

Obama Criticizes America's Founders at His New Presidential Center

Former President Barack Obama opened the \$850 million Barack Obama Presidential Center in Chicago on Thursday with a dedication ceremony attended by three former presidents and a roster of celebrities, delivering remarks that criticized the nation's Founders for falling short of America's founding ideals.

"In forming our union, the founders fell terribly short of the Declaration's promise, leaving slavery intact, allowing states to restrict the franchise to white men who owned property," Obama said at the ceremony in Jackson Park on Chicago's South Side.

The remarks came 16 days before the United States marks its 250th anniversary on July 4.

Obama also acknowledged the durability of the American experiment. "The success of this experiment was never a given," he said, adding that the Founders "did have the foresight, the genius, to provide us with a framework that allows each generation to make our union more perfect."



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Citing the upcoming anniversary, Obama said the nation's founders envisioned a country with "no kings or lords, no serfs or subjects, but only citizens, each of us free to pursue our own version of happiness and able to determine our collective fate through an elected representative government."

Obama used the occasion to warn against what he described as

threats to democratic institutions. “No one is above the law or beneath its protections,” he said, invoking checks and balances, an independent judiciary, and a free press as foundational values. He cautioned that when citizens “lose faith in each other” and stop believing voting matters, “we open the door to the most ruthless, or the most careless, or the most fearful among us.”

The ceremony drew former Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Joe Biden, along with former first lady Michelle Obama, former Vice President Kamala Harris, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, and former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Celebrities in attendance included Oprah Winfrey and Steven Spielberg. Performers included Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Wonder, Christina Aguilera, and U2’s Bono and the Edge.

Michelle Obama also addressed the crowd, saying a lasting legacy is measured not by wealth or recognition but by “the difference we make in one another’s lives.”

The 19-acre campus includes a museum with digital exhibits on Obama’s presidency, a branch of Chicago’s public library, a basketball court, and green spaces. Featured artifacts include a print of the Declaration of Independence, a pen used by Frederick Douglass, Lincoln’s Bible, and a pamphlet by civil rights journalist Ida B. Wells.

Obama closed his remarks with a call for cross-partisan unity, citing Republicans John McCain and Mitt Romney as holding the same core democratic values as he did during his presidency.

The center opens to the general public Friday on Juneteenth, with a free open house running through the weekend. The project took roughly a decade to complete at a cost of approximately \$850 million.

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