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Barack Obama, CC'83, First Columbia Graduate Elected President of the United States

Barack Obama (CC'83) becomes the first Columbia graduate elected president of the United States.

He joins other illustrious Columbians who went on to run the country at pivotal times during its history: Theodore Roosevelt, who was president from 1901 to 1908, and his cousin Franklin D. Roosevelt, president from 1933 to 1945. Both attended [Columbia Law School](#) but did not graduate. And Dwight D. Eisenhower left his post as University president in 1952 to become the nation's 34th president. As an undergraduate, he attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Obama joins a long tradition of Columbians in public service, ranging from signers of the Declaration of Independence to Cabinet members to Supreme Court justices, as well as 15 New York City mayors and 13 governors of New York, including the current officeholder, David A. Paterson (CC'77).

"We note with pride that Barack Obama will not only be the nation's first African American president, he will also be the first Columbia graduate to occupy the Oval Office," Columbia president Lee C. Bollinger said. "Senator John McCain is also a member of the Columbia family, as the McCains' daughter is a recent graduate of [Columbia College](#). We wish him well in continuing his record of service to our country."

Both Senators Obama and McCain were on Columbia's campus in September, in one of their few joint appearances during the general election, participating in the ServiceNation Presidential Forum. They discussed their views on the role of citizenship and public service in a post-9/11 America.

Speaking to a packed audience in Lerner Hall, with a spillover crowd of some 7,500 sitting on the steps of Low Library watching on a Jumbotron, Obama discussed his hopes for a nation guided by civic engagement. "We have always balanced the tradition of individual responsibility and self-reliance with notions of community and love for country," he said. "What it's done, is it allowed people to exercise the freedom to determine the direction of their communities, but still recognizing that we are part of a common project, of creating a better life for the next generation."

Obama attended Columbia College from 1981 to 1983, after transferring in his junior year from Occidental College.

A few months ago, Obama sent a letter from the campaign trail on the occasion of the Class of 1983's 25th reunion: "I learned a lot at Columbia, found my focus, studied and came out with a determination to do something about the injustices I had seen and read about," he wrote.

"Twenty-five years ago, we left Columbia with the wind at our backs. But in spite of our successes, many in our nation have not shared in the prosperity of the last quarter-century, and some are worse off than before. We must continually be reminded of the work that remains to protect our union and repair our world."



Barack Obama at the ServiceNation Presidential Forum, held on Sept. 11, 2008 in Roone Arledge Auditorium.

Image credit: Eileen Barroso

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