

■ Michelle Obama's Speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention

Date: August 20, 2024

Author: Michelle Obama

Genre: speech; address

Summary Overview

Michelle Obama's 2024 Democratic National Convention speech in Chicago emphasizes the contagious power of hope and the need to vanquish fear, division, and hate. She reflects on her mother's values of hard work, humility, and decency, urging everyone not to squander the sacrifices of elders. Obama champions the presumed Democratic nominee for president, Kamala Harris, as a qualified and dignified leader who understands the struggles of ordinary Americans and calls for unity against those who distort the truth and promote division. She emphasizes the importance of active participation and voting to ensure a brighter future for the country, urging everyone to "do something" and support Kamala Harris and her running mate Tim Walz.

Defining Moment

Michelle Obama, as a former First Lady and prominent figure in the Democratic Party, has given speeches at previous Democratic National Conventions. Her speeches have typically been well-received and have addressed themes of unity, American values, and the party's vision for the country. Her perspective is generally that of a liberal Democrat, a successful Black professional, and mother. She has inspired millions with her vocal advocacy for various social reforms and her powerful messaging and charismatic style.

The 2024 Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago from August 19 to August 22 and served as the official event where the Democratic Party nominated its candidate for the 2024 presidential election. The convention that year was particularly important because the initial Democratic nominee, President Joe Biden, was pressured to withdraw from the race over concerns about his age; he was replaced only a month before the convention by Kamala Harris, Biden's vice president. Harris immediately embarked on a whirlwind campaign to introduce herself to the American public and receive endorsements from prominent Democratic figures like Barack and Michelle Obama. Although Harris



Michelle Obama. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

managed to accomplish much in a short time span in terms of energizing the Democratic ticket, she was still something of an unknown for many viewers of the convention. Michelle Obama's speech was designed to put the weight of the former First Lady and president behind the new nominee and appeal to American voters to elect her.

The race was also a do-or-die moment for the Democrats, because Biden, despite his administration's success in passing major legislature, was unpopular with voters and, on the Republican side, former president Donald J. Trump was performing extremely well, having demolished his rivals in the Republican primaries and still riding high with voters following the Republican National Convention, in Milwaukee, in July.

Author Biography

Michelle Obama, born Michelle Robinson in Chicago in 1964, attended a top-ranked public "magnet" high school in the city before earning a bachelor's degree in sociology and African American studies from Princeton University. She later earned her law degree from Harvard University. After graduating, she worked at a Chicago law firm, where she met Barack Obama, who was a summer associate at the time. She

then transitioned to the public sector, serving as an assistant to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and as the assistant commissioner of planning and development for the City of Chicago. She also held leadership roles in various nonprofit organizations.

As First Lady, Michelle Obama launched several impactful initiatives, including the "Let's Move!" campaign to combat childhood obesity, "Joining Forces" with Jill Biden to support veterans and military families, "Reach Higher" to encourage young people to pursue higher education, and "Let Girls Learn" to expand access to education for girls globally.

After leaving the White House Obama published a bestselling memoir, *Becoming* (2018), and remained active in advocacy, particularly through her work with "When We All Vote," a nonpartisan organization she cochaired to increase voter participation and address voter suppression. Married to Barack Obama since 1992, the couple has two daughters, Malia and Sasha. Michelle Obama is widely regarded as an inspirational figure and something of a fashion icon and role model for women and girls around the world. After her work in promoting Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election cycle, she decided to step away from public life.



Historical Document

Michelle Obama's Speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention

Thank you guys. OK. We got a big night ahead. Thank you all so much. Thank you. Hello, Chicago!

Something, something wonderfully magical is in the air, isn't it? Yeah.

You know, we're feeling it here in this arena, but it's spreading all across this country we love. A familiar feeling that's been buried too deep for far too long. You know what I'm talking about. It's the contagious power of hope, the anticipation, the energy, the exhilaration of once again being on the cusp of a brighter day. The chance to vanquish the demons of fear, division, and hate that have consumed us and continue pursuing the unfinished promise of this great nation. The dream that our parents and grandparents fought and died and sacrificed for. America, hope is making a comeback.

But, to be honest, I am realizing that until recently, I have mourned the dimming of that hope. And maybe you've experienced the same feelings—it's that deep pit in my stomach, a palpable sense of dread about the future. And for me, that mourning has also been mixed with my own personal grief. The last time I was here in my hometown was to memorialize my mother, the woman who showed me the meaning of hard work and humility and decency. The woman who set my moral compass high and showed me the power of my own voice. Folks, I still feel her loss so profoundly. I wasn't even sure if I'd be steady enough to stand before you tonight, but my heart compelled me to be here because of the sense of duty that I feel to honor her memory and to remind us all not to squander the sacrifices our elders made to give us a better future.

