

Obama library dedication turns presidency of war, Wall Street bailouts into Democratic Camelot

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The opening of the Obama Presidential Center on Chicago's South Side was an exercise in political myth-making. The Democratic Party, the Democratic-aligned media, business figures and an assortment of entertainment celebrities assembled Thursday to present the Obama presidency as an American Camelot. Barack and Michelle Obama were cast as the protagonists of a lost age of democratic grace, reason and moral purpose, interrupted by the aberration of Trump.

The \$850 million complex, dominated by a massive stone tower that has been derided as an "Obamalisk," was dedicated from a stage occupied by former presidents and first ladies, before an invited audience featuring a good number of multi-millionaires. For all the rhetoric about democracy and equality, the real social base of the Democratic Party was reflected in the highly privileged and wealthy audience seated before the main stage, while the rabble was relegated to Midway Plaisance Park to watch from the grass.

In attendance were former presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Joe Biden, along with Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush and Jill Biden. The presence of Bush, the war criminal responsible for the invasion of Iraq, who came to power through the theft of the 2000 election, underscored the fundamental unity of the two parties of American imperialism.

The Democratic Party establishment was represented by figures from every wing of the party: House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, former Vice President and 2024 presidential candidate Kamala Harris, Illinois U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson and former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Also present was Michigan U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib, a member of the Democratic Socialists of

America, who joined in honoring Obama, the president who continued Bush's "War on Terror" and institutionalized drone assassinations of so-called "enemy combatants," including US citizens.

The list of foreign dignitaries included former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, former Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel and former Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj. Also in attendance were Tom Hanks, David Letterman, Stephen Colbert, Bono and the Edge of U2, Christina Aguilera, Marc Anthony, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, Tems and Eddie Vedder.

The ceremony lasted more than three hours and combined militarism, celebrity worship and nationalist pageantry, overlain with identity and racial politics. Following a benediction, the Illinois National Guard presented the colors, and Jennifer Hudson sang the national anthem. This was followed by a promotional film narrated by Obama, filled with the hollow slogans of his 2008 campaign, including "Yes, we can" and calls to "imagine your impact."

That Valerie Jarrett, chief executive officer of the Obama Foundation, delivered the first speech was politically significant. Jarrett, a longtime Obama associate, is representative of the reactionary social layer elevated through the Democratic Party and identity politics: wealthy, corporate-connected, deeply embedded in Chicago's political machine and hostile to the working class.

Before serving as Obama's senior adviser from 2009 to 2017, Jarrett was CEO of the Habitat Company, a major Chicago real estate firm that managed public housing developments, including Grove Parc Plaza, where poor residents lived in conditions marked by decay, vermin and neglect. Her career has included leading positions on

corporate, financial, university and transit boards. Less than three weeks after the murder of George Floyd, amid mass protests against police violence, Jarrett rejected calls to defund the police and suggested that more money was needed for law enforcement.

The central political purpose of the ceremony was expressed in the speeches of Michelle and Barack Obama. Michelle Obama's remarks are already being hailed by the media as "historic." But like the rest of the event, they were aimed at rewriting the Obama years as a kind of Garden of Eden, ignoring the social devastation, war, police violence and corporate plunder that defined the period.

Michelle Obama praised her husband's "dazzling brilliance" and "unshakable moral fiber," declaring that he had made the country proud by "rescuing our economy, expanding healthcare, ending a war, ordering the Bin Laden raid, saving the auto industry, winning a peace prize, keeping us safe from Ebola, regulating the banks, standing up for marriage equality, listening to science, and comforting an entire nation in the face of unspeakable tragedies."

Every phrase in this litany is false. "Rescuing our economy" refers to the bailout of Wall Street following the financial crash of 2008, which was initiated under Bush and expanded under Obama. Trillions of dollars in loans, guarantees and cash handouts were funneled to the banks, while millions of workers lost their homes. Not a single major Wall Street executive was prosecuted. When measures were proposed to limit executive pay at bailed-out firms, Obama intervened on behalf of the financial aristocracy. During the Obama presidency, the number of American billionaires rose from 359 to 565, a 57 percent increase.

"Expanding healthcare" refers to the passage of the Affordable Care Act, a program modeled on Romneycare that strengthened the domination of the insurance companies and funneled billions in public subsidies to the private healthcare industry.

"Ending a war" is perhaps the most grotesque claim of all. Obama expanded the war in Afghanistan, continued the occupation of Iraq, oversaw drone assassinations across the Middle East and Africa, initiated the CIA's Operation Timber Sycamore in Syria and backed the US-NATO war in Libya, which destroyed the country and helped reintroduce open slave markets in North Africa.

The "saving" of the auto industry meant the use of federal bailout funds to impose a historic attack on autoworkers. In the 2009 managed bankruptcies of

General Motors and Chrysler, tens of thousands of jobs were destroyed, plants were closed, new-hires' wages were cut in half, strikes were banned for six years and the United Auto Workers bureaucracy was handed a direct financial stake in the "restructuring" through its control of the VEBA retiree healthcare trust.

Barack Obama's own speech was no less reactionary. He preached "bipartisanship" and the "shared values" of the two parties of big business and war, declaring that a "sense of duty and honor" was not Republican or Democratic but "American," and that every president on stage had tried to uphold these values. He explicitly included John McCain and Mitt Romney in this pantheon.

This was the political essence of the ceremony. Obama presents Trump as an interloper, a temporary departure from the "arc" of American democracy. In reality, the fascist Trump embodies the financial oligarchy that rules the US. He is the product of the very social order Obama rescued after the 2008 financial crash.

Obama's reference to the United States as an "undeniable force for good in the world" was the greatest lie of all. In fact, US imperialism is the undeniable center of global reaction, responsible for countless wars, occupations, sanctions, coups, assassinations and, more recently, outright genocide by its Israeli attack dog in Gaza.

The Obama Presidential Center is a monument to hypocrisy. Its purpose is to provide the Democratic Party with a usable myth as it seeks to contain popular hatred of Trump while blocking any independent movement of the working class.



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