

President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address:
A Critique And Overview

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Table of Contents

Obama Biography	1
Obama's Oratory	2
Favreau Biography	4
The Inauguration	5
Summary of Speech	7
Basic Construction	10
Underlying Construction	12
Responsibility	14
Delivery of Speech	17
Reaction	18
Conclusion	20

Both Democrats and Republicans listened anxiously to President Barack Obama's inaugural address on January 20, 2009, hoping it would outline what was to be expected for his next four years. Members of both parties had high hopes for Obama's address. Millions of people lined the Washington Mall in the cold January air to see and listen to Barack Obama. Though Barack Obama delivered the address and spoke of his visions, it is important to also acknowledge his speech writer, Jonathan Favreau, whose job it was to research and construct the speech. Throughout Obama's political history he has an underlying theme of responsibility, which was not forgotten when Obama and Favreau put together Obama's inaugural address. In this paper I reconstruct the context in which the inaugural address was given by giving background on Obama, his oratorical skills, Jonathan Favreau, the inaugural events and the audience that was present. I then provide a summary of the speech, its basic construction as well as its underlying construction, the use of responsibility in the speech, the general delivery of the speech and the reactions to the speech.

Obama Biography

Barack Obama beat former first lady Hillary Clinton in the Democratic Primary Election and went on to run against Senator John McCain in the 2008 presidential election. Barack Obama beat John McCain by 192 electoral votes on November 4, 2008 and became the first African American president of the United States.¹ Before Barack Obama became the 44th president of the United States of America, he was born on August 4, 1961 in Hawaii and was primarily raised by his mother with the help of his grandfather and grandmother. Except for living in Indonesia from 1967 to 1971 with his mother and his stepfather, Obama was primarily raised in Hawaii.² Obama started his college career at Occidental College but later transferred to

¹ "Election Center 2008."

² Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, 30.

Columbia University where he graduated in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in Political Science. After graduation Obama worked for a church-based group in an impoverished neighborhood in Chicago, instead of going straight to law school. He did go back to school, however, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1991. While at Harvard, Obama was president of the Harvard Law Review and was the first African American to hold the position. After law school, Obama worked as a professor and a civil right attorney until being elected to the U.S. Senate in 2004. Obama was only the third African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate. Barack Obama now resides in the White House with his wife, Michelle and their daughters Malia and Sasha.³

Obama's Oratory

President Barack Obama is possibly one of the greatest orators that has ever been president. His ability to communicate well and excite audiences was illustrated throughout his campaign and continues to show throughout the duration of his presidency. Obama's great political sense and rhetorical ability showed through while he was in law school. One of his professors, Charles Ogletree commented on Obama's natural ability saying: "Mr. Obama cast himself as an eager listener, sometimes giving warring classmates the impression that he agreed with all of them at once... People had a way of hearing what they wanted in Mr. Obama's words."⁴ Obama did well with controlling two opposing sides through his rhetoric. He was able to calm down angry people and settle arguments.

Some of the hype of Obama's renowned rhetorical ability could be due to the fact of just leaving eight years of listening to the not-so-eloquent George W. Bush. One critic of Bush wrote that "It seems more apt to characterize Bush here as an "applause-rendering" president rather

³ "Meet the Candidate."

⁴ Heninger, "100 Days: 'Harry, I Have a Gift!'"

than as a rhetorical president; after all, a third of the time in his most important rhetorical act as president was spent generating, and then basking in, applause.”⁵ Few would disagree with characterizing Bush as not very eloquent and lacking rhetorical ability. But most will agree that Obama can speak well, that for what Bush lacked, Obama makes up for in his rhetoric. As *USA Today*'s Sandy Grady puts it: “Sometimes the words were glorious and lyrical as a jazz solo in a 2 a.m. nightclub. Sometimes they were practical and mundane as a carpentry manual. They were delivered in a confident, edgy cadence that reminded some of us of Jack Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr.”⁶ Obama influenced many people during his campaign and the election through his oratorical abilities. He excited the younger generations when they had shown little to no political interest before. This was largely due to his rhetorical abilities and it is important to understand what exactly it is about Obama's rhetoric that has such an impact on people. Clayborne Carson, executive director and editor of the Martin Luther King Jr. Collection at Morehouse College, wrote a piece that examined the incredible similarities between Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetorical abilities and those of Barack Obama's. In his piece he states: “Nonetheless, my study of King, especially since becoming editor of his papers, has convinced me that King's and Obama's distinctive oratorical qualities are related in important ways.”⁷ Carson claims that Obama has paralleled some of King's ideas and views, predominantly by speaking about the same country that does not judge on the color of one's skin that King hoped for so many years ago.⁸

⁵ Lim, *The Anti-Intellectual Presidency: The Decline of Presidential Rhetoric from George Washington to George W. Bush*, 65.

