

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks at the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina

January 19, 2025

The First Lady. Thank you. Aren't they amazing?

So it's so good to be back in South Carolina today, where the entire Biden family always feels at home.

Joe and I have always been drawn to you, South Carolina. You met us with kindness and incredible warmth here. We've found friends and mentors in your cities and your towns. We've found respite on your shores.

In 2015, when we lost our son Beau to cancer, Joe and I brought our family to the Lowcountry to find peace. You helped us heal when we had reached life's lowest lows. And it's also here, in 2020, where you gave us wings.

After healing us, you believed in Joe's courage and conviction to heal our Nation. South Carolina made sure that Joe became the 46th President of the United States.

Restoring the soul of the Nation was never just a sound bite for Joe. It was his drumbeat, lifting our country out of a pandemic, setting our economy on solid ground, and fortifying our hope for what is possible. And he—we couldn't have done it without you.

So here we are in the final moments of this extraordinary journey at our last event as your President and First Lady. And Joe and I wanted to be with you, our South Carolina family.

You've seen us through our proudest mountain time moments and helped us achieve them, and you've been through [by; White House correction] our side through the hard times and everything in between.

Thank you for opening your arms to us. Thank you for carrying us forward with kindness. With our whole hearts, we love you, South Carolina.

Audience members. We love you!

The First Lady. So now let's hear from this wonderful choir, the Voices of Liberation.

Thank you, South Carolina. Thank you.

[At this point, the program continued with a choral performance. Then, Representative James E. Clyburn made remarks, concluding as follows.]

Rep. Clyburn. Thank you. Now, Mr. President, I've got a little gift here for you. That's the way we do it down here in the Lowcountry.

The President. You already gave me a gift. *[Laughter]*

Rep. Clyburn. No, no, that was an investment. *[Laughter]* That was an investment.

Mr. President, I got a little gift for you here. Now, this gift—I'm going to tell you a little bit about it—is a profound reflection of our Nation's history, acknowledging both the tragedy of oppression and the enduring triumphant spirit of resilience and achievement.

It celebrates an extraordinary contributions of African Americans, honoring the past while embracing the promise of a brighter future, which your Presidency, your 50-plus years of public service have reminded us.

On the historic occasion of the first visit by a United States President to the International African American Museum, IAAM, to this sacred site of Gadsden's Wharf, where, according to researchers, over 40 percent of the Africans who came into this country and became enslaved came through this site.

We present this Carolina maple wood and hand-woven sweetgrass rice fanner to you, our 46th President of the United States.

[Rep. Clyburn presented a plaque and rice fanner to the President.]

Now, on behalf of Dr. Tonya Matthews, the CEO of the International African American Museum, myself, my family, my significant other—there are the three girls there. *[Laughter]*

The President. I know those three girls.

Rep. Clyburn. Yes, Angela has been crying all day. *[Laughter]*

On behalf of them; two—at least two of your Cabinet members are here, Administrator Regan and, of course, my almost homeboy—*[laughter]*—Secretary Lloyd; and all of these people from all over South Carolina and some outside of the State—I know I met some folks from New Jersey back there—we want to present you with this extraordinary gift, crafted by the hands of skill—the Charleston artisans.

This award is framed by the timeless art of sweetgrass weaving, a tradition rooted in African American culture and maintained in the Lowcountry through Gullah Geechee traditions. The plaque is made of wood carved from the Carolina maple tree dating back to the early 1800s. This reclaimed wood comes from land where enslaved individuals labored. These two things are now blended into this powerful symbol of resilience and that word that share with me so often: hope.

Mr. President.

The President. God love you, man.

Rep. Clyburn. Love you too.

The President. You're incredible, man. I really mean it.

[Rep. Clyburn and the President posed for a photograph, and the Voices of Liberation Choir performed "Every Praise."]

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you. My lord, what a day.

Audience member. We love Joe!

Audience members. We love Joe! We love Joe! We love Joe!

The President. Well, thank you. I tell you, I love Jim. *[Laughter]*

Jim, I want to thank you. You're the best friend anyone could have. I really mean it. You're incredible.

And thank you, Liberation Choir. You are incredible.

You know, you captured the spirit of what Saint Augustus—Saint Augustine, in my church, said. He said, "Singing is praying twice." Well, you're praying four times. *[Laughter]*

[The President turned around and addressed the choir positioned behind the podium.]

