming majority of Black voters – about 8 in 10 – still [cast their votes](#) for the Democratic candidate.

"To the Black and Hispanic communities, I want to thank you for the tremendous outpouring of love and trust that you have shown me with your vote," the President [said](#) in his inaugural speech, reading from a teleprompter. "We set records, and I will not forget it. I've heard your voices in the campaign, and I look forward to working with you in the years to come. Today is Martin Luther King Day and his honor – this will be a great honor. But in his honor we will strive together to make his dream a reality. We will make his dream come true."

The president issued a [slew of immigration-related executive orders](#) on his first day back in office, among them orders to roll back asylum and immigration programs and end birthright citizenship – the constitutional right of US citizenship for children born in the country regardless of their parents' immigration status. Many of the orders are expected to or already are facing pushback and legal challenge.

"These monuments, these holidays, these important figures to us don't live in isolation," Jeffries said. "They currently need to be redefined and defined. And Martin Luther King, as a historic figure, has been one of those folks where his words, his language, has ideology, his thoughts have been co-opted to tell a different story around what it means to be American, around what it means to think about economic justice. There were three things towards the end of his life that King advocated for. He was anti-war, anti-poverty, and anti-racism. Those were the three things that

were important to him.” When Trump compares himself to King, Jeffries said, “anything short of those things are just, frankly, not true in this moment.”

For more with Nicole Obi and Imari Paris Jeffries – on where progress for Black Bostonians has fallen short, the impact of any given presidential administration, and the “algorithms” of democracy – listen to [The Codcast](#) on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

The Codcast



CommonWealth Beacon's **JENNIFER SMITH** is joined by **NICOLE OBI**, president and CEO of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, and **IMARI K. PARIS JEFFRIES**, executive director of Embrace Boston. They discuss how organizations dedicated to racial justice and equity are responding to the challenges of this political era.

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More from CommonWealth Beacon

OPINION : Should the state limit the expansion of natural gas infrastructure as part of its climate change agenda? Jim Peyser [takes the measure of the arguments for and against](#) that proposition in the latest installment of a series of essays he's written that acknowledge the complexity and nuance of important policy debates that often get reduced to shouting matches.

OPINION : Marinell Rousmaniere of EdVestors [lays out the principles](#) that should guide the Boston Public Schools as the district looks to rightsize its footprint with several school closures.

In Other News

BEACON HILL

- Girding for battle: Attorney General Andrea Campbell plans to ask the Legislature to [boost her office's budget](#) to give it the staffing she says it will need to take on anticipated legal challenges against the

- Trump administration. (Boston Herald)
- Western Massachusetts leaders often claim they don't get enough respect on Beacon Hill, a [politically useful](#) complaint for them as most of the state's residents – and voters – are in eastern Massachusetts. (MassLive)

MUNICIPAL MATTERS

- Newton city councilors plan to vote on an ordinance banning anyone born on or after March 1, 2004, from [buying tobacco products](#). Cities and towns are weighing such ordinances after the Supreme Judicial Court approved a [generational ban](#) in Brookline last year. (WBUR)

HEALTH/HEALTH CARE

- More than 60 geese, swans, and ducks found in a [Plymouth pond](#) might have died from bird flu, according to state officials. (Patriot Ledger)

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

- GBH News rounds up the Massachusetts congressional delegation's takes on President Donald Trump's second [inaugural speech](#), with Salem's Rep. Seth Moulton calling it "more of a rant than a speech" and a "grievance-filled diatribe."

ELECTIONS

- Josh Kraft is indeed [running for mayor](#) of Boston, setting his sights on knocking off first-term incumbent Michelle Wu. He is scouting for a campaign headquarters and plans an early February launch. Kraft has been [weighing a run](#) since 2023. (Politico)

EDUCATION

- Ed Wingenbach, who took the reins as president of Hampshire College six years ago with a mandate to stabilize finances and enrollment at the Amherst school – a goal that he and college leaders say the school is on track to meet – [is stepping down](#) in June. (Boston Globe)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE/COURTS

- The Worcester Telegram [breaks down](#) how a TikTok "To Catch a Predator" trend landed five Assumption University students in court last week on kidnapping and conspiracy charges.

MEDIA

- WCVB-TV had the [right to fire](#) a cameraman who refused to get the Covid-19 vaccine, a federal court ruled. (Universal Hub)



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