⁶ Grady, “His Words Will Matter.”

⁷ Carson, “King, Obama, and the Great American Dialogue.”

⁸ *Ibid.*

Favreau Biography

It is important to understand Barack Obama's speech writer and his background, because he was majorly in charge of the construction and writing of the speech. Jonathan Favreau is Obama's speech writer and wrote his Inaugural Address. Jon Favreau was born in Winchester, Massachusetts on June 2nd, 1981. Favreau went to College of the Holy Cross, just an hour from his hometown, and graduated with a Bachelors degree in Political Science in 2003. It is through John Kerry that Favreau met Barack Obama. Favreau had interned in Senator John Kerry's office during college and, after graduating, went to work for the then democratic presidential nominee John Kerry on his election campaign. Favreau met Obama at the 2004 Democratic National Convention while Kerry was running for president and Obama was running for the US Senate. Obama and Favreau met when Kerry sent Favreau to ask Obama to make a modification to his speech. After Obama won and Kerry lost the election, Favreau was hired by Obama as a speechwriter.⁹

Favreau has since written many speeches for Obama. In the course of writing his speeches, Favreau conducts major research and keeps in constant contact with Obama. Obama often refers to Favreau as his "mind reader" because they worked together so closely during the campaign and now during the presidency. Writing Obama's inaugural address was a very important speech assignment for Favreau and required a lot of research and work for him. Before setting to work on Obama's inaugural address, Favreau and Obama had an hour long meeting in which they discussed what Obama expected from it. After this initial meeting, Favreau set to work on the speech and various versions of it were emailed back and forth between Favreau and Obama at least four times. Writing the speech also required a lot of research. Favreau spent a lot of time on reading past speeches made by presidents as well as

⁹ Parker, "The New Team: Jonathan Favreau."

other information that would be useful in writing the speech. Favreau worked on the bulk of the speech in a Starbucks in Washington DC. Jonathan Favreau currently shares the record of youngest presidential speechwriter with James Fallows, Jimmy Carter's speechwriter.¹⁰

The Inauguration

Inaugurations are important events in America, and Obama's inauguration was especially important because it marked a historic event in our country. Inaugurations are week long events that include balls, parades, and dinners. Obama's inauguration theme was "Renewing America's Promise."¹¹ Obama's inauguration was the most expensive in history, at an estimated 75 million dollars. Obama made a big effort to include as many ordinary citizens in the inauguration ceremonies as possible. Many of the events had limited space, however. As a result, many people were disappointed when they could not get tickets. For the actual inauguration of Obama, 280,000 tickets were given out to the Senators and Representatives. The Senators and Representatives then gave the tickets out to citizens as they saw fit. The day of the inauguration, January 20th, 2009, included the swearing-in ceremony, the inaugural luncheon, the inaugural parade and official inaugural balls. During the swearing-in ceremony, the Chief Justice administers the oath of office and then the new president gives his inaugural address. Chief Justice John Roberts actually messed up the oath and Obama had to subtly correct him by not repeating Roberts' words exactly but by saying the correct oath. Even so, the White House lawyers felt that Obama should retake the oath the next day at the White House. During the Inaugural Luncheon, following the swearing-in ceremony, two US Senators were taken to the hospital. Senator Robert Byrd collapsed at the luncheon due to exhaustion and declining health and was rushed to the hospital but was released the next day. The late Senator Edward Kennedy

¹⁰ Pilkington, "Obama inauguration: Words of history... crafted by 27-year-old in Starbucks."

