

In celebrating King, we must overcome divisive - Sacramento Bee, The (CA) - January 16, 2017 - page 5B

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Today we celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. On Friday Donald Trump will be inaugurated president of the United States. The stark contrast of personalities and ideals cannot be more distinct.

King fought and died for equality and social justice, while Trump campaigned on separation, isolation, deportation and exclusion.

Eight years ago Barack Obama was the first person of African American descent elected to our nation's highest office. Political and media pundits proclaimed this was the beginning of a "post-racial" era. But in the days and weeks following Trump's election the Southern Poverty Law Center reported a sharp rise in hate-related incidents, mostly focusing on anti-immigrant sentiment at schools and college campuses.

During this same time, California State University, Sacramento, President Robert S. Nelsen felt compelled to send two separate messages to the university community emphasizing our "Hornet family," respect for diversity and a call for civility. Campus services such as the Counseling Center, the Employee Assistance Program and the Dreamer Resource Center were on high alert.

Despite the fears of an unknown future, Sacramento State is poised to confront the hate-filled rhetoric that emerged from the presidential campaign. An office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion was established over a year ago and a new Center on Race, Ethnicity and Immigration is now taking shape.

More importantly, students have taken it upon themselves to rise up tall and strong in the face of what they see as an increasingly hostile national political environment. This was clearly seen in the formation of the Define American chapter on our campus that uses the power of their stories to transcend politics to shift the conversation about immigrants, identity and citizenship in a changing America.

Jose Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who revealed his undocumented immigration status in a New York Times feature article, is a co-founder of Define American. He was also the keynote speaker at Sacramento State's "Keeping the Dream Alive Summit" held Nov. 21. There were more than 500 attendees.

Our campus is particularly vulnerable to many of the most divisive policy changes being proposed by the new Trump administration and Republican-controlled Congress. Sacramento State is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution and Asian-American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, and is the seventh most diverse university in the western United States. Many of our students are the first in their families to attend college.

Sacramento State must continue its mission to "transform lives by preparing students for leadership, service and success." The most recent commencement ceremony at Sleep Train Area celebrated the graduation of 3,800 students. Roughly half of the graduates came from families earning less than \$38,000 a year. It is expected that these graduates will move on to work and professions that will exceed the incomes of their families.

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr., we must remember we can and will overcome.

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