

Geraldine Ferraro

Ladies and gentlemen of the convention, my name is Geraldine Ferraro. I stand before you to proclaim tonight: America is the land where dreams can come true for all of us. As I stand before the American people and think of the honor this great convention has bestowed on me, I recall the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who made America stronger by making America more free. He said: "Occasionally in life there are moments which cannot be completely explained by words. Their meaning can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart." Tonight is such a moment for me. My heart is filled with pride. My fellow citizens, I proudly accept your nomination for Vice President of the United States. And I am proud to run with a man who will be one of the great presidents of this century, Walter F. Mondale.

Tonight, the daughter of a woman whose highest goal was a future for her children, talks to our nation's oldest party about a future for us all. Tonight, the daughter of working Americans tells all Americans that the future is within our reach if we're willing to reach for it. Tonight, the daughter of an immigrant from Italy has been chosen to run for Vice President in the new land my father came to love.

Our faith that we can shape a better future is what the American dream is all about. The promise of our country is that the rules are fair. If you work hard and play by the rules, you can earn your share of America's blessings. Those are the beliefs I learned from my parents. And those are the values I taught my students as a teacher in the public schools of New York City. At night I went to law school. I became an assistant district attorney and I put my share of criminals behind bars. I believe: If you obey the law, you should be protected. But if you break the law, you should pay for your crime. When I first ran for Congress, all the political experts said a Democrat could not win my home district of Queens. I put my faith in the people and the values that we shared. Together, we proved the political experts wrong. In this campaign, Fritz Mondale and I have put our faith in the people. And we are going to prove the experts wrong again. We are going to win. We are going to win, because Americans across this country believe in the same basic dream.

Last week, I visited Elmore, Minnesota—yeah, Elmore—the small town where Fritz Mondale was raised. And soon Fritz and Joan will visit our family in Queens. Nine hundred people live in Elmore. In Queens there are 2000 people on one block. You would think we would be different, but we're not. Children walk to school in Elmore past grain elevators; in Queens they pass by subway stops. But, no matter where they live, their future depends on education, and their parents are willing to do their part to make those schools as good as they can be. In Elmore, there are family farms; in Queens, small businesses. But the men and women who run them all take pride in supporting their families through hard work and initiative. On the Fourth of July in Elmore, they hang flags out on Main Street; in Queens, they fly them over Grand Avenue. But all of us love our country, and stand ready to defend the freedom that it represents. Americans want to live by the same set of rules. But under this administration, the rules are rigged against too many of

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our people. It isn't right that every year, the share of taxes paid by individuals citizens is going up, while the share paid by large corporations is getting smaller and smaller. The rules say: Everyone in our society should contribute their fair share. It isn't right that this year Ronald Reagan will hand the American people a bill for interest on the national debt larger than the entire cost of the federal government under John F. Kennedy. Our parents left us a growing economy. The rules say: We must not leave our kids a mountain of debt.

It isn't right that a woman should get paid 59 cents on the dollar for the same work as a man. If you play by the rules, you deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