

Democratic National Convention: Trauma, compromise, consilience, and the (im)possibility of racial reconciliation.

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Barack Obama's Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention: Trauma, Compromise, Consilience, and the (Im)possibility of Racial Reconciliation

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Abstract

The two authors of this article offer alternative readings of Barack Obama's July 27, 2004, address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention (DNC) as an experiment in interracial collaborative rhetorical criticism, one in which they "write together separately." David A. Frank judges Obama's speech a prophetic

effort advancing the cause of racial healing. Mark Lawrence McPhail finds Obama's speech, particularly when it is compared to Reverend Al Sharpton's DNC speech of July 28, 2004, an old vision of racelessness. Despite their different readings of Obama's address, both authors conclude that rhetorical scholars have an important role to play in cultivating a climate of racial reconciliation.



BARACK OBAMA'S ADDRESS TO THE 2004 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION: TRAUMA, COMPROMISE, CONSILIENCE, AND THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION

DAVID A. FRANK AND MARK LAWRENCE MCPHAIL

The two authors of this article offer alternative readings of Barack Obama's July 27, 2004, address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention (DNC) as an experiment in interracial collaborative rhetorical criticism, one in which they "write together separately." David A. Frank judges Obama's speech a prophetic effort advancing the cause of racial healing. Mark Lawrence McPhail finds Obama's speech, particularly when it is compared to Reverend Al Sharpton's DNC speech of July 28, 2004, an old vision of racelessness. Despite their different readings of Obama's address, both authors conclude that rhetorical scholars have an important role to play in cultivating a climate of racial reconciliation.

Illinois state senator Barack Obama's keynote address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention marked an important moment in the trajectory of African American rhetoric. His speech earned two reasonable responses, one upward-inflected and the other downward-inflected.¹ For one of the authors of this essay, David A. Frank, Obama articulates a post-civil rights rhetoric intended to bring the various components of his composite audience (an audience "embracing people differing in character, loyalties, and functions") into rapprochement.² The core value at the center of Obama's speech is the essential equality of created individuals, and the mood he sought to cultivate is one of "audacious hope." Working from these foundations, Obama nests the traumas of slavery and racism with those suffered by American workers lacking a living wage and affordable health care, the bigotry

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