

TWO AMERICAS • LUMINARIES • NOBEL PEACE PRIZE • LIVING RECORD

A Call to Action

Barack Obama's 2009 Nobel Peace Prize

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The Announcement

On October 9, 2009 — eight months and twenty days after his inauguration — the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Barack Obama the Nobel Peace Prize, the earliest into any presidency the honor has ever arrived. The Committee's citation praised his "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples," his vision of a world without nuclear weapons, and a broader claim that he had "created a new climate in international politics." Obama became the fourth U.S. president to win the prize, and the first sitting president to do so since Woodrow Wilson in 1919 — Theodore Roosevelt had also won while in office, in 1906, while Jimmy Carter's 2002 prize came decades after he left the White House, for a different body of post-presidential work.

Surprise, and Some Doubt

The announcement drew widespread surprise, including from the Committee's own press corps. A poll taken shortly afterward found roughly six in ten Americans felt Obama had not yet done enough to earn it, and criticism came from across the political spectrum — some conservative commentators called it premature and political, while some international observers and past laureates worried it undercut the prize's credibility by rewarding intention rather than achievement. Committee chairman Thorbjørn Jagland later defended the choice as meant to strengthen Obama's stated goals rather than reward completed outcomes — a defense offered after the fact, not part of the original citation.

Obama's own reaction, delivered in the Rose Garden the day of the announcement, echoed the same doubt.

"I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who have been honored by this prize... I will accept this award as a call to action." — Barack Obama, October 9, 2009

Oslo, December 10, 2009

Obama accepted the prize roughly three weeks after ordering a surge of thirty thousand additional troops into Afghanistan, and his acceptance speech confronted that tension directly rather than avoiding it, invoking the tradition of just war theory to argue that force can, in narrow circumstances, be morally necessary.

"I am the Commander-in-Chief of the military of a nation in the midst of two wars... A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms." — Barack Obama, Nobel Acceptance Speech, 2009

He donated the full \$1.4 million prize to charity, later reported across roughly ten organizations including the Fisher House Foundation and the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund — the precise itemized breakdown is not independently confirmed here against a primary release and should be checked before being stated as exact figures. Obama is the first Black American to win the Nobel Peace Prize as president; this is a distinct distinction from Ralph Bunche (1950) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1964), the first Black American laureates of any kind, and this entry keeps the two claims separate rather than conflating them.

NC Local Lens

No documented connection ties the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize itself to North Carolina or Cumberland County. A genuine Cumberland County connection to Obama's presidency exists, but it is a separate event two years later: on December 14, 2011, President and Mrs. Obama visited Fort Bragg to mark the end of the Iraq War, telling assembled troops and families, "Welcome home... It's harder to end a war than begin one," and noting the 202 Fort Bragg soldiers killed in that war. This entry states plainly that the Fort Bragg visit is unrelated to the Nobel Prize and should never be presented as though it were.

Sourcing Caveats for Future Sessions

Charity donation breakdown: the ten-organization, itemized list is sourced secondhand; verify against an AP or White House release before citing specific dollar figures per recipient.

"First Black American" framing: Obama is the first Black American president to win the prize — not the first Black American laureate overall, a distinction belonging to Ralph Bunche (1950). Keep these separate.

Citations

Chicago Notes-Bibliography style, primary and institutional sources.

1. "The Nobel Peace Prize 2009 — Press Release," The Norwegian Nobel Committee, October 9, 2009, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2009/press-release/>.
2. "Barack H. Obama — Facts," The Nobel Prize, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2009/obama/facts/>.
3. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize," Oslo City Hall, Norway, December 10, 2009, The White House: President Barack Obama Archives, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.
4. Barack Obama, "Remarks on Winning the Nobel Peace Prize," Rose Garden, Washington, D.C., October 9, 2009, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-winning-the-nobel-peace-prize>.
5. Barack Obama, "Remarks at Fort Bragg, North Carolina," December 14, 2011, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-fort-bragg-north-carolina-0>.

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