

Michelle Obama's DNC speech

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Read former first lady Michelle Obama's speech from the 2020 Democratic National Convention, as prepared for delivery:

Good evening, everyone. It's a hard time, and everyone's feeling it in different ways. And I know a lot of folks are reluctant to tune into a political convention right now or to politics in general. Believe me, I get that. But I am here tonight because I love this country with all my heart, and it pains me to see so many people hurting.

5 I've met so many of you. I've heard your stories. And through you, I have seen this country's promise. And thanks to so many who came before me, thanks to their toil and sweat and blood, I've been able to live that promise myself.

That's the story of America. All those folks who sacrificed and overcame so much in their own times because they wanted something more, something better for their kids.

10 There's a lot of beauty in that story. There's a lot of pain in it, too, a lot of struggle and injustice and work left to do. And who we choose as our president in this election will determine whether or not we honor that struggle and chip away at that injustice and keep alive the very possibility of finishing that work.

15 I am one of a handful of people living today who have seen firsthand the immense weight and awesome power of the presidency. And let me once again tell you this: the job is hard. It requires clear-headed judgment, a mastery of complex and competing issues, a devotion to facts and history, a moral compass, and an ability to listen—and an abiding belief that each of the 330,000,000 lives in this country has meaning and worth.

20 A president's words have the power to move markets. They can start wars or broker peace. They can summon our better angels or awaken our worst instincts. You simply cannot fake your way through this job.

25 As I've said before, being president doesn't change who you are; it reveals who you are. Well, a presidential election can reveal who we are, too. And four years ago, too many people chose to believe that their votes didn't matter. Maybe they were fed up. Maybe they thought the outcome wouldn't be close. Maybe the barriers felt too steep. Whatever the reason, in the end, those choices sent someone to the Oval Office who lost the national popular vote by nearly 3,000,000 votes.

In one of the states that determined the outcome, the winning margin averaged out to just two votes per precinct—two votes. And we've all been living with the consequences.

30 When my husband left office with Joe Biden at his side, we had a record-breaking stretch of job creation. We'd secured the right to health care for 20,000,000 people. We were respected around

the world, rallying our allies to confront climate change. And our leaders had worked hand-in-hand with scientists to help prevent an Ebola outbreak from becoming a global pandemic.

35 Four years later, the state of this nation is very different. More than 150,000 people have died, and our economy is in shambles because of a virus that this president downplayed for too long. It has left millions of people jobless. Too many have lost their health care; too many are struggling to take care of basic necessities like food and rent; too many communities have been left in the lurch to grapple with whether and how to open our schools safely. Internationally, we've turned our back, not just on agreements forged by my husband, but on alliances championed by presidents
40 like Reagan and Eisenhower.

And here at home, as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and a never-ending list of innocent people of color continue to be murdered, stating the simple fact that a Black life matters is still met with derision from the nation's highest office.

45 Because whenever we look to this White House for some leadership or consolation or any semblance of steadiness, what we get instead is chaos, division, and a total and utter lack of empathy.

Empathy: that's something I've been thinking a lot about lately. The ability to walk in someone else's shoes; the recognition that someone else's experience has value, too. Most of us practice this without a second thought. If we see someone suffering or struggling, we don't stand in
50 judgment. We reach out because, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It is not a hard concept to grasp. It's what we teach our children.

And like so many of you, Barack and I have tried our best to instill in our girls a strong moral foundation to carry forward the values that our parents and grandparents poured into us. But right now, kids in this country are seeing what happens when we stop requiring empathy of one
55 another. They're looking around wondering if we've been lying to them this whole time about who we are and what we truly value.

They see people shouting in grocery stores, unwilling to wear a mask to keep us all safe. They see people calling the police on folks minding their own business just because of the color of their skin. They see an entitlement that says only certain people belong here, that greed is good, and
60 winning is everything because as long as you come out on top, it doesn't matter what happens to everyone else. And they see what happens when that lack of empathy is ginned up into outright disdain.

They see our leaders labeling fellow citizens enemies of the state while emboldening torch-bearing white supremacists. They watch in horror as children are torn from their families and thrown into
65 cages, and pepper spray and rubber bullets are used on peaceful protestors for a photo-op.

Sadly, this is the America that is on display for the next generation. A nation that's underperforming not simply on matters of policy but on matters of character. And that's not just disappointing; it's downright infuriating, because I know the goodness and the grace that is out there in households and neighborhoods all across this nation.

70 And I know that regardless of our race, age, religion, or politics, when we close out the noise and the fear and truly open our hearts, we know that what's going on in this country is just not right. This is not who we want to be.

75 So what do we do now? What's our strategy? Over the past four years, a lot of people have asked me, "When others are going so low, does going high still really work?" My answer: going high is the only thing that works, because when we go low, when we use those same tactics of degrading and dehumanizing others, we just become part of the ugly noise that's drowning out everything else. We degrade ourselves. We degrade the very causes for which we fight.

