

Words for Study

keynote
Convention
multiracial
commentators

ballots
milestone
barrier
heritage

endowed
inalienable
pedigree
naysayers

democracy
self-reliance
tyranny
fundamental

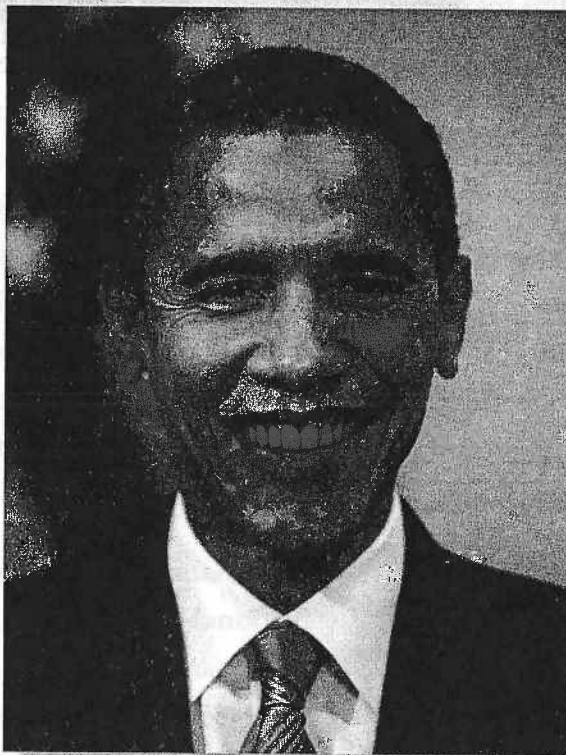
LESSON 19

The Face of Change

On July 27, 2004, Illinois Senator Barack Obama gave the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts. A first-term senator, Obama was not well known on the national stage, but his speech inspired the audience and instantly raised his political profile, casting him as a rising star within the Democratic Party.

In 2007, Obama announced a run for the U.S. presidency, launching a successful campaign and winning his party's nomination in August 2008 at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado.

Obama ran on a platform of "hope" and "change," promising to restore a sense of unity and common purpose to the nation. The son of a white American mother and a black African father, Obama reflected the increasingly multiracial identity of many Americans. Race became a major issue



during the campaign, with some politicians and commentators claiming that Americans were not ready to elect a black president. Despite Obama's strong poll numbers, many political experts questioned whether white voters would in fact cast their ballots for the white candidate once they entered the privacy of the voting booth.

After a lengthy campaign, Obama won an election-night victory on November 4, 2008, against

Republican candidate John McCain. On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn into office as the 44th president of the United States, becoming the nation's first black president. His appointment marked a major milestone in the struggle for equality and civil rights begun decades earlier.

The following excerpts are adapted from Obama's speeches at both Democratic conventions and from his victory speech on Election Day, 2008.

July 27, 2004

Keynote Speech, Democratic National Convention, Boston, Massachusetts

Tonight is a particular honor for me because—let's face it—my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father—my grandfather—was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and persistence my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before.

While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty, joined the army, marched across Europe.

Back home, my grandmother raised their baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the G.I. Bill, bought a house, and later moved west all the way to Hawaii in search of opportunity.

And they, too, had big dreams for their daughter. A common dream, born of two continents.

My parents shared not only an improbable love; they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or "blessed," believing that in an open-minded America your name is no barrier to success.

They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren't rich, because in a generous America you don't have to be rich to achieve your potential.

They are both passed away now. And yet, I know that, on this night, they look down on me with great pride.

I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents' dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.

Tonight, we gather to affirm the greatness of our nation—not because of the height of our skyscrapers, or the power of our military, or the size of our economy. Our pride is based on a very simple assertion, summed up in a declaration made over two hundred years ago: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Aug 28, 2008

Nomination acceptance speech, Democratic National Convention, Denver, Colorado

Four years ago, I stood before you and told you my story—of the brief union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who weren't well-off or well-known, but shared a belief that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to.

