

Obama's victory speech

by Rosie McAndrew

Intermediate

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 a good speaker?

You're going to hear part of the speech Barack Obama made when he was elected President. Before you listen, you may need 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 |

Check your answers while you listen and see if you can 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 voted
- c. living through the war
- d. the beginning of the Internet
- e. bringing different kinds of people together
- f. voting by computer
- g. creating more jobs for people

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

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4 Find the information

Scan the text to find phrases that mean the following.

1. voted (para 1)

2. only about 30 years after the slaves were freed (para 2)

3. statement of belief (para 3)

4. go and vote (para 4)

5. the dry areas (of America in the 1930s) (para 5)

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

7. give our children a good education (para 10)

8. make people wealthy again (para 10)

5 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Obama makes a lot of historical references.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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6 Interpretation and discussion

1. What words would you use to describe this speech? *Depressing, hopeful, inspiring, exhausting, 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 voted = 1
Clue: *A woman ... cast her ballot ... 106 ... colour of her skin*
- c. Living through the war = 3
Clue: *the bombs fell on our harbour ...*
- d. The beginning of the Internet = 5
Clue: *... a world was connected by our own science and imagination.*
- e. Bringing different kinds of people together = 7
Clue: *that out of many, we are one*
- f. Voting by computer = 6
Clue: *she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote*
- g. Giving people new hope after bad times = 2
Clue: *Despair ... conquer fear itself ... new jobs*

4 Find the information

1. stood in line to make their voice heard in this election
2. just a generation past slavery
3. creed
4. reach for the ballot
5. the dust bowl
6. tyranny threatened the world
7. open doors of opportunity for our kids
8. restore prosperity

5 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

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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.