

## Who Is Inspiring Obama?

*The publisher of the Milestone Documents book series chooses the five most important inaugural addresses.*

January 5, 2009 (DALLAS) -- President-elect Barack Obama often cites past presidents as a source of guidance and inspiration. So from whose inaugural address is he taking cues as he prepares for his January 20th address? Neil Schlager, publisher of the award-winning reference book *Milestone Documents in American History* and the soon-to-be-released *Milestone Documents of American Leaders*, says that while the obvious modern choice is John F. Kennedy's hope-filled 1963 address, we can expect to hear echoes from a variety of other great inaugural addresses.

"Everyone wants to be Kennedy on inauguration day. His address is really the standard by which all modern political speeches are measured," says Schlager. "But history is filled with poignant, gripping, and encouraging addresses. I think President-elect Obama's reading is likely taking him back to 1789, when George Washington took office."

As Obama puts the final touches on his address, Schlager thinks he'll turn to these five inaugural addresses—history's most important—for pointers on...

- **Humility:** George Washington's first inaugural address (1789). With the country in post-Revolution chaos, Washington is called out of retirement by friends and colleagues and becomes the unanimous choice as the country's first president. He asks his fellow citizens to excuse errors due to his "incapacity as well as disinclination for the weighty and untried cares before me."
- **Healing:** Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural address (1801). Given after a bitter campaign against President John Adams, Jefferson's address calls for unity rather than retaliation against his opponents—a change in direction from the previous administration. He pledges to allow dissenting voices and reminds them of their common ground: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."
- **Compassion:** Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address (1865). At a mere 703 words, Lincoln's second inaugural address defines the meaning of the Civil War and approaches the task of Reconstruction "with malice toward none; with charity for all." Lincoln appeals to his fellow citizens "to bind up the nation's wounds," thus adopting a generous tone in an address now considered to be one of the fundamental documents in American history.
- **Confidence:** Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address (1933). With the United States in the midst of the Great Depression and the American economy hitting rock bottom the very month Roosevelt took office, Roosevelt's first inaugural address takes a markedly different tone than his predecessor Herbert Hoover's. Roosevelt takes the business community to task for incompetent and unethical practices that led to economic disaster. While he emphasizes that "the people of the United States have not failed," he assumes the role of the leader they elected to restore a sense of "discipline and direction."
- **Inspiration:** Kennedy's inaugural address (1961). In his brief address, Kennedy succinctly calls upon Americans to help achieve the New Frontier—a metaphor for Americans' "unfulfilled hopes

and dreams" that Kennedy turned into a wide-ranging domestic program—through sacrifice and service and to take up the "burdens" of freedom.

During the month of January, MilestoneDocuments.com is featuring the full text of all five addresses, as well as in-depth analytical articles written by prominent historians. In addition, visitors will soon be able to read expert analysis of Barack Obama's inaugural address.

Based on content from Schlager Group's acclaimed reference series, *MilestoneDocuments.com* assembles experts to comment on and explore the primary source documents that shaped history. Its unique approach pairs riveting, readable analysis with the original documents, guiding students, teachers, and historians to a greater understanding of classic and contemporary works. It also features a lively blog by top historians and a free e-newsletter for history teachers.