It is that promise that has always set this country apart—that through hard work and sacrifice, each of us can pursue our individual dreams but still come together as one American family, to ensure that the next generation can pursue their dreams as well.

That's why I stand here tonight. Because for two hundred and thirty-two years, at each moment when that promise was in danger, ordinary men

and women—students and soldiers, farmers and teachers, nurses and janitors—found the courage to keep it alive.

I don't fit the typical pedigree, and I haven't spent my career in the halls of Washington.

But I stand before you tonight because all across America something is stirring. What the naysayers don't understand is that this election has never been about me. It's been about you.

For eighteen long months, you have stood up, one by one, and said enough to the politics of the past. You understand that in this election, the greatest risk we can take is to try the same old politics with the same old players and expect a different result. You have shown what history teaches us—that at defining moments like this one, the change we need doesn't come from Washington. Change comes to Washington. Change happens because the American people demand it—because they rise up and insist on new ideas and new leadership, a new politics for a new time.

America, this is one of those moments.

I believe that as hard as it will be, the change we need is coming. Because I've seen it. Because I've lived it.

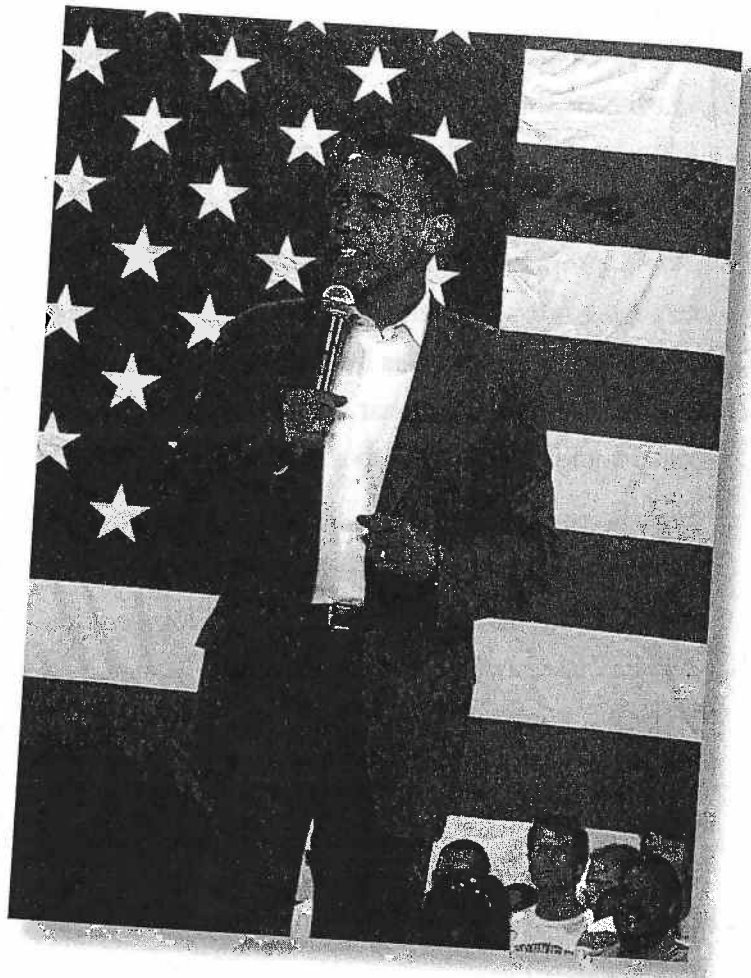
November 4, 2008

Election-night victory speech, Chicago, Illinois

Hello, Chicago.

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen, by people who waited three



hours and four hours, many for the first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled. Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red states and blue states.

We are, and always will be, the United States of America.

It's the answer that led those who've been told for so long by so many to be cynical and fearful and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this date, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.

Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington. It began in the backyards of Iowa and the living rooms of Vermont and the front porches of South Carolina. It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give \$5 and \$10 and \$20 to the cause.