¹¹ Cooper, "Presidential Inauguration 2009 - A Guide to Inauguration Events in Washington, DC."

had a seizure during the luncheon due to a combination of his brain cancer and exhaustion from pushing himself so hard. The inaugural parade, which followed the luncheon, had to start late due to these incidents. Overall, however, the Inauguration events went relatively smoothly.¹²

Obama's inaugural audience was quite extensive. Hundreds of thousands of people attended his inaugural address, millions packed the National Mall to watch it on big screens and millions more people watched it on television or online. About 280,000 tickets were given out for the inaugural address.¹³ Estimates on how many people showed up in the National Mall in order to watch Obama's inaugural address on big screens and to experience the inaugural celebrations vary from 800,000 to 3 million people. Satellite pictures were taken of the crowds as well as video footage. Crowd specialists, who specialize in estimating crowd sizes by analyzing pictures of the crowds and equations based on the size of the available space and how much space the average person occupies. Steve Doig, a professor at Arizona State University and crowd specialist, claims that, based on his calculations, that the entire mall, packed full, could fit 3 million people. From a satellite picture taken an hour before the ceremony, Doig points out that the mall is not packed full but people are simply crowded around the television screens with large spaces in between and this is why he estimates only 800,000 people were in the National Mall.¹⁴ According to CNS News, "The British defense and security company HIS Jane's estimated 1.27 to 1.65 million people attended Obama's Inauguration, not counting those who lined up along the parade route."¹⁵ This number range is most likely more accurate than Doig's estimate of 800,000 people. Most sources agree with or have numbers that are very close to the British defense and security company's numbers. Most sources also agree that Obama's

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mills, "Satellites, balloons, and math used to count inauguration crowd."

¹⁵ Starr, "Crowd Sizes on National Mall A Matter of Media Speculation."

crowds beat the previous record, set by Lyndon B. Johnson's inaugural address, of 1.2 million people.¹⁶

For the people in the rest of the country, and the rest of the world for that matter, who could not make it to Washington D.C., they turned to the television and internet. Nielsen Media Research found that 37.8 million people watched the inaugural address on television during a seven hour period on January 20th, 2009. Obama's inaugural address came second only to Ronald Reagan's inaugural address as the most watched address on television.¹⁷ The internet also played a large role in providing the inaugural address to those who could not make it to Washington DC. Akamai Technologies Inc. deals with the web traffic of over 150 websites. They estimated that over 7.7 million people around the world watched Obama's address via live, streaming internet. Throughout the rest of the day many more people watched the address online. CNN reported that almost 27 million people watched streaming video of the inaugural address.¹⁸ If all of these figures are added up, between the people who watched in person and in the National Mall, those who watched on television and those who watched it online, roughly about 73.8 million people watched Obama's inaugural address throughout the day on January 20th, 2009. This does not account for how many people have watched or read his inaugural address since January 20th. Regardless, this is an incredible number of people who have watched Barack Obama's inaugural address.

Summary of Speech

Barack Obama started his inaugural address with the customary humble thanking of the people and acknowledgment of the previous president. He then goes on to acknowledge the crisis that America is in and attributes this to the war we are fighting overseas as well as the

¹⁶ Mills, "Satellites, balloons, and math used to count inauguration crowd."

¹⁷ Baumann, "Updated: 37.8 Mil Watch Obama Inauguration."

¹⁸ Sutter, "Online inauguration videos set records."

financial crisis we are facing. He points out several current problems, including people losing their homes and jobs, health care costing too much, schools no longer doing their jobs and our gross use of energy. He points out our problems but then makes a strong claim that we will overcome them. He hints that, by voting him president, we chose to fight and not to succumb to our problems. He claims that the country will right itself, that, if Americans fight for it, the country will be reconstructed.

Obama calls Americans back to their roots, to follow in their ancestors' footsteps. Obama's argument is that American's ancestors did not build the country by being lazy, but by working hard and making sacrifices. Obama then reminds the American people that we must work hard to rebuild our country, that we did not become the best by sitting down, but by working hard, often unacknowledged for our hard work. America is known for working hard and we must work for what we want, it will not be handed to us. Obama makes references to our ancestors, who worked hard to make America what it is today and to give us the lives we live today.¹⁹ He encourages us to continue on our ancestors' journey, to rebuild America, and to fix the problems that he previously cited. Obama acknowledges that there will be critics, but that they are incorrect in their assumptions and that our government will be righted. Obama chooses to plainly state that the government will be held accountable, that taxpayers' dollars will be put to good use and that trust will be restored in the government. Obama turns to our markets and claims that they are good, but that we did not watch them and they thus spun out of control. He claims that, in order for our markets to prosper, we must extend opportunity to every wanting person.²⁰

¹⁹ Obama, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address: The Full Text," 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Obama acknowledges the people all over the world who are watching and extends a friendly hand to them. He speaks of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan and claims that we will begin to pull out responsibly of Iraq and work for peace in Afghanistan. He then acknowledges that we do fight when it is necessary, but that we do not overly exert our power. Obama makes a veiled threat to other countries and other governments that America will fight to stay on top and in power; that terrorists will not win and they will be defeated. He makes comment on lessening the nuclear threat and our impact on the environment but that we do not back down to terrorists. Obama makes a powerful statement towards corrupt leaders: “To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.”²¹ Obama shows that America is willing to help those who ask for it and defeat those who do not.

