

Name of collection

Why do American parties hold conventions?

Contributors name:

Barack Obama

In 2004, then Illinois Senate candidate, Barack Obama, delivered the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in Boston. He spoke about his personal background, and about the Democratic party. Here is that speech in its entirety.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you so much. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE CONTINUES]

Thank you, Dick Durbin. You make us all proud. On behalf of the great state of Illinois--

[APPLAUSE]

--crossroads of a nation, land of Lincoln, let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. 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.

[APPLAUSE]

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 perseverance, 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.

[APPLAUSE]

While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas.

[APPLAUSE]

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 Patton's army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line. After the war, they studied on the GI Bill, bought a house through FHA. And later, moved West, all the way to Hawaii in search of opportunity.

[APPLAUSE]

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 a tolerant America, your name is no barrier to success.

[APPLAUSE]

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.

[APPLAUSE]

They're both passed away now. And yet I know that on this night, they do look down on me with great pride. They stand here-- and 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.

[APPLAUSE]

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 premise, summed up in a declaration made over 200 years ago. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

[APPLAUSE]

That they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That is the true genius of America.

[APPLAUSE]

A faith-- a faith in simple dreams. An insistence on small miracles that we can tuck in our children at night and know that they're fed, and clothed, and safe from harm. That

we can say what we think, write what we think without hearing a sudden knock on the door. That we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe. That we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted at least most of the time.

[APPLAUSE]

This year in this election, we are called to reaffirm our values and our commitments, to hold them against a hard reality and see how we're measuring up to the legacy of our forbearers and the promise of future generations. And fellow Americans, Democrats, Republicans, independents I say to you tonight we have more work to do.

[APPLAUSE]

More work to do for the workers I met in Galesburg, Illinois who are losing their union jobs at the Maytag plant that's moving to Mexico. And now they're having to compete with their own children for jobs that pay \$7 an hour. More to do for the father that I met who was losing his job and choking back the tears wondering how he would pay \$4,500 a month for the drugs his son needs without the health benefits that he counted on. More to do for the young woman in East St. Louis, and thousands more like her who has the grades, has the drive, has the will, but doesn't have the money to go to college.

Now don't get me wrong. The people I meet in small towns, and big cities, and diners, and office parks they don't expect government to solve all the problems. They know they have to work hard to get ahead, and they want to. Gong to the collar counties around Chicago, and people will tell you they don't want their tax money wasted by a welfare agency or by the Pentagon.

[APPLAUSE]

Going--

[APPLAUSE]

Going to any inner city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can't teach our kids to learn. They know that parents have to teach, that children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations, and turn off the television sets, and eradicate the slander that says a Black youth with a book is acting White. They know those things.

[APPLAUSE]

People don't expect-- people don't expect government to solve all their problems, but they sense deep in their bones that with just a slight change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life. And that the doors of opportunity remain open to all. They know we can do better, and they want that choice. In this election, we offer that choice. Our party has chosen a man to lead us who embodies the best this country has to offer. And that man is John Kerry.

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry understands the ideals of community, faith, and service because they've defined his life. From his heroic service to Vietnam to his years as a prosecutor and Lieutenant governor through two decades in the United States Senate, he's devoted himself to this country. Again and again, we've seen him make tough choices when easier ones were available. His values and his record affirm what is best in us. John Kerry believes in an America where hard work is rewarded. So instead of offering tax breaks to companies shipping jobs overseas, he offers them to companies creating jobs here at home.

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry believes in an America where all Americans can afford the same health coverage our politicians in Washington have for themselves.

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry believes in energy independence so we aren't held hostage to the profits of oil companies or the sabotage of foreign oil fields.

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry believes in the constitutional freedoms that have made our country the envy of the world, and he will never sacrifice our basic liberties nor use faith as a wedge to divide us.

[APPLAUSE]

And John Kerry believes that in a dangerous World, war must be an option sometimes, but it should never be the first option.

[APPLAUSE]

A while back-- a while back, I met a young man named Sheamus in a VFW hall in East Moline, Illinois. He was a good looking kid. 6'2, 6'3, clear eyed with an easy smile. He told me he joined the Marines, and was heading to Iraq the following week. And as I listened to him explain why he'd enlisted, the absolute faith he had in our country and its leaders, his devotion to duty and service that I thought. This young man was all that any of us might ever hope for in a child.

