

BARACK OBAMA



THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS

2009

BARACK OBAMA
THE
INAUGURAL
ADDRESS
2009

Together with
Abraham Lincoln's
FIRST AND SECOND
INAUGURAL ADDRESSES
and
THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS
and
Ralph Waldo Emerson's
SELF-RELIANCE



PENGUIN BOOKS

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THE
INAUGURAL
ADDRESS
2009

PREFACE

To commemorate the historic inauguration of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States, Penguin presents a keepsake edition of his 2009 inaugural address together with writings by two great American thinkers and writers whose words have influenced and inspired Obama politically, philosophically, and personally: Abraham Lincoln and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Barack Obama took the oath of office on January 20, 2009, in the bicentennial year of Lincoln's birth, under the theme "A New Birth of Freedom," a phrase drawn directly from the Gettysburg Address. With Lincoln's wartime address and his first and second inaugural speeches we reflect on the nation's history and progress from Lincoln's political commitment to equality to Obama's

promise of change. Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance," a cornerstone of American philosophy, and one of Obama's favorite works, calls for our trust in individual integrity, rather than in materialism and conformity. Together these writings embody the American values and ideals that Barack Obama reminded us on election night we all share: "self-reliance, individual liberty, and national unity."

For each generation, there are historic moments and hopeful words that carry us forward in celebration or through crisis. In the tradition of the history of Penguin Classics, we publish this book in honor of our enduring legacy of language, whose capacity to inspire, strengthen, and unite us is eternal.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

The first and second inaugural addresses and the Gettysburg Address, by Abraham Lincoln, are reprinted from *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (Penguin Classics, 2009), edited with an introduction by Andrew Delbanco. “Self-Reliance,” by Ralph Waldo Emerson, is reprinted in its entirety from *Nature and Selected Essays* by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Penguin Classics, 2003), edited with an introduction by Larzer Ziff.

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BARACK OBAMA
INAUGURAL ADDRESS



JANUARY 20, 2009
WASHINGTON, D.C.

My fellow citizens:

I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. 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. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of 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 the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land, a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America—they will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of shortcuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted—for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk takers, the doers, the makers of things—some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor—who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth.

For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sanh.

Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions—that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick our-

selves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. And we will act, not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. All this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the

stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works—whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account—to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day—because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.

Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control—the nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity, on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart—not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.