He claims that we plan to help starving and hurting nations and that those who have too much should give to those who have too little. He pays respect to our troops, those who are fighting and those who have fallen and calls the American people to give as generously as our troops do. Obama then returns to the argument that Americans must return to the values of their forefathers; that they must remember how far we have come and continue to make great strides.²² Obama ends his speech with a reference to our fighting for our independence, that we never gave up then and we will not give up now. Obama includes a quote that he made seem like George Washington’s words but actually came from *The American Crisis* by Thomas Paine stating: “Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet

²¹ Obama, “President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address: The Full Text.”

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

[it].”²³ He ends the speech with a challenge to the American people not to give up and to fight to keep the country strong.²⁴

Basic Construction

Obama organizes the inaugural speech by first giving an overview of the problems the country faces, and then breaking those problems down into domestic problems and foreign problems. Within the breakdown of domestic problems, Obama presents the problem and then gives evidence as to how America will overcome it. Obama also includes several challenges to Americans to step up and not let these trials and tribulations overtake America. He gives evidence that our ancestors did not let problems defeat them and challenges Americans to follow their ancestors’ leads and not allow the recent difficulties that Americans are facing to defeat us now.

When addressing the foreign problems that America is facing, Obama also draws upon history as a method of persuasion. He presents the problem or potential problem posed by foreign countries or people and then challenges them to either choose the “right” way or to choose the consequences. He challenges other people and nations that America will not stand down and that America will fight for what it believes in. In transitioning back to the domestic setting of the speech, Obama draws on the American soldiers fighting overseas. He uses their involvement in both our domestic and foreign troubles in order to bring the focus of the speech back to the domestic setting. Obama ends the speech with a quote and a last challenge to the American people to stand up and fight for their country.

Obama’s use of a formal, yet plain language works greatly towards the speech’s effectiveness. Obama utilizes metaphors in the speech but he does so sparingly in order to

²³ Paine, “The American Crisis.”

²⁴ Obama, “President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address: The Full Text,” 4.

ensure that it will be understood by many. He varies his sentence lengths and structures in order to keep the flow of the speech interesting. He also uses formal language while still keeping it at a level that the average person can understand. Even the less educated of America could understand the general ideas and principles put forth by the speech. When laying out the most important problems faced by America, Obama writes: “That we are in the midst of a crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare our nation for a new age.”²⁵ This is plain enough that many can understand what he is saying and identify with these problems. Obama also utilizes some formal and lofty rhetoric stating: “The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often, the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms.”²⁶ This is a different level of language than the previous example. It is more lofty and lyrical and less plain and to the point. It requires one to think about the words and connect them to real life events. Obama utilizes both formal and lofty rhetoric as well as plain and to-the-point rhetoric. This enables the speech to achieve a sense of poetic flow at the same time allowing the average American to grasp much of the meaning behind it.

Obama uses a lot of “musts” in his speech, which gives a sense of necessity and responsibility to the listener or reader. He claims “so it *must* be with this generation of Americans” and “Starting today, we *must* pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.”²⁷ Obama suggests that there is no choice in the matter but that it is simply something we have to do. In Obama’s inaugural address, he uses the word must a

²⁵ Obama, “President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address: The Full Text.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

total of eight times.²⁸ He also uses a lot of “will” language. In his language he states that things *will* be done and they *will* happen. He gives no room for questioning, only a definite outcome to the plans that Obama has. Obama claims that these goals “*will* not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America — they *will* be met.”²⁹ Obama uses the word will a total of 24 times in his speech. This creates a lot of strong statements. He gives the illusion that what he is saying will happen and there are no other alternatives.

Obama also uses a lot of definitive statements in his speech. Whether talking about America’s past or stating what is happening in the present or what must be done in the future, Obama says things with a decisive tone and sentence structure. Obama states “This is the journey we continue today.”³⁰ The path is already set for Americans. There are no choices but to do what is required. Obama also states that “We are the keepers of this legacy.”³¹ This places a lot of accountability into the hands of Americans because to let something happen to the legacy, or to let it die, would mean America failed as a keeper. If America lets it die, they will be blamed. Through his short sentence structure, it makes his words into statements, with no room for argument.