80 But let's be clear: going high does not mean putting on a smile and saying nice things when confronted by viciousness and cruelty. Going high means taking the harder path. It means scraping and clawing our way to that mountain top. Going high means standing fierce against hatred while remembering that we are one nation under God, and if we want to survive, we've got to find a way to live together and work together across our differences.

And going high means unlocking the shackles of lies and mistrust with the only thing that can truly set us free: the cold hard truth.

85 So let me be as honest and clear as I possibly can. Donald Trump is the wrong president for our country. He has had more than enough time to prove that he can do the job, but he is clearly in over his head. He cannot meet this moment. He simply cannot be who we need him to be for us. It is what it is.

90 Now, I understand that my message won't be heard by some people. We live in a nation that is deeply divided, and I am a Black woman speaking at the Democratic Convention. But enough of you know me by now. You know that I tell you exactly what I'm feeling. You know I hate politics. But you also know that I care about this nation. You know how much I care about all of our children.

95 So if you take one thing from my words tonight, it is this: if you think things cannot possibly get worse, trust me, they can; and they will if we don't make a change in this election. If we have any hope of ending this chaos, we have got to vote for Joe Biden like our lives depend on it.

100 I know Joe. He is a profoundly decent man, guided by faith. He was a terrific vice president. He knows what it takes to rescue an economy, beat back a pandemic, and lead our country. And he listens. He will tell the truth and trust science. He will make smart plans and manage a good team. And he will govern as someone who's lived a life that the rest of us can recognize.

105 When he was a kid, Joe's father lost his job. When he was a young senator, Joe lost his wife and his baby daughter. And when he was vice president, he lost his beloved son. So Joe knows the anguish of sitting at a table with an empty chair, which is why he gives his time so freely to grieving parents. Joe knows what it's like to struggle, which is why he gives his personal phone number to kids overcoming a stutter of their own.

His life is a testament to getting back up, and he is going to channel that same grit and passion to pick us all up, to help us heal and guide us forward.

110 Now, Joe is not perfect. And he'd be the first to tell you that. But there is no perfect candidate, no perfect president. And his ability to learn and grow—we find in that the kind of humility and maturity that so many of us yearn for right now. Because Joe Biden has served this nation his entire life without ever losing sight of who he is; but more than that, he has never lost sight of who we are, all of us.

115 Joe Biden wants all of our kids to go to a good school, see a doctor when they're sick, live on a healthy planet. And he's got plans to make all of that happen. Joe Biden wants all of our kids, no matter what they look like, to be able to walk out the door without worrying about being harassed or arrested or killed. He wants all of our kids to be able to go to a movie or a math class without being afraid of getting shot. He wants all our kids to grow up with leaders who won't just serve themselves and their wealthy peers but will provide a safety net for people facing hard times.

120 And if we want a chance to pursue any of these goals, any of these most basic requirements for a functioning society, we have to vote for Joe Biden in numbers that cannot be ignored. Because right now, folks who know they cannot win fair and square at the ballot box are doing everything they can to stop us from voting. They're closing down polling places in minority neighborhoods. They're purging voter rolls. They're sending people out to intimidate voters, and they're lying about the security of our ballots. These tactics are not new.

125 But this is not the time to withhold our votes in protest or play games with candidates who have no chance of winning. We have got to vote like we did in 2008 and 2012. We've got to show up with the same level of passion and hope for Joe Biden. We've got to vote early, in person if we can. We've got to request our mail-in ballots right now, tonight, and send them back immediately and follow-up to make sure they're received. And then, make sure our friends and families do the
130 same.

We have got to grab our comfortable shoes, put on our masks, pack a brown bag dinner and maybe breakfast too, because we've got to be willing to stand in line all night if we have to.

135 Look, we have already sacrificed so much this year. So many of you are already going that extra mile. Even when you're exhausted, you're mustering up unimaginable courage to put on those scrubs and give our loved ones a fighting chance. Even when you're anxious, you're delivering those packages, stocking those shelves, and doing all that essential work so that all of us can keep moving forward.

140 Even when it all feels so overwhelming, working parents are somehow piecing it all together without child care. Teachers are getting creative so that our kids can still learn and grow. Our young people are desperately fighting to pursue their dreams.

And when the horrors of systemic racism shook our country and our consciences, millions of Americans of every age, every background rose up to march for each other, crying out for justice and progress.

145 This is who we still are: compassionate, resilient, decent people whose fortunes are bound up with one another. And it is well past time for our leaders to once again reflect our truth.

So, it is up to us to add our voices and our votes to the course of history, echoing heroes like John Lewis who said, "When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something." That is the truest form of empathy: not just feeling, but doing; not just for ourselves or our kids, but for everyone, for all our kids.

150 And if we want to keep the possibility of progress alive in our time, if we want to be able to look our children in the eye after this election, we have got to reassert our place in American history. And we have got to do everything we can to elect my friend, Joe Biden, as the next president of the United States.

Thank you all. God bless.