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Text of Al Sharpton's Address to the Democratic National Convention

FDCH E-Media, Inc.
Wednesday, July 28, 2004; 9:07 PM

The text of Reverend Al Sharpton's remarks to the Democratic National Convention:

SHARPTON: Thank you.

Tonight I want to address my remarks in two parts.

One, I'm honored to address the delegates here.

Last Friday, I had the experience in Detroit of hearing President George Bush make a speech. And in the speech, he asked certain questions. I hope he's watching tonight. I would like to answer your questions, Mr. President.

(APPLAUSE)

To the chairman, our delegates, and all that are assembled, we're honored and glad to be here tonight.

SHARPTON: I'm glad to be joined by supporters and friends from around the country. I'm glad to be joined by my family, Kathy, Dominique, who will be 18, and Ashley.

We are here 228 years after right here in Boston we fought to establish the freedoms of America. The first person to die in the Revolutionary War is buried not far from here, a Black man from Barbados, named Crispus Attucks.

(APPLAUSE)

Forty years ago, in 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party stood at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City fighting to preserve voting rights for all America and all Democrats, regardless of race or gender.

Hamer's stand inspired Dr. King's march in Selma, which brought about the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Twenty years ago, Reverend Jesse Jackson stood at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, again, appealing to the preserve those freedoms.

Tonight, we stand with those freedoms at risk and our security as citizens in question.

SHARPTON: I have come here tonight to say, that the only choice we have to preserve our freedoms at

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this point in history is to elect John Kerry the president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

I stood with both John Kerry and John Edwards on over 30 occasions during the primary season. I not only debated them, I watched them, I observed their deeds, I looked into their eyes. I am convinced that they are men who say what they mean and mean what they say.

(APPLAUSE)

I'm also convinced that at a time when a vicious spirit in the body politic of this country that attempts to undermine America's freedoms -- our civil rights, and civil liberties -- we must leave this city and go forth and organize this nation for victory for our party and John Kerry and John Edwards in November.

(APPLAUSE)

And let me quickly say, this is not just about winning an election. It's about preserving the principles on which this very nation was founded.

Look at the current view of our nation worldwide as a results of our unilateral foreign policy. We went from unprecedented international support and solidarity on September 12, 2001, to hostility and hatred as we stand here tonight. We can't survive in the world by ourselves.

(APPLAUSE)

How did we squander this opportunity to unite the world for democracy and to commit to a global fight against hunger and disease?

SHARPTON: We did it with a go-it-alone foreign policy based on flawed intelligence. We were told that we were going to Iraq because there were weapons of mass destruction. We've lost hundreds of soldiers. We've spent \$200 billion dollars at a time when we had record state deficits. And when it became clear that there were no weapons, they changed the premise for the war and said: No, we went because of other reasons.

If I told you tonight, "Let's leave the Fleet Center, we're in danger," and when you get outside, you ask me, Reverend Al, "What is the danger?" and I say, "It don't matter. We just needed some fresh air," I have misled you and we were misled.

(APPLAUSE)

We are also faced with the prospect of in the next four years that two or more of the Supreme Court Justice seats will become available. This year we celebrated the anniversary of Brown v. the Board of Education.

(APPLAUSE)

SHARPTON: This court has voted five to four on critical issues of women's rights and civil rights. It is frightening to think that the gains of civil and women rights and those movements in the last century could be reversed if this administration is in the White House in these next four years.

(APPLAUSE)

I suggest to you tonight that if George Bush had selected the court in '54, Clarence Thomas would have never got to law school.

(APPLAUSE)

This is not about a party. This is about living up to the promise of America. The promise of America says we will guarantee quality education for all children and not spend more money on metal detectors than computers in our schools.

(APPLAUSE)

The promise of America guarantees health care for all of its citizens and doesn't force seniors to travel to Canada to buy prescription drugs they can't afford here at home.

(APPLAUSE)

SHARPTON: The promise of America provides that those who work in our health care system can afford to be hospitalized in the very beds they clean up every day.

The promise of America is that government does not seek to regulate your behavior in the bedroom, but to guarantee your right to provide food in the kitchen.

(APPLAUSE)

The issue of government is not to determine who may sleep together in the bedroom, it's to help those that might not be eating in the kitchen.

(APPLAUSE)

The promise of America that we stand for human rights, whether it's fighting against slavery in the Sudan, where right now Joe Madison and others are fasting, around what is going on in the Sudan; AIDS in Lesotho; a police misconduct in this country.