Underlying Construction

The inaugural address is largely built on artistic proofs with only a small amount of inartistic proofs. Among the artistic proofs, identified by Aristotle, Obama primarily utilizes ethos and pathos. Obama and Favreau learned early on in the campaign that, though Obama is an amazing orator and Favreau is an amazing rhetorician, the lofty language that they were originally using did not reach as wide an audience as they wished to. Thus Obama moved to a

²⁸ Obama, “President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address: The Full Text.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

more down-to-earth style, where he spoke plainly about his views and plans instead of encasing them in flowing and flowery words. In an article written during Obama's campaign, Michael Powell, a writer for the *New York Times*, reflects on Obama's change in oratory: "The Speech is his finely polished sword, a transcendent weapon... But Mr. Obama sheaths that sword more often now. He is grounding his lofty rhetoric in the more prosaic language of white-working-class discontent, adjusting it to the less welcoming terrain of Pennsylvania. His preferred communication now is the town-hall-style meeting."³² In a more down-to-earth, or "town-hall-style" approach, Obama utilizes pathos. For middle class, working Americans, or for those listening in other countries for that matter, Obama uses an emotional appeal in order to influence and persuade his audiences. With the help of Favreau, Obama appeals to the practical knowledge and experiences of the average American instead of trying to persuade them through logic. In Obama's inaugural address, he draws on America's sense of patriotism and pride in being an American. He draws upon American's knowledge and memory of history and challenges them to not let their ancestors' hard work and sacrifices go to waste.

Obama also utilizes ethos in the speech. By the time of Obama's inauguration, Obama's credibility, or perceived credibility was incredibly high, and even after Obama took office, his (perceived) credibility stayed at an elevated level. In an opinion poll by the *Washington Post* and ABC conducted in late April 2009 the following results were found: "On whether he is "willing to listen to different points of view," Mr. Obama elevates into hyperspace, hitting 90%. Just behind is "he understands the problems of people like you," at 73%."³³ This was several months after Obama took office but people still put a lot of faith in him. With this antecedent ethos, Obama's speech held a lot of worth in the eyes of Americans. Similarly, in a poll

³² Powell, "Moving to Down-to-Earth Oratory for Working People."

³³ Henninger, "100 Days: 'Harry, I Have a Gift'."

conducted in late May 2010, almost a year and a half after Obama took office; people still believe that he has the necessary traits for a president. In a poll conducted by CNN, 65% of those polled agree that Obama has the personality and leadership qualities that a president should have.³⁴ Both of these polls give further evidence to Obama's ability to speak well and elicit trust from his audiences. Even though Obama's inaugural address itself was criticized as not reaching the height of the expectations people had for it, many people did not question whether his words were true nor whether he was trustworthy. Even now, people still feel that he has the personality and leadership abilities of a president.

Responsibility

Throughout Obama's political life he has called upon the people to be responsible. He used many of his speeches to argue that we as Americans must learn to be a responsible people, that we must work on both individual and mutual responsibility. Derek Sweet and Margret McCue-Enser studied Obama's use of constructing a responsible people in an article they wrote for *Communication Studies*. They studied eight different speeches made by Obama and found that he utilized this argument for individual and mutual responsibility frequently.³⁵ They found that "Obama's rhetoric offers a reconfiguration of responsibility that intertwines the personal and the communal and calls for each individual to examine one's actions as situated within, and constitutive of, a broader community. And while individuals certainly have choices to make within their own lives, those choices always possess the potential to impact the greater community."³⁶ Throughout Obama's use of epideictic rhetoric, He calls on American's to be

³⁴ CNN, "President Obama and the Obama Administration."

³⁵ Sweet and McCue-Enser, "Constituting 'the People' as Rhetorical Interruption: Barack Obama and the Unfinished Hopes of an Imperfect People," 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

responsible, not to shirk their responsibilities but to rise to the occasions and choose to be responsible, for the good of themselves and the community as a whole.

