

INAUGURATION 2009

Big day for U.S.

Barack Obama makes history



Associated Press photos

President Barack Obama delivers his inaugural address Tuesday at the U.S. Capitol in Washington. **Top right:** President Obama and his wife, Michelle, dance together at the Obama Home States Inaugural Ball in Washington.

The 44th president takes his place

By JENNIFER LOVEN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It was a moment unlike any other in the life of America. A jubilant crowd of more than a million, stood for hours in frigid temperatures Tuesday to witness a young black man with a foreign-sounding name take command of a nation founded by slaveholders. The scene was watched in fascination by millions more — maybe billions — around the world.

Barack Obama took the oath of office and became the first black president sounding inspirational themes, warning foreign foes and hearing waves of cheers — just like every president before him.

"We gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord," the nation's 44th president said.

He had a message for the world: "We are ready to lead once more."

Meaning that he, the young African-American, was ready to lead.

Obama didn't forget he was black. "This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed," he said, "why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent Mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath."

No one blinked. That was that. The presidency passed to black Democrat Obama from white Republican George W. Bush at the stroke of noon, marking one of democracy's greatest gifts: the peaceful transfer of power.

It was a stark transfer all the same. In one of the new administration's first acts, Obama ordered federal agencies to halt all pending regulations until further review — this after Bush's final weeks raised heated debate over rushing new rules into effect on the way out the door.

And even though new White House aides struggled to find offices and work intercoms, an overhauled www.whitehouse.gov Web site was running under Obama's banner within minutes of his swearing-in. "Change has come to America," he declared.



Associated Press

This nine-picture combination shows people around the country and around the world reacting as they watch President Barack Obama's televised inauguration. Pictured are: top row from left, a man in Jackson, Miss.; a woman in Los Angeles; a woman in Philadelphia; second row, a woman in Oakland, Calif.; a girl in Midland, Texas; a man in Philadelphia; third row, a woman in Chicago; a woman in Seattle; a man in Baghdad.

Obama plunges into his new job in earnest today after capping inaugural festivities at a national prayer service in the morning, meeting with his economic team and Iraq advisers and welcoming a stream of public visitors into the White House while Congress gives his economic revival plan a going-over and takes up the nomination of Hillary Rodham Clinton to be secretary of state. Her confirmation has been held up for now by Republican concern over the foundation fundraising of her hus-

band, the former president.

The new president had been buoyant and relaxed through the three days of pre-inaugural festivities. But he seemed somber as he stood on the Capitol steps, placed his left hand on the Bible used by Abraham Lincoln and repeated the inaugural oath "to preserve, protect and defend" a Constitution that originally defined blacks as three-fifths of a person. A deafening cheer went up.

"What is required of us now is a new era

of responsibility — a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly," Obama said. "This is the price and the promise of citizenship."

It was a day of high spirits — jarred by sudden concern about the health of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. The legendary Democrat, suffering from brain cancer, and was rushed from a Capitol luncheon in Obama's honor to a hospital. "My prayers are with him and his family," Obama said. Later, fellow Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts said Kennedy was laughing and joking at the hospital and itching to get back to work.

On the inaugural parade route, Obama and his wife, Michelle, twice climbed out of the heavily armored presidential limousine and walked a few blocks along famed Pennsylvania Avenue, waving to adoring crowds under the watchful eyes of security agents.

Obama wove a thread of personal responsibility and accountability through his inaugural address, an 18-minute sermon on civic duty. A liberal Democrat proposing billions of dollars in new spending, Obama nonetheless spoke of the limits of government.

"It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours," he said. "It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate."

Obama's 10-year-old daughter, Malia, aimed a camera at her father as he spoke. Michelle leaned onto the edge of her seat, body tensed and brow knitted.

"Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and begin again the work of remaking America," Obama said.

More inspirational than prescriptive, Obama's inaugural address only glancingly mentioned a series of promises from his campaign: to get the U.S. out of Iraq, stabilize Afghanistan, create jobs, "restore science to its rightful place," boost the use of alternative energy, address climate change, transform schools, manage government spending wisely and oversee a more bipartisan, less-divisive approach to policymaking.

To a world eager for his leadership to replace Bush's, Obama had become words: "We are ready to lead once more."