It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's indifference, who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep.

It drew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on doors of perfect strangers, and from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized.

This is your victory.

Let's remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House, a party founded on the values of self-reliance and individual liberty and national unity.

Those are values that we all share. And while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress.

As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, we are not enemies but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.

Tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring

power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope.

That's the true genius of America: that America can change. Our union can be perfected. What we've already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing: Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.

She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons—because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.

And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America—the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.

At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes we can.

When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs, a new sense of common purpose. Yes we can.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes we can.

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "We Shall Overcome." Yes we can.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination.

And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change.

Yes we can.

America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves—if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should

be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment.

This is our time, to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth, that, out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope. And where we are met with cynicism and doubts and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

Thank you. God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.



1 Understanding the Reading. Answer the following questions in good sentence form.

1. List three facts about Barack Obama that made him an appropriate symbol of change.

2. How did white voters prove the political commentators and experts wrong on November 4, 2008?

3. Why did Obama's election mark a major milestone in the struggle for equality and civil rights?

4. Why did Obama describe himself as an unlikely candidate for office?

5. According to Obama, how do things change in Washington?

6. How did young people "reject the myth of their generation's indifference"?

7. Why do you think Obama compares the political campaign to the Civil War? What connections might he see?

8. In your opinion, how is Obama's story part of the "American story"?

9. Why does Obama use a 106-year-old woman as a symbol of change?

10. Name five things that have changed during Ann Nixon Cooper's lifetime, according to the speech.

2 What Do You Think? Answer the following questions in brief but detailed paragraphs.

1. Obama asks the audience, "if our children should live to see the next century . . . what change will they see? What progress will we have made?" What do you think will have changed 100 years from now? Include reasons for your thinking.

2. How does the phrase "Yes we can" relate to what Obama calls the "true genius of America"?

3 History in the Making. In his speeches, Barack Obama refers to many major historical moments. Use a dictionary, encyclopedia, or the Internet to help you complete the sentences below. Each sentence deals with historical figures, places, or events mentioned in Obama's speeches.

1930s	the Civil War	John McCain	Rosa Parks
African Americans	Ann Nixon Cooper	Montgomery	Pearl Harbor
Neil Armstrong	the Dust Bowl	the New Deal	Franklin D. Roosevelt
Berlin	G.I. Bill	Richard Nixon	women
Birmingham	Martin Luther King, Jr.	November 4	World War II
George H. Bush	Abraham Lincoln	Barack Obama	