You see, my mom in her steady quiet way, lived out that striving sense of hope every single day of her life. She believed that all children, all people have value. That anyone can succeed if given the opportunity. She and my father didn't aspire to be wealthy—in fact, they were suspicious of folks who took more than they needed. They understood that it wasn't enough for their kids to thrive if everyone else around us was drowning. So my mother volunteered at the local school. She always looked out for the other kids on the block. She was glad to do the thankless, unglamorous work that, for generations, has strengthened the fabric of this nation. The belief that if you do unto others, if you love thy neighbor, if you work and scrape and sacrifice, it will pay off—if not for you, then maybe for your children or your grandchildren.

You see, those values have been passed on through family farms and factory towns, through tree-lined streets and crowded tenements, through prayer groups and national guard units and social studies classrooms. Those were the values my mother poured into me until her very last breath.

Kamala Harris and I built our lives on those same foundational values. Even though our mothers grew up an ocean apart, they shared the same belief in the promise of this country. That's why her mother moved here from India at 19. It's why she taught Kamala about justice, about the obligation to lift others up, about our responsibility to give more than we take. She'd often tell her daughter: "Don't sit around and complain about things. Do something."

So, with that voice in her head, Kamala went out and she worked hard in school, graduating from an HBCU, earning her law degree at a state school. And then she went on to work for the people fighting to hold law breakers accountable, strengthening the rule of law, fighting to get folks better wages, cheaper prescription drugs, a good education, decent healthcare, childcare, elder care. From a middle class household, Kamala worked her way up to become Vice President of the United States of America.

My girl, Kamala Harris, is more than ready for this moment. She is one of the most qualified people ever to seek the office of the presidency. And she is one of the most dignified—a tribute to her mother, to my mother, and to your mother too. The embodiment of the stories we tell ourselves about this country. Her story is your story. It's my story. It's the story of the vast majority of Americans trying to build a better life.

Look, Kamala knows, like we do, that regardless of where you come from, what you look like, who you love, how you worship, or what's in your bank account, we all deserve the opportunity to build a decent life. All of our contributions deserve to be accepted and valued. Because no one has a monopoly on what it means to be an American. No one.

Kamala has shown her allegiance to this nation, not by spewing anger and bitterness, but by living a life of service and always pushing the doors of opportunity open to others. She understands that most of us will never be afforded the grace of failing forward. We will never benefit from the affirmative action of generational wealth. If we bankrupt the business or choke in a crisis, we don't get a second, third, or fourth chance. If things don't go our way, we don't have the luxury of whining or cheating others to get further ahead. No. We don't get to change the rules, so we always win. If we see a mountain in front of us, we don't expect there to be an escalator waiting to take us to the top. No. We put our heads down. We get to work. In America, we do something.

(Crowd chants: "Do something!")

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And throughout her entire life, that's what we've seen from Kamala Harris, the steel of her spine, the steadiness of her upbringing, the honesty of her example, and yes, the joy of her laughter and her light.

It couldn't be more obvious: Of the two major candidates in this race, only Kamala Harris truly understands the unseen labor and unwavering commitment that has always made America great.

Now, unfortunately, we know what comes next. We know folks are going to do everything they can to distort her truth. My husband and I, sadly, know a little something about this. For years, Donald Trump did everything in his power to try to make people fear us. See, his limited, narrow view of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people who happen to be Black.

Wait, I want to know: Who's going to tell him that the job he's currently seeking might just be one of those "Black jobs"?

Look, it's his same old con: doubling down on ugly, misogynistic, racist lies as a substitute for real ideas and solutions that will actually make people's lives better. Look, because cutting our healthcare, taking away our freedom to control our bodies, the freedom to become a mother through IVF like I did—those things are not going to improve the health outcomes of our wives, mothers, and daughters. Shutting down the Department of Education, banning our books—none of that will prepare our kids for the future. Demonizing our children for being who they are and loving who they love—look, that doesn't make anybody's life better.

Instead, it only makes us small. And let me tell you this: Going small is never the answer. Going small is the opposite of what we teach our kids. Going small is petty, it's unhealthy, and quite frankly, it's unpresidential.

So, why would any of us accept this from anyone seeking our highest office? Why would we normalize that type of backward leadership? Doing so only devalues and cheapens our politics. It only serves to further discourage good, big-hearted people from wanting to get involved at all. America, our parents taught us better than that, and we deserve so much better than that.

That's why we must do everything in our power to elect two of those good, big-hearted people. There is no other choice than Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. No other choice.

But, as we embrace this renewed sense of hope, let us not forget the despair we have felt. Let us not forget what we are up against. Yes, Kamala and Tim are doing great now. We're loving it. They're packing arenas across the country. Folks are energized. We are feeling good. But, remember there are still so

many people who are desperate for a different outcome, who are ready to question and criticize every move Kamala makes, who are eager to spread those lies, who don't want to vote for a woman, who will continue to prioritize building their wealth over ensuring that everyone has enough.

So no matter how good we feel tonight or tomorrow or the next day, this is going to be an uphill battle. So folks, we cannot be our own worst enemies. No. See, because the minute something goes wrong, the minute a lie takes hold, folks, we cannot start wringing our hands. We cannot get a Goldilocks complex about whether everything is just right. And we cannot indulge our anxieties about whether this country will elect someone like Kamala instead of doing everything we can to get someone like Kamala elected.