SHARPTON: The promise of America is one immigration policy for all who seek to enter our shores, whether they come from Mexico, Haiti or Canada, there must be one set of rules for everybody.

(APPLAUSE)

We cannot welcome those to come and then try and act as though any culture will not be respected or treated inferior. We cannot look at the Latino community and preach "one language." No one gave them an English test before they sent them to Iraq to fight for America.

(APPLAUSE)

The promise of America is that every citizen vote is counted and protected, and election schemes do not decide the election.

It, to me, is a glaring contradiction that we would fight, and rightfully so, to get the right to vote for the

people in the capital of Iraq in Baghdad, but still don't give the federal right to vote for the people in the capital of the United States, in Washington, D.C.

(APPLAUSE)

SHARPTON: Mr. President, as I close, Mr. President, I heard you say Friday that you had questions for voters, particularly African- American voters. And you asked the question: Did the Democratic Party take us for granted? Well, I have raised questions. But let me answer your question.

You said the Republican Party was the party of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. It is true that Mr. Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, after which there was a commitment to give 40 acres and a mule.

That's where the argument, to this day, of reparations starts. We never got the 40 acres. We went all the way to Herbert Hoover, and we never got the 40 acres.

SHARPTON: We didn't get the mule. So we decided we'd ride this donkey as far as it would take us.

(APPLAUSE)

Mr. President, you said would we have more leverage if both parties got our votes, but we didn't come this far playing political games. It was those that earned our vote that got our vote. We got the Civil Rights Act under a Democrat. We got the Voting Rights Act under a Democrat. We got the right to organize under Democrats.

(APPLAUSE)

SHARPTON: Mr. President, the reason we are fighting so hard, the reason we took Florida so seriously, is our right to vote wasn't gained because of our age. Our vote was soaked in the blood of martyrs, soaked in the blood of good men (inaudible) soaked in the blood of four little girls in Birmingham. This vote is sacred to us.

(APPLAUSE)

This vote can't be bargained away.

(APPLAUSE)

This vote can't be given away.

(APPLAUSE)

Mr. President, in all due respect, Mr. President, read my lips: Our vote is not for sale.

(APPLAUSE)

SHARPTON: And there's a whole generation of young leaders that have come forward across this country that stand on integrity and stand on their traditions, those that have emerged with John Kerry and John Edwards as partners, like Greg Meeks, like Barack Obama, like our voter registration director, Marjorie Harris, like those that are in the trenches.

And we come with strong family values. Family values is not just those with two-car garages and a retirement plan. Retirement plans are good. But family values also are those who had to make nothing stretch into something happening, who had to make ends meet.

I was raised by a single mother who made a way for me. She used to scrub floors as a domestic worker, put a cleaning rag in her pocketbook and ride the subways in Brooklyn so I would have food on the table.

SHARPTON: But she taught me as I walked her to the subway that life is about not where you start, but where you're going. That's family values.

(APPLAUSE)

And I wanted somebody in my community -- I wanted to show that example. As I ran for president, I hoped that one child would come out of the ghetto like I did, could look at me walk across the stage with governors and senators and know they didn't have to be a drug dealer, they didn't have to be a hoodlum, they didn't have to be a gangster, they could stand up from a broken home, on welfare, and they could run for president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

As you know, I live in New York. I was there September 11th when that despicable act of terrorism happened.

SHARPTON: A few days after, I left home, my family had taken in a young man who lost his family. And as they gave comfort to him, I had to do a radio show that morning. When I got there, my friend James Entome (ph) said, "Reverend, we're going to stop at a certain hour and play a song, synchronized with 990 other stations."

I said, "That's fine."

He said, "We're dedicating it to the victims of 9/11."

I said, "What song are you playing?"

He said "America the Beautiful." The particular station I was at, the played that rendition song by Ray Charles.

As you know, we lost Ray a few weeks ago, but I sat there that morning and listened to Ray sing through those speakers, "Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountains' majesty across the fruited plain."

And it occurred to me as I heard Ray singing, that Ray wasn't singing about what he knew, because Ray had been blind since he was a child. He hadn't seen many purple mountains. He hadn't seen many fruited plains. He was singing about what he believed to be.

Mr. President, we love America, not because all of us have seen the beauty all the time.

SHARPTON: But we believed if we kept on working, if we kept on marching, if we kept on voting, if we kept on believing, we would make America beautiful for everybody.

Starting in November, let's make America beautiful again.

Thank you. And God bless you.

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