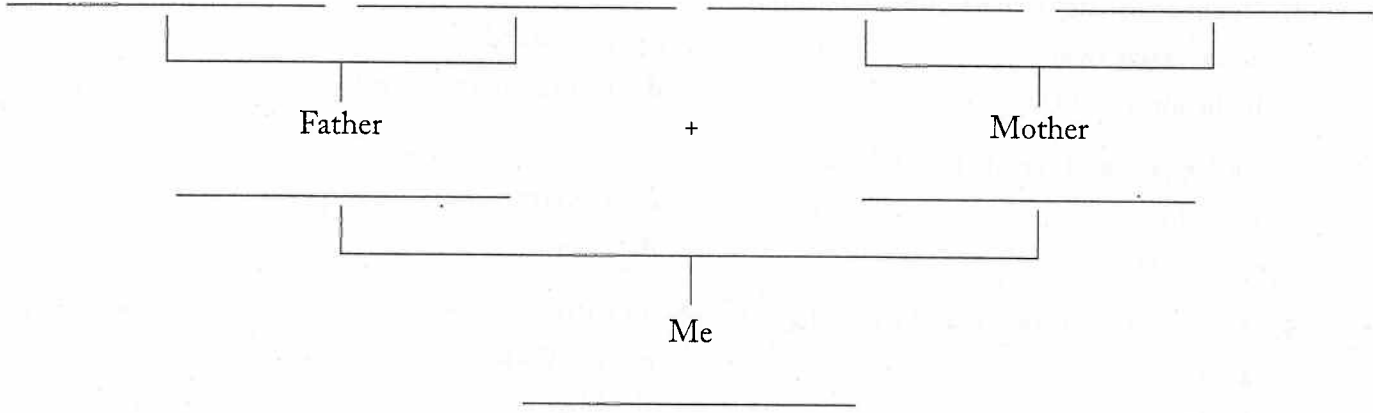
1. _____, a black woman, refused to give up her seat at the front of a bus to make room for a white passenger. Her actions set off the bus boycotts in _____, Alabama.
2. The _____ wall separated two parts of Germany from one another. The wall "fell" in 1989, when _____ was president.
3. In 1941, the Japanese bombed _____, prompting the United States to enter into _____. After the war, the _____ helped many veterans attend college.
4. _____ was a preacher and civil rights leader who delivered a famous "I Have a Dream" speech.
5. _____ and _____ were two groups that were not initially allowed to vote. _____ saw both of those groups win the right to cast a ballot.
6. _____ passed a major financial rescue plan, known as _____, during the _____.
7. _____ was one of the men who landed on the moon in 1969, during _____'s presidency.
8. Police released attack dogs on civil rights marchers in _____, Alabama.
9. The _____ was caused by a major drought that swept across American farmlands during the 1930s.
10. _____ lost the presidential race to _____ on _____, 2008.
11. _____ was the first Republican president. During his presidency, the nation fought _____ and abolished slavery.

4 Comprehension Check. Write the letter of the correct answer on the line to the left.

- _____ 1. The idea that white voters would claim to support Obama and then vote for the white candidate in the privacy of the voting booth is an example of what kind of thinking?
- a. optimistic
 - b. cynical
 - c. multiracial
 - d. idealistic
- _____ 2. Obama mentions a “sense of common purpose.” This could also be called:
- a. individualism
 - b. equality
 - c. civility
 - d. responsibility
- _____ 3. “Inalienable” rights are rights that cannot:
- a. be taken away
 - b. be given to others
 - c. be defined
 - d. belong to immigrants
- _____ 4. The opposite of “prosperity” is:
- a. richness
 - b. rejection
 - c. poverty
 - d. duty
- _____ 5. A person who is prejudiced might have a problem with:
- a. diversity
 - b. democracy
 - c. elections
 - d. liberty
- _____ 6. Barack Obama describes his heritage as diverse. “Heritage” can refer to all of the following, except:
- a. lineage
 - b. legacy
 - c. background
 - d. ambitions
- _____ 7. When Obama mentions “red states and blue states,” he is referring to what two types of states?
- a. Northern and Southern
 - b. Republican and Democrat
 - c. diverse and segregated
 - d. Eastern and Western
- _____ 8. The opposite of “cynical and doubtful” would be:
- a. pessimistic and fearful
 - b. idealistic and democratic
 - c. optimistic and hopeful
 - d. diverse and hopeful
- _____ 9. Another way to describe “self-reliance” would be:
- a. indifference
 - b. humility
 - c. determination
 - d. independence
- _____ 10. Obama says Ann Nixon Cooper was born “just a generation past slavery.” That means slavery existed in the time of her:
- a. parents
 - b. grandparents
 - c. great-grandparents
 - d. children

5 Biographies and Family Trees. In his speeches, Barack Obama discusses the heritage, legacy, and experiences of different generations. He describes the lives of his grandparents, parents, and himself. He tells his own life story, or biography, in order to explain why he is an unlikely candidate for the presidency. Fill out your own family tree below, including brief descriptions of each family member (their country of origin, profession, etc). Imagine you are running for a political office in the U.S. Using your family tree as reference, write a brief biography of your life and family background that explains how you are a likely or unlikely candidate for the office.

Grandfather + Grandmother Grandfather + Grandmother



My Biography

© 2011 Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.