Now, I apologize for my back. You're standing there, and you're chilly and——

Choir member. Yes, sir.

Choir member. Yes, we are.

Choir member. We're good! We're good!

The President. All right. Well, God love you. [*Laughter*]

You know, Jim—as I said, Jim, you're one of the best friends anybody could have. You're a student of history, a teacher of history. This museum of history is one of your dreams.

And Joe—Mayor Joe Riley—I don't know where Joe is—Joe. Joe is incredible. Joe Joe, you—[*applause*—you're—another dear friend who had the vision and fortitude to make this museum a reality, Reverend Joe Darby, God love you. Thank you. Thank you for always—and for your friendship and your fellowship.

And Dr. Tonya Matthews, who just—part of the official delegation. I had a trip—I took a trip to Angola because I wanted—we're starting something major in Africa, and I wanted her to come along. I want to thank you very much.

And your fellow leaders here at the museum, including one of the great American landscape artists, Walter Hood—[*applause*—who makes work here—stunning, breathtaking.

And I'd like to also thank two outstanding members of my Cabinet: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who of the best appointments I ever made in my career. You're not only a warrior; he has a heart as big as his head. He's an incredible man. [*Laughter*] No, you are, Lloyd. You—you're a—you're first rate. And Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Michael Regan. Michael.

To our extraordinary leaders and patriots and friends here, and I want to thank you all distinguished guests.

Before I go any further though, I do want to introduce my family. The love of my life and the life of my love, my daughter Ashley Biden. Stand up, Ashley. Ashley is a social worker protecting abused women in Philadelphia. And God love you, kid.

And my son Hunter Biden. You're the smartest man I know. And my grandson, named after his uncle—Beau is not here—Beau Biden. And that beautiful lady sitting next to Hunter is his wife. [*Laughter*] And guess what? She's from South Africa.

Look, folks, as Jill and I shared, we have a—we shared—we felt that the power of prayer for so many of you across South Carolina has made a big deal for—it's been a big deal for us. For real. That's why, on our last full day in office, we wanted to be here with you in South Carolina.

We started this morning in church to reflect on the power of faith in God, in each other, in our democracy.

Here at this museum, we reflect on the power of history, redeeming the soul of the Nation.

I'm honored to be here and just toured this sacred ground, just as I toured another museum last month in Angola.

In the wind and the waves, we could hear them. We could hear them. The young women and men born free in the highlands of Angola only to be captured, bound, and forced on a death march by slave traders in the year 1619. The start of a 250-years slave trade across Africa and the Caribbean to the shores of America. The start of America's original sin.

They were baptized into a foreign faith against their will. Their names were changed against their will, condemned to slave ships bound for what they call the Middle Passage between Africa and America. Many did not survive the journey. And the many who did survive arrived here in the Charleston—

[*The President coughed.*]

Excuse me—Gadsden Wharf, along the Cooper River.

When their feet touched this land, iron shackles literally dug into their skin. They were forced to build an 840-foot wharf, the largest single port of entry for enslaved people in American history.

And standing here, we hear them again in the wind and the waves: their pain, their fear, their anguish. But we also hear something else: their faith to survive, their faith in each other, their faith to hope, passed through generations.

This museum is so important because it embodies the trauma and the triumph of the African American experience. And it embodies the truth that Black history is American history. Black culture—[*applause*]. Black culture is American culture.

And while there are those who want to erase history, some injustices are so heinous that they can never be buried, no matter how hard people try. We must know the good, the bad, and the truth about who we are. That's what great nations do, and we're a great nation.

We're unique among nations. Our Nation is not based on religion, ethnicity, or geography, or some ethnic component. We're the only nation in the world—the only one in the history of the world—built on an idea. The idea was that we're all created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives.

Standing here, we know we know we've never fully lived up to that idea, but we've never walked away from it either. From slavery to emancipation, from the Civil War to the civil rights movement, from the reckoning on race today, there's been a long line of Black patriots who have helped make the promise of America real for all Americans, who have helped us become the Nation we say we are and want to be.

And as my Presidency comes to an end, I know how it started because of this movement. As we celebrate his life this weekend, I think of the deep influence Dr. King had on me as I was a kid coming out of school. I think about the people I grew up with as a lifeguard in the east—what they called the—"the Bucket" in Wilmington, in the projects. I was the only White guard—lifeguard of 19 guards there, because I wanted to be part of the community. I—that's the—are—guys I played ball with.

