



SIAC



Dr Walter Nicgorski Cicero, eloquence, wisdom, and power

 Dr Walter Nicgorski, University of Notre Dame, member of the advisory board of the SIAC, presented a paper on « *Cicero, eloquence, wisdom, and power* », the 16th april 2009, at « *President Barack Obama & the Lessons of Antiquity* » Conference, Grand Valley State University , organised by the Hauenstein Center.

This conference is on line, on tulliana, at : [Documents > Multimedia](#) (optimized Firefox). The following summary comes from [Hauenstein Center](#) site.

 Le professeur Walter Nicgorski, University of Notre Dame, membre du comité scientifique de la SIAC, a prononcé une conférence intitulée « *Cicero, eloquence, wisdom, and power* », le 16 avril 2009, lors du colloque « *President Barack Obama & the Lessons of Antiquity* », qui s'est tenue à Grand Valley State University, sous l'égide du Hauenstein Center. La conférence est en ligne sur Tulliana à :

Cette conférence est en ligne sur Tulliana à : [Documents > Multimedia](#) (Optimisé Firefox). Le résumé suivant, en anglais, est tiré du site du [Hauenstein center](#).

Summary - Résumé

Walter Nicgorski of the University of Notre Dame explains his lessons the President can learn from Greek antiquity. “I begin with the pretensions of a poet.” Nicgorski asserts, “I sing of a man whose eloquence with the spoken word first brought him to prominence. A man who rose to the highest political office of the most powerful nation in the world, as a young man it was already clear he was greatly gifted with a richly colorful yet clear and forceful speaking style. His oratorical ability always led

some to be suspicious that he was shallow in substance. He needed at times to retreat in order to rest and renew the voice upon which the power depended. He came to pursue national and political affairs from a social class not usually prominent or successful in such pursuits. Remarkable too was the fact that he came from and was raised in outlying areas rather than at the centers of power. Though he found a way to those centers to put his advanced education in the hands of distinguished teachers, he studied rhetoric, law, philosophy, and history with a specific plan to position himself for winning office and exercising leadership in the Republic. He held major offices at very young ages, and when he assumed the highest office he found his time at the helm of the ship of state was consumed by a single divisive crisis and it kept him, perhaps tragically, from pursuing well other goals he had for improving justice and the quality of life in the Republic. He seems to have very much wanted to unify the Republic and to proceed by persuasion rather than by the muscle of influence and the greater number of votes. He thus hoped, hoped I say, to bring concord and harmony among parties and classes rather than to stir the embers of class and culture wars to a new intensity. I said I sing of such a man, following the model of Homer and Virgil but I quip my song about two men following remarkably similar courses almost twenty-one hundred years apart.

My first and direct inspiration is the life of Marcus Tullius Cicero who lived from 106 to 43 and stood prominently in Roman public life in the last tumultuous decades before the Roman Republic fell to the Empire. By these opening remarks I have sought to highlight the parallels between the lives of Cicero and Barack Obama. But these can be at best suggested and enticing similarities and are at this point all together on the surface. [In my paper] one can see how different Cicero's story is from that of Barack Obama different beneath the skeletal similarity noted here. After all we've been reminded from the text of Thucydides history only roughly repeats itself and never precisely. Nor do we free and complex human beings expect it to. Notable too is that Cicero's story is complete except for the rising of falling tides of his influence on history that is still unfolding. Obama's story is developing and his life and notable achievements can only be accessed as the ancient Athenian law giver Solen said of the happiness of each human being at his journey's end the fact however is that Obama's story is now a motion before us and is incomplete brings with it the beautiful possibility that it represents a life and leadership still open to the lessons of history.

Cicero's deeds as a political leader are likely never to be instructive as have been, and hopefully will be his reflective writings based on a culmination experience and his philosophical studies. President Obama's deeds may will be the primary way he writes the lessons of history to the future. Of the four lessons I draw from Cicero the first and most important of all is a methodological lesson about how to go about determining what is right and wise. This is most important because it is the basis of drawing any conclusions, bits or more of wisdom, about anything.

The reaching and understanding the nature of things, including human nature, marks out the virtue of wisdom for Cicero, but it is one virtue among several and it is subject to control by the other virtues...Justice, which requires doing no harm to others and not standing back when harm is done to others. Never, in other words, a blank check for science, a disarming awe in the face of its many wonderful achievements. Rather it is the same morality that is to check great talent be it eloquence or other abilities that is to guide the ways of science to keep them in accord with just and genuine human well being...The Republic, for Cicero, is sustained by respecting the trust and good faith both explicit and implicit in contracts and established practices. Without such basic principles in approaching property issues including taxation that is redistribution. The ties of community weakened and a society is drawn toward factualism that will weaken and possibly destroy it ».