Kamala and Tim, they have lived amazing lives and I am confident that they will lead with compassion, inclusion, and grace. But they are still only human. They are not perfect. And like all of us, they will make mistakes. But luckily y'all, this is not just on them. No, uh-uh. This is up to us, all of us, to be the solution that we seek. It's up to all of us to be the antidote to the darkness and division. Look, I don't care how you identify politically—whether you're a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or none of the above. This is our time to stand up for what we know in our hearts is right. To stand up, not just for our basic freedoms but for decency and humanity; for basic respect, dignity, and empathy; for the values at the very foundation of this democracy.

It's up to us to remember what Kamala's mother told her: "Don't just sit around and complain. Do something." So if they lie about her—and they will—we've got to do something. If we see a bad poll—and we will—we've got to put down that phone and do something. If we start feeling tired, if we start feeling that dread creeping back in, we gotta pick ourselves up, throw water on our face, and what?

(Crowd chants: "Do something!")

We only have two and a half months, y'all, to get this done. Only 11 weeks to make sure every single person we know is registered and has a voting plan. So we cannot afford for anyone, anyone, anyone, America, to sit on their hands and wait to be called. Don't complain if no one from the campaign has specifically reached out to you to ask you for your support. There is simply no time for that kind of foolishness. You know what you need to do.

So, consider this to be your official ask: Michelle Obama is asking you—no, I'm telling y'all—to do something.

(Crowd chants: "Do something!")

Because, y'all, this election is gonna be close. In some states, just a handful—listen to me—a handful of votes in every precinct could decide the winner. So we need to vote in numbers that erase any doubt. We need to overwhelm any effort to suppress us. Our fate is in our hands. In 77 days, we have the power to turn our country away from the fear, division, and smallness of the past. We have the power to marry our hope with our action. We have the power to pay forward the love, sweat, and sacrifice of our mothers and fathers and all those who came before us.

We did it before, y'all, and we sure can do it again. Let us work like our lives depend on it, and let us keep moving our country forward and go higher—yes, always higher—than we've ever gone before, as we elect the next President and Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris and Tim Walz.

Thank you all. God bless.

Now, before I go, I have one more job tonight. Yeah, one more job. You all, thank you for all the love, but it is now my honor to introduce somebody who knows a whole lot about hope, someone who has spent his life strengthening our democracy—and let me tell you, as someone who lives with him, he wakes up every day, every day, and thinks about what's best for this country. Please welcome America's 44th President and the love of my life, Barack Obama!



Document Analysis

Michelle Obama delivered a stirring and deeply personal speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, rallying the crowd with a message of hope, unity, and the urgent need for action in the upcoming election. She begins by reflecting on the sense of optimism and anticipation in the air, describing it as a return to the hope that had been buried for too long. Obama acknowledges the fear, division, and hate that had consumed the nation in recent years but emphasizes that America is on the cusp of a brighter future. She speaks candidly about her own grief, particularly the loss of her mother, whose values of hard work, humility, and community service had profoundly shaped her life. Obama connects her mother's legacy to the broader American story, emphasizing the sacrifices made by previous generations to create opportunities for their children and grandchildren.

Obama then turns her focus to Vice President Kamala Harris, praising her as one of the most qualified and dignified candidates ever to seek the presidency. She highlights Harris's journey from a middle-class upbringing to becoming vice president, underscoring her commitment to justice, opportunity, and service. Obama contrasts Harris's leadership with the divisive and small-minded tactics of Donald Trump, who she accuses of spreading fear, racism, and misogyny. She criticizes Trump's policies, such as cutting healthcare, restricting reproductive rights, and undermining education, as harmful to the well-being of Americans. Obama urges the audience to reject this backward leadership and instead embrace the vision of compassion, inclusion, and progress offered by Harris and her running mate, Tim Walz.

In a passionate call to action, Obama stresses that the election will be an uphill battle and that the outcome depends on the active participation of every American. She urges the crowd not to be complacent or discouraged by lies, bad polls, or setbacks, but to take responsibility for shaping the future of the country. Obama emphasizes the importance of voting in overwhelming numbers to counteract efforts to suppress the vote and to ensure a decisive victory for Harris and Walz. She reminds the audience that their actions will honor the sacrifices of previous generations and determine the direction of the nation.

Concluding on a hopeful note, Obama introduces her husband, former President Barack Obama, as a symbol of the values and kind of leadership that the country needs in 2024. Her speech is a powerful blend of personal reflection, political urgency, and a call for collective action, leaving the audience energized and ready to fight for a better future.

Essential Themes

Michelle Obama's speeches and writings often exemplify the liberal perspective by emphasizing themes such as social equality, educational opportunity, healthcare access, and social justice. She advocates for policies and values that promote inclusivity and support for marginalized communities, highlighting the importance of community engagement, diversity, and