The east side of Wilmington, there was a guy named "Mouse." [*Laughter*] Mousey was a good man. [*Laughter*] Mousey got in a little trouble when he was younger. Mousey became my friend. He also—we had faith in him. He became the leader of the NAACP in Delaware and also the head of the Longshoremen's union. He passed away this month.

But I think about all of you and so many people across the country of every race and background who have joined the work of redeeming the soul of this Nation together. That's what this is about. Time and again, I've seen people open their hearts and change their minds and join hands and continue building an America of our shared dreams.

I've tried to be a link between our history and our future, between our dreams and the possibilities. I had the honor of serving with the first Black President, the first woman Vice President. Let me say, Kamala Harris is an incredible leader, and I'm grateful for her partnership and the hope and aspiration she represented for so many people.

Together—together, we kept our commitment to have an administration that looks like America and taps into the full talents of America. I guaranteed we have administration that looked like America. We had more women in the Cabinet, more African Americans, including the first Black Secretary of Defense and a man of great honor. First Black Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

We entered office—we entered office facing one of the toughest periods in our history. We came out sooner by doing the work to beat the pandemic; to build the strongest economy in the world with some of the most significant investments ever made in all of American history, particularly for Black America; to address the sting of systemic racism and advancing racial equity in all we do, including executive action of police reform; to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, from the freedom to vote to the freedom to choose; to reassert America's leadership in the world, including our intense efforts that led to the release of hostages and a cease-fire war in Gaza—and an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.

A lot of people said we couldn't do it, but this community knew we could do it.

In front of the White House, built by an enslaved people, we celebrated Juneteenth, a Federal holiday that I named, and introduced the first Black woman on the United States Supreme Court. And by the way, she is smarter than those guys. *[Laughter]* A promise I made here in South Carolina.

I can go on, but the point is, we're proving that by remembering our history, we can make history. But we know the battle for the soul of America continues.

In this moment of strength of our institutions of democracy—the Presidency, the Congress, the courts, a free and independent press, and yes, our institutions in our communities, like this museum—they matter more than ever.

To tell the truth of our Nation. To stand up to what my dad said the worst of all sins was—the abuse of power—and ensure everyone gets a fair shot. That's what it's all about. To understand the journey of our democracy is difficult and ongoing and the distance is short between peril and possibility. But we've got to keep going.

We owe it to all those who came before us here on these waters and all those who are going to come after. Folks, there's so much we can do. We've got to stay involved. We've got to stay engaged.

Let me close with where I started, with my gratitude for all you've done for me but, most of all—*[applause]*—but, most of all, for all you've done for our Nation.

Scripture says, "I have been young and now I'm old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken." After all these years working alongside you, I have not seen the righteous forsaken.

I love you all. I mean it from the bottom of my heart. My family owes you. We owe you. The Nation owes you.

May God keep the faith, and may God bless the souls of this sacred place. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4:15 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mignon and Angela Clyburn and Jennifer Clyburn-Reed, daughters of Rep. Clyburn; Joseph A. Darby, Jr., senior pastor, Nichols Chapel AME Church in Charleston, SC; Richard "Mouse" Smith, president of the Delaware National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who died on January 2; former President Barack Obama; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Q. "C.Q." Brown, Jr., USAF; and Supreme Court Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. He also referred to his daughter-in-law Melissa Cohen Biden. Rep. Clyburn referred to his partner Virginia Newman.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : International African American Museum in Charleston, SC.

Locations: Charleston, SC.

Names: Austin, Lloyd J., III; Biden Cohen, Melissa; Biden, Ashley B.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R. "Beau," IV; Biden, R. Hunter; Brown, Charles Q. "C.Q.," Jr.; Clyburn, Angela; Clyburn, James E.; Clyburn, Mignon; Clyburn-Reed, Jennifer; Darby, Joseph A., Jr.; Harris, Kamala D.; Hood, Walter J.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Matthews, Tonya M.; Obama, Barack; Regan, Michael S.; Riley, Joseph P., Jr.

Subjects: Abortion; Civil rights movement; COVID–19 pandemic; Diversity, equity, and inclusion, improvement efforts; Environmental Protection Agency; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Gaza, hostages held by Hamas; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Joint Chiefs of Staff; Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Secretary of Defense; Slavery, U.S. (historical); South Carolina, International African American Museum in Charleston; South Carolina, President's visit; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Vice President; Voting rights, protection efforts.

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