

Realizing the Dream:

The Inauguration of President Barack H. Obama



Dr. Ruth P. Wilson (right), with family members Dr. Cheryl Scott, Aliko Carter, and Ajayi Scott-Robinson

Forty-five years after Dr. Martin Luther King's historic "I Have a Dream" speech, the nation nominated, elected and inaugurated its first African-American President. The media hailed Obama's election and inauguration as a moment of historical importance to the people of the United States of America. On January 14, 2009, Dr. Wilson, a social anthropologist and professor at San José State University, traveled to the District of Columbia to observe, participate, discuss, and record events surrounding the inauguration. This exhibit represents a conscious effort to share her observations and experiences with the public.

The inauguration of an American President is a major national rite of passage. It signals a change of leadership for our nation, and often a change in policies that reverberates across the nation and all over the world. Thousands of formal and informal gatherings engage the millions of visitors who arrive in the Washington area during the weeks before and after the official inauguration. The most publicly televised events (the swearing in ceremony, the parade, and the inaugural ball) represent the tip of the iceberg. Dr. Wilson's lens focused on events the television cameras did not capture.

Items in the Exhibit

Twenty photographs on the left and right portray formal and informal, public and private, national and international gatherings that occurred: a luncheon attended by former Peace Corps Volunteers and their mentor; two historical sites that represent the legacy of African Americans who have served the Executive Office; a rare glimpse of celebrities attending the Realizing the Dream Awards Ceremonies and the African American Church Inaugural Ball, both of which were held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, D. C.; the crowds at the first Inaugural Concert held on the Mall near the Lincoln Memorial, and the press of ticket holders who stood for five hours in the cold to clear security and eye witness the swearing in ceremony (From the collection of Dr. Ruth Wilson and Miss Ajayi Scott-Robinson).

Items in the three glass cases in front of this section are special collections. **The center case** contains newspapers heralding Obama's nomination as the Democratic National Convention in August 2008, his successful election in November 4, 2008, and some of the events and ceremonies surrounding his Inauguration, January 20, 2009 (Collection courtesy of Drs. Steven Millner, Ruth P. Wilson, and Magdalena Barrera). **The left case** displays official documents: invitations to the inauguration, the inaugural program, and inaugural tickets to the Capitol's secured area for invited guests. (Collection courtesy of Drs. Steven Robinson, Cheryl Scott, and Ruth Wilson. Decorative t-shirts dominate the memorabilia displayed in **the glass case on the right**, along with Metro transit tickets and a bookmark bearing Obama's image. These items represent the thousands of official and non-official souvenirs sold by vendors throughout Washington, D.C. area (Collection courtesy of the Scott-Robinson Family and Dr. Ruth Wilson).