

Commentary: Obama inaugural, potent history

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Commentary: Obama inaugural, potent history, dream fulfilled

Jan. 12, 2009 -- When President-elect Barack Obama takes the oath as the 44th President of the United States on Jan. 20, he will have concluded one of the most inspiring and symbolically rich journeys in American history – the end of which presents daunting challenges and unique opportunities.

A decided underdog when he launched his candidacy, Obama rode a wave of support from Americans who were willing to stand up for the "hope" and "change" he very effectively communicated to capture the trust and confidence of a majority of Americans, which carried him all the way to the presidency.



Obama's election draws parallels with other American presidents who led the nation through challenging times, and campaigned as agents for change. President Abraham Lincoln understood the strategic objectives of the Civil War that marked his time, as well as the importance of addressing the domestic issues beyond the fighting that divided the nation. President Franklin Roosevelt led the nation in times of economic turmoil and protracted war; and President John F. Kennedy captured the imagination of a new generation of Americans with a message of change.

President-elect Obama (D-Illinois) announced his candidacy for president on February 10, 2007, shortly before the 198th birthday of Abraham Lincoln, America's sixteenth president and arguably its most revered politician. Lincoln is widely regarded as our nation's greatest president, a courageous leader who ushered in what is widely considered the most dramatic period of change in American history.

Lincoln was savvy in surrounding himself with people of differing political affiliations and perspectives at a time when the country was engulfed in partisanship; Obama is giving an indication of a similar approach to governing. Standing before a cheering crowd in front of the old Illinois statehouse in Springfield, Illinois, where President Lincoln once served in the legislature and established himself

as an agent for change, Obama evoked the memory of Lincoln to announce his candidacy for president.

And so it is on the eve of the 200th anniversary of the "Great Emancipator's" birth that America inaugurates its first African-American president.

When Obama assumes the mantle of president he will inherit challenges similar to those faced by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he was elected in 1932. Roosevelt inherited an American economy in severe depression. Roosevelt used his vast political and communication skills to rally the country during this period and went on to lead the country through war and out of economic despair.

Many experts believe the economy President-elect Obama will inherit is the country's worst since the Great Depression. He will also inherit a nation at war on two fronts - in Iraq and Afghanistan. As with Roosevelt, these daunting challenges will require Obama to maximize the use of his political and communication skills as he leads the nation through this challenging period. Roosevelt is considered by many to be one of America's greatest presidents, and with the challenges Obama must immediately face, the opportunity for greatness is within his reach - but in the current volatile economic and security climate there is also great risk.

For many Americans, Obama also evokes memories of President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy was a young, talented politician and gifted communicator who represented a new generation of politician. Many credit Kennedy's masterful use of television as a catalyst for his close election victory in 1960.

Most observers believe that the Obama campaign benefitted enormously from his savvy use of the Internet and modern day technology to win the Democratic Party's nomination. In 1960, during his acceptance speech for the nomination of his party for president, Kennedy called for change when he used the term "New Frontier," to rally Americans to his cause. Kennedy captured the imagination of a new generation of Americans with his call to service, for a renewal of hope and possibilities when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Given the challenges currently facing America, President-elect Obama, like President Kennedy, will likely seek to inspire a new generation of Americans with a renewed call for service and sacrifice in his inaugural address – perhaps to achieve energy independence.

In a final moment of symbolism which will usher in a powerful and dramatic conclusion to what will undoubtedly be one of the most significant moments in American history, Barack Obama will become the 44th president of the United States on January 20, 2009 – the very day after America celebrates the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28th, 1963, that Dr. King gave one of the greatest speeches in American history, his "I Have a Dream" speech.

In that speech, Dr. King said he dreamed of a day in which his children would "one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." On the opposite end of the Washington Mall on the steps of our nation's capitol, 45 years after Dr. King's speech, and as a result of more than 66 million Americans of all races who pulled the lever for him on November 4, 2008, Barack Obama will become the embodiment of that dream.

(Editors note: Col. Jeremy Martin is a USAWC graduate.)

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