

Obama's victory speech

by Rosie McAndrew

Advanced

1 Pre-listening

Have you been following the American election campaign?
Have you heard any extracts from Barack Obama's speeches?
If you have, did you hear them in English, or in your own language?
Did you think he was an effective speaker?

You're going to hear the final section of the speech he made when he was elected President. Before you listen, you may like to check some of the key words.

2 Key words

Match the words and phrases on the left with the definitions on the right.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. cast her ballot | a. try very hard to solve a problem or change a situation |
| 2. generation | b. continued to try |
| 3. slavery | c. cruel and unfair use of power over other people |
| 4. struggle | d. no trust in other people |
| 5. pressed on | e. voted |
| 6. despair | f. about 30 years; long enough for a family of children to grow up |
| 7. tyranny | g. long rubber pipes to direct water onto plants, fires (or people) |
| 8. hoses | h. a system where people are forced to work for their 'owners' without pay |
| 9. reclaim | i. great sadness, no hope |
| 10. cynicism | j. get back something you have lost or left behind |

Now listen to the extract, and confirm the meaning from the context.

3 Listening

1. As you listen, number these ideas in the order you hear them.

- a. the first moon landing
- b. a very old black woman's life experience
- c. surviving the war
- d. the birth of the Internet
- e. uniting the American people
- f. electronic voting
- g. creating employment

2. Listen again to check, and note down clues in the speech that helped you to decide.

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.....
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4 Reading comprehension and vocabulary

Scan the text to find phrases that mean the following.

- voted (two phrases in para 1)
 - _____
 - _____
- only about 20 years after the slaves were freed (para 2)

- continued to try (para 3)

- statement of belief (para 3)

- go and vote (para 4)

- great sadness in the dry areas (of America in the 1930s) (para 5)

- everyone was in danger from enemy powers (para 6)

- long rubber pipes used to direct water onto plants (or people) (para 7)

- give our children a good education (para 10)

- make people wealthy again (para 10)

5 Literary style

1. Obama's speech uses a lot of literary devices to have an impact on the listener. Which of the following devices does he use? Which do you think he uses most often?

- alliteration (using several words together that begin with the same sound)
- repetition for effect
- rhythm
- rhyme
- parallel structures (e.g. *He went to work, she stayed at home.*)
- direct appeal to the listener: using *you* and imperatives
- including the listener, using *we* and *our*

2. What is the key phrase that Obama repeats at intervals through the speech?

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3. Parallel structures naturally create a sense of rhythm. Obama uses a lot of these in the extract. One from paragraph two has been given as an example. See how many more you can find. (If there is more than one space for one paragraph, there is more than one example.)

paragraph	Examples
2	<i>no cars on the road or planes in the sky</i>
3	
4	
5	
7	
8	
9	
10	

6 Internet research

Obama makes a lot of historical references. What do you know about the topics in the table below? Look them up on the Internet, and see what you can find out. Just make very short notes.

the dust bowl	
the New Deal	
the buses in Montgomery	
the hoses in Birmingham	
a bridge in Selma	
a preacher from Atlanta	

Why do you think Obama refers to all these events?

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7 Interpretation and discussion

1. What words would you use to describe this speech? *Depressing, hopeful, inspiring, exhausting, artful, convincing, energizing, ...?*
2. Do you think Obama will be less or more patriotic than Bush?
3. Do you think he will take American forces out of Iraq and Afghanistan? What makes you think this?
4. Do you think he will increase or decrease public spending on the poor? What makes you think this?
5. Do you think he will be a good president? Why / why not?

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KEY

2 Key words

1. e
2. f
3. h
4. a
5. b
6. i
7. c
8. g
9. j
10. d

3 Listening

- a. The first moon landing = 4
Clue: *A man touched down on the moon ...*
- b. A very old black woman's life experience = 1
Clue: *A woman ... cast her ballot ... 106 ... colour of her skin*
- c. Surviving the war = 3
Clue: *the bombs fell on our harbour ...*
- d. The birth of the Internet = 5
Clue: *... a world was connected by our own science and imagination.*
- e. Uniting the American people = 7
Clue: *that out of many, we are one*
- f. Electronic voting = 6
Clue: *she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote*
- g. Restore prosperity = 2
Clue: *Despair ... conquer fear itself ... new jobs*

4 Reading comprehension and vocabulary

1. a. cast her ballot
b. stood in line to make their voice heard
2. just a generation past slavery
3. pressed on
4. creed
5. reach for the ballot
6. despair in the dust bowl
7. tyranny threatened the world
8. hoses
9. open doors of opportunity for our kids
10. restore prosperity

5 Literary style

1. a. Alliteration – *heartache and hope; despair, dust bowl, depression ...*
b. Repetition for effect – yes, a lot! See answer 2, below.
c. Rhythm – yes, a lot! See answer 3, below.
d. Rhyme – not noticeably.
e. Parallel structures – yes, his most frequent technique. See answer 3, below.
f. Direct appeal to the listener – not a lot in this extract. *Thank you, God bless you*, in paragraph 11, and two questions to the listener (rhetorical questions) in paragraph 9.
g. Including the listener, using *we* and *our* – yes, throughout the speech.

2. 'Yes, we can'.
3.

Para 2: ... *no cars on the road or planes in the sky ...*

Para 3: ... *the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress ...*

Para 4: ... *when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed ...*

... *stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot ...*

Para 5: ... *despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land ...*

... *a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose ...*

Para 7: ... *the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta ...*

Para 8: *A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin ...*

And this year, in this election ...

through the best of times and the darkest of hours

Para 9: ... *we have come so far. We have seen so much ...*

Para 10: *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 ...*

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6 Internet research

1. Individual findings
2. To set his victory in historical context; to show how far attitudes in America have changed since the nineteen-thirties and the Civil rights movement in the sixties, to make it possible for a black man to be elected president of the USA.

Possible weblinks for research:

the dust bowl

http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water_02.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dust_Bowl

the New Deal

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USARnewdeal.htm>

the buses in Montgomery

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_Bus_Boycott

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmontgomeryB.htm>

the hoses in Birmingham

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_campaign

a bridge in Selma

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/03/AR2007030301239.html>

a preacher from Atlanta

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/king_martin_luther.shtml

To compare Obama's speech to Martin Luther King's famous *I have a dream* speech, you can see two different televised versions on YouTube:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtl_0vAJk

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEMXaTktUfA>

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Transcript of the final part of the speech:

1

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.

2

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 colour of her skin.

3

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.

4

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.

5

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 and a new sense of common purpose. Yes we can.

6

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.

7

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.

8

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.

9

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?

10

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 doubt, and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people:

11

Yes We Can. Thank you, God bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.