But then I ask myself, are we serving Sheamus as well as he's serving us? I thought of the 900 men and women, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, friends and neighbors who won't be returning to their own hometowns. I thought of the families I've met who were struggling to get by without a loved one's full income, or whose loved ones had returned with a limb missing, or nerves shattered, but still lacked long term health benefits because they were reservists.

[APPLAUSE]

When we send our young men and women into harm's way, we have a solemn obligation not to fudge the numbers or shade the truth about why they are going, to care for their families while they're gone, to tend to the soldiers upon their return, and to never ever go to war without enough troops, to win the war, secure the peace, and earn the respect of the world.

[APPLAUSE]

Now let me be clear. Let me be clear. We have real enemies in the world. These enemies must be found, they must be pursued, and they must be defeated. John Kerry knows this. And just as Lieutenant, Kerry did not hesitate to risk his life to protect the men who served with him in Vietnam, President Kerry will not hesitate one moment to use our military might to keep America safe and secure.

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry believes in America, and he knows that it's not enough for just some of us to prosper. For alongside our famous individualism, there's another ingredient in the American saga. A belief that we're all connected as one people. If there is a child on the south side of Chicago who can't read, that matters to me even if it's not my child.

[APPLAUSE]

If there's a senior citizen somewhere who can't pay for their prescription drugs, and having to choose between medicine and the rent, that makes my life poorer even if it's not my grandparent.

[APPLAUSE]

If there's an Arab-American family being rounded up without benefit of an attorney or due process, that threatens my civil liberties.

[APPLAUSE]

It is that fundamental belief--

[APPLAUSE]

It is that fundamental belief I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper. That makes this country work.

[APPLAUSE]

It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, and yet still come together as one American Family. [NON-ENGLISH], out of many one. Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us. The spin masters, the negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there is not a liberal America and a conservative America. There is the United States of America.

[APPLAUSE]

There is not a Black America, and a White America, and Latino America, and Asian America. There's the United States of America.

[APPLAUSE]

The pundits-- the pundits like to slice and dice our country into red states and blue states. Red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats. But I've got news for them too. We worship an awesome God in the blue states, and we don't like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the red states.

[APPLAUSE]

We coach little league in the blue states. And yes, we've got some gay friends in the red states. There are Patriots who opposed the war in Iraq, and there are Patriots who supported the war in Iraq. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes. All of us defending the United States of America.

[APPLAUSE]

In the end-- in the end-- in the end, that's what this election is about. Do we participate in a politics of cynicism, or do we participate in a politics of hope?

[APPLAUSE]

John Kerry calls on us to hope. John Edwards calls on us to hope. I'm not talking about blind optimism here. The almost willful ignorance that thinks unemployment will go away if we just don't think about it, or health care crisis will solve itself if we just ignore it. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something more substantial.

It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs. The hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores. The hope of a young Naval Lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta. The hope of a mill worker son who dares to defy the odds. The hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him too.

[APPLAUSE]

Hope-- hope in the face of difficulty, hope in the face of uncertainty, the audacity of hope. In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us. The bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead. I believe that we can give our middle class relief, and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair.

[APPLAUSE]

I believe that we have a righteous wind at our backs. And that if we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices and meet the challenges that face us. America, tonight, if you feel the same energy that I do, if you feel the same

urgency that I do, if you feel the same passion that I do, if you feel the same hopefulness that I do, if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country from Florida to Oregon, from Washington to Maine, that people will rise up in November. And John Kerry will be sworn in as president, and John Edwards will be sworn in as vice president. And this country will reclaim its promise. And out of this long political darkness, a brighter day will come. Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

The Democratic National Committee earlier this week announced that Mark Warner will deliver the keynote address at this year's convention in Denver. The former Virginia governor is running for that state's open Senate seat this year. You can follow campaign 2008 any time by logging on to our site for politics at c-span.org/Politics. There you'll find the latest ads from the presidential and state races, including two new ads from senators Obama and McCain on the economy. Here's a look at those ads.