

A **CROWD** of students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered at **Goshen College (IN)** to watch Barack Obama take the oath of office on Jan. 20, 2009.



gathering for the **INAUGURAL**

Jodi H. Beyeler

Either on the Mall or in the Auditorium, campuses watch the peaceful transfer of power.

by Mimi Wiggins Perreault

Juliana Wilhoit stood near the National Air and Space Museum on the National Mall looking over the crowds of people who had gathered since 4 a.m., and realized the bond she shared with those present. It was the beginning of a change.

"History was made," Wilhoit, 20, a sophomore at **Wheaton College (IL)**, said with excitement. "And, hey, I was one of those people involved."

Wilhoit is president of the Wheaton College chapter of College Democrats, and avidly campaigned for President Barack Obama on her campus, in Racine and Marysville, Wis., and even made it to Grant Park in Chicago on

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James Brenneman, Ph.D. president, **Goshen College (IN)**

election night, where Obama gave his acceptance speech as the next president of the United States. She said while this was her first time to vote in a national election, her involvement made her feel like her vote counted. She said her reasons for being an Obama supporter were very much in line with her Christian faith.

"The Democratic Party has a platform of providing justice," she said. "In a lot of ways, I feel like the church has just failed. We need change within the church. It's a people-centered party."

Wilhoit flew in from Chicago for the inaugural festivities on Sunday morning, attended the We Are One concert that evening and even made it to one of the

inaugural balls at George Washington University the evening after the ceremony. She said she could not think of any place she would have rather been that weekend.

"We all worked so hard to get there," she said. "The number of people was amazing."

President Obama took the oath of office in a ceremony flanked by prayer, an invocation by Saddleback Church's Rick Warren that included the Lord's Prayer and a benediction by Rev. Joseph Lowery, who acknowledged the significance of Obama's presidency in relation to the dreams of Martin Luther King, Jr. Wilhoit said these references to faith made the ceremony even more meaningful.

Also in the crowd was Washington Journalism Center student Zachary Klemme, 20, a student from **Asbury College (KY)**, who said he was touched by the experience even though he did not vote for Obama.

"The opportunity to experience this event with so many people in the city that were in a celebratory mood and who were so genuinely excited about the event was what made it great to be with all three or four million people," Klemme said. "I will remember how people pushed aside the complicating circumstances of the event—the cold, the sheer number of people who were in the city, the extra police and security personnel to deal with, traffic issues and so on—to remain focused on the event itself. Perseverance, really, in a way."

Watching Back Home

While preparing to watch back home in Indiana, **Goshen College (IN)** President James Brenneman released a statement before a two-hour long community viewing party where more than 400 watched in the campus's Umble Center on a movie theater-sized screen.



Danika Heatherly

"One of the most amazing, even miraculous, signs of American democracy at its best is the peaceful transition of power we are about to witness," Brenneman said. "No matter who you voted for, that act of relinquishment by one president to another, especially by a political adversary, is truly awe-inspiring."

Brenneman, his son Quinn and a crowd of students and faculty attended the event. Two professors previewed the event with scholarly information about its historical and political significance, and the event concluded with commentary by two professors about what was said during the inauguration ceremony, including an acknowledgement to Arizona Sen. John McCain for his concession speech.

Goshen was one of several CCCU institutions that had inauguration viewing parties, many of which corresponded with festivities celebrating the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Buck James

TOP: WHITWORTH STUDENTS traveled to the nation's capital to stand among the crowds as Obama was sworn into office. **BOTTOM: APPROXIMATELY 1.5 MILLION** people on the National Mall witnessed the inauguration of the nation's first African-American president.



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Zach Klemme, Junior, **Asbury College (KY)**

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Junior Jacob Schlabach from St. Paul, Minn., attended the Goshen gathering and reflected on Obama’s inaugural address.

“Did Obama give me hope? Yes, though not in the way that may have been expected,” Schlabach said. “I think his somber, realistic tone in regards to the challenges that our nation, and our world, face was a welcomed change for politics.”

Schlabach did vote for Obama, but said the experience of watching with a group of people who did not necessarily support Obama during the election was just as meaningful to him.

“At one point, at the beginning of the inauguration, one of the organizers of the school event tried to insight a cheer of ‘yes, we can.’ The response was lackluster. Everyone who was there was there to see Obama become president, yet it seemed to me that the people present had a feeling that the political maneuvering and partisan inspiration should go on hold for a time.”

Documenting the Experience

Students who took part in Media Impact in N.Y. and D.C., **Whitworth University’s (WA)** January term study program, came to Washington, D.C. to attend the inauguration and meet with leaders from the media to talk about contemporary American society.

Whitworth professor James McPherson led the group of nine students attending the program. The students created a blog to log the events of their trip (<http://jmc346.blogspot.com>), and four students decided to conduct a film project to document the



Buck James

A CROWD WAITS on E Street to get past a security check point in an attempt to get onto the Inaugural Parade Route.

perspective of people from all 50 states. While they came up a few states short, the video collection presented a diverse array of perspectives from the event. McPherson acknowledged that the experience was a teachable moment for his students.

“Students learned some interesting lessons about fairness (comparing people who got good seats because of whom they knew to people who had worked on the campaign but couldn’t get tickets), about the peaceful transfer of power that some nations find so amazing on our part and especially about how a key event—or person—can, for better or worse, bring people together,” he said. “(In the midst of the) massive crowd and the cold, an Iranian immigrant sat near me and began softly singing along with the national anthem,” he said. “My wife and I joined in, me with tears in my eyes.”

At the end, the crowds made their way off of the National Mall and back into the streets, and Wilhoit returned to her campus to lead the Wheaton College Democrats and Students for Change, a new organization born out of the election campaign. While her thoughts about the Obama administration are positive, she recognizes the importance of the people behind the president.

“The government can’t do everything; he’s recognized and enabled people,” she said. “Now we have to keep up our end of the work.” **A**

Mimi Wiggins Perreault lives in downtown Washington, D.C. with her husband Greg. She attended the **Washington Journalism Center** in the summer of 2004, and graduated from **Baylor University (TX)** with a bachelor of arts in journalism in 2005.