

Obama's Lincoln Memorial Speech

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Remarks of President-elect Barack Obama – as prepared for delivery
"We Are One: The Obama Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial"

Washington, D.C.

Sunday, January 18, 2009

I want to thank all the speakers and performers for reminding us, through song and through words, just what it is that we love about America. And I want to thank all of you for braving the cold and the crowds and traveling in some cases thousands of miles to join us here today. Welcome to Washington, and welcome to this celebration of American renewal.

In the course of our history, only a handful of generations have been asked to confront challenges as serious as the ones we face right now. Our nation is at war. Our economy is in crisis. Millions of Americans are losing their jobs and their homes; they're worried about how they'll afford college for their kids or pay the stack of bills on their kitchen table. And most of all, they are anxious and uncertain about the future - about whether this generation of Americans will be able to pass on what's best about this country to our children and their children.

I won't pretend that meeting any one of these challenges will be easy. It will take more than a month or a year, and it will likely take many. Along the way there will be setbacks and false starts and days that test our fundamental resolve as a nation.

But despite all of this - despite the enormity of the task that lies ahead - I stand here today as hopeful as ever that the United States of America will endure - that the dream of our founders will live on in our time.

What gives me that hope is what I see when I look out across this mall. For in these monuments are chiseled those unlikely stories that affirm our unyielding faith - a faith that anything is possible in America. Rising before us stands a memorial to a man who led a small band of farmers and shopkeepers in revolution against the army of an Empire, all for the sake of an idea. On the ground below is a tribute to a generation that withstood war and depression - men and women like my grandparents who toiled on bomber assembly lines and marched across Europe to free the world from tyranny's grasp. Directly in front of us is a pool that still reflects the dream of a King, and the glory of a people who marched and bled so that their children might be judged by their character's content. And behind me, watching over the union he saved, sits the man who in so many ways made this day possible.

And yet, as I stand here tonight, what gives me the greatest hope of all is not the stone and marble that surrounds us today, but what fills the spaces in between. It is you - Americans of every race and region and station who came here because you believe in what this country can be and because you want to help us get there.

It is the same thing that gave me hope from the day we began this campaign for the presidency nearly two years ago; a belief that if we could just recognize ourselves in one another and bring everyone together - Democrats, Republicans, and Independents; Latino, Asian, and Native American; black and white, gay and straight, disabled and not - then not only would we restore hope and opportunity in places that yearned for both, but maybe, just maybe, we might perfect our union in the process.

This is what I believed, but you made this belief real. You proved once more that people who love this country can change it. And as I prepare to assume the presidency, yours are the voices I will take with me every day I walk into that Oval Office - the voices of men and women who have different stories but hold common hopes; who ask only for what was promised us as Americans - that we might make of our lives what we will and see our children climb higher than we did.

It is this thread that binds us together in common effort; that runs through every memorial on this mall; that connects us to all those who struggled and sacrificed and stood here before.

It is how this nation has overcome the greatest differences and the longest odds - because there is no obstacle that can stand in the way of millions of voices calling for change.

That is the belief with which we began this campaign, and that is how we will overcome what ails us now. There is no doubt that our road will be long. That our climb will be steep. But never forget that the true character of our nation is revealed not during times of comfort and ease, but by the right we do when the moment is hard. I ask you to help me reveal that character once more, and together, we can carry forward as one nation, and one people, the legacy of our forefathers that we celebrate today.

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