In another paper written for *American Behavioral Scientist*, the authors look at Obama's use of what they call a "pragmatic moral voice."³⁷ The authors argue that this use of a pragmatic moral voice helped Obama in his campaign and was the cornerstone on which he built his presidential persona. The authors state that "Barack Obama's pragmatic moral voice is unique for its synthesis of a commonsense, moral voice with pragmatic rhetorical practice... "pragmatism" invents methods for negotiating uncertainty, generating knowledge based upon human interest, expressing individualism (pluralism), and building communities... Its fifth tenet is the means for achieving all of these that derives from rhetoric."³⁸ Whether it is called a pragmatic moral voice or a call for responsibility, Obama utilized a need for individual as well as communal responsibility throughout his rhetoric.

Within Obama's inaugural address, there is an overall ideology of "responsibility." Americans have a responsibility to act and to follow the path that is laid out in front of them. They have a responsibility to themselves, to their country, and to the rest of the world. Through Obama's "must" and "will" language, he makes this responsibility quite clear. He states that Americans have a responsibility to their ancestors, whose blood and sweat this country was built upon. He claims that Americans' ancestors did not shy away from that responsibility and neither shall their descendents today. He calls upon Americans to work hard to rebuild America and not to shy away from responsibility. Obama points out that the American government and financial sector will take responsibility for its actions and that poor choices and misused funds will be a

³⁷ Jenkins and Cos, "A Time for Change and a Candidate's Voice: Pragmatism and the Rhetoric of Inclusion in Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign," 185.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

thing of the past. Responsibility sits on the government as well as its people. In such a difficult time, responsibility is important.

Obama's inaugural address attended to many events that are happening both domestically and abroad. His words were meant to touch the hearts of Americans and to warn and strengthen those countries and leaders outside of the US. Obama begins his inaugural address by acknowledging the difficulties that were and still are currently facing the US. Specifically he speaks of the economic crisis and how it can be blamed on the "greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age."³⁹ Obama also claims that "What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility..."⁴⁰ Obama specifically states that the failure of the US's economy is a result of irresponsibility and that in order to fix America, it must practice responsibility.

The ideology of responsibility that Obama puts forth in his inaugural address functioned fairly well in his speech. It was necessary to rely on an ideology of responsibility in order to address the American people, and those around the world. There are difficulties facing Americans that must be faced head on and not swept under the rug or left with the assumption that someone else will deal with it. America faces a lot of difficulties and with these difficulties come hard times. The only way to get through hard times is to work just as hard to get out of them. Americans especially are used to a life of leisure and comfort. America is a highly consumerist society and is used to luxury. With the difficulties that are facing the world and America, excessive luxury is not something that it can afford. Practicality must prevail and responsibility for their wrongs and failures is a must. Obama points out all of this in his speech

³⁹ Obama, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address: The Full Text," 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

and tells America what is required of it. He states it fairly, plainly and honestly. Obama's speech was not well received by all and many believe that it did not live up to its hype. The ideology of responsibility was felt by some, however. *The New York Times* reported a spike in Peace Corps applications two days after Obama gave his inaugural address as Americans heard his call for responsibility and service.⁴¹ More recently, 40 billionaires have pledged to give at least 50% of their wealth to charities. This trend was started by Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who estimate that their efforts have the potential of generating over 600 billion dollars in charitable giving.⁴² Obama's message of responsibility was certainly heard by most Americans and they are continuing to work towards a better America.

Obama's ideology of responsibility is significant for future inaugural addresses as well as for rhetorical theory. Obama called upon others to step up to the plate. Most people look to other people and to their government to solve all of their problems without taking responsibility for it themselves. In order to dig America out of its hole and help it to stay as the top power in the world, all of its citizens must take responsibility for their actions. When faced with similar situations, other presidents and political leaders can draw upon this ideology of responsibility in order to excite its audience and instill in them a sense of purpose.

Delivery of Speech

Obama delivered his inaugural address with the help of a teleprompter. With such an important speech and such a busy man, the teleprompter enabled him to speak with an ease and flow, never worrying that he might forget a line. Utilizing a teleprompter comes with its risks, however. One must be able to speak without sounding too rehearsed and without adding awkward pauses made by trying to read the teleprompter and not by the natural rhythm of the

⁴¹ Pope, "Experienced, Eager to Serve, Will Travel."

⁴² Blankinship, "40 Billionaires Pledge to Donate Half Their Wealth."

speech. Obama did not run into that problem. As we saw throughout his campaign, Obama speaks well and has little trouble with rhetoric. Through his ability to make his speeches sound easy and unrehearsed; Obama was able to elicit a sense of trust from the American people. Obama spoke in a cool and collected manner and accurately got his points across during his inaugural address. It was not a heated or highly charged address because that was not what the country or world needed. Obama and Favreau recognized that an inaugural address is not the time for such speeches and thus kept it to the timbre that inaugurals should be kept at. Among such an already highly charged world full of heated debates and problems, Obama needed to provide a cool and collected inaugural address. An incredibly charged and demanding address would have only heightened the problems that the United States continues to face, both domestically and internationally. Obama has proven to surround himself with great minds and advisors and through them Obama can continue to work to help the country and the world. His inaugural address, however, was not the vehicle in which this needed to be done.

Many expected an amazing and earth shattering inaugural address from Obama but the expectations, given Obama's proven abilities and the great historic significance the event held, were too high for the inaugural address to meet. No matter what Obama produced as his inaugural address, there would always have been people who felt that it fell short. When expectations are vaulted to such a level, it is nearly impossible for any human man to reach them. Despite the lack of pizzazz that most were expecting, Obama's inaugural address accurately lived up to his reputation as a great orator and he gave a successful speech on January 20, 2009.

Reaction

In the hours and days following Obama's historic inaugural address there was much reaction to the speech. The address had its hailers and critics alike, both domestically and around

the world. Internationally, Obama's election into office held great interest for many countries. Many were happy to see a Democrat back in office, and furthermore, a black Democrat. Many international papers wrote of their hopes for the new regime, especially regarding issues that most effected them. France's newspaper *Le Figaro* spoke of their hopes that Obama will work to strengthen America's allegiance with Europe. Israel's oldest daily newspaper, *Ha'aretz* gave caution to Israel's love for power, that "Israel should internalize Obama's call for restraint as an attribute of security."⁴³ The *Joong Ang Daily* of Korea claimed that it understood that Obama must prioritize the U.S.'s interests but that Obama must work to ensure that America and the world prospers in peace. *The Moscow Times* in Russia wrote of their hopes for better U.S.-Russian relations and that the best way for that is for Russia to actively help resolve problems that are seen as a priority to the U.S. And finally, *The Middle East Times* weighed in on Obama's inaugural address. They make a biblical analogy that new wine should always be kept in new bottles and that "the new wine, or spirit, of Obama's policies to reduce tensions around the world has been entrusted to an exceptionally old-fashioned national security team, particularly with regards to the Middle East."⁴⁴ Many countries were anxious to see what Obama had to say on January 20, 2009 and how his new policies would affect them.

Domestically, Americans had a much higher stake in what Obama had to say at his inauguration and how it would foreshadow the next four years. Many felt that it provided the necessary amounts of hope and promises for a better future. *The New York Times* stated that, though "the speech was not programmatic, nor was it filled with as much soaring language as F.D.R.'s first Inaugural Address or John Kennedy's only one. But it left no doubt how Mr. Obama sees the nation's problems and how he intends to fix them and, unlike Mr. Bush, the

⁴³ Swaine, "Barack Obama's inauguration: Reaction from the world's media."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

necessary sacrifices he will ask of all Americans.”⁴⁵ *The Washington Post* approved of Obama’s sober acknowledgment of all the problems that America faces combined with his complete assurance that they will be resolved.⁴⁶ *The Times* spoke honestly of Obama’s Inaugural Address, stating that the address faced soaring expectations and did not meet them but that it “was still a powerful speech, delivered at a moment in American history when every word could be laden with meaning, and every word was.”⁴⁷ We do not yet know which phrases from the speech will join those of Roosevelt and Kennedy, to be remembered over the ages, but we do know that Obama provided a great Inaugural Address, even if it did not or could not reach the expectations that came before it.

Conclusion

Obama’s inaugural address, said by Obama and written by Jon Favreau, was given at the Washington Mall on a Tuesday in the freezing cold. It was meant to outline his presidency and the goals he has. His address utilized plain language but with a touch of eloquence. He spoke in terms that even the less educated could understand and he addressed those around the world as well as those in the US. Obama’s address was well received by some and criticized by others. His address was preceded by a lot of hype and high expectations that leaves some to wonder if those expectations could have been met. Obama and Favreau produced a great speech and the ideology of responsibility was well integrated into the speech. The ideology of responsibility was a necessary idea in these tough times. Obama is a wonderful orator and spoke with confidence and reassurance. President Barack Obama continues to utilize his oratorical abilities when giving speeches and we still have a lot to look forward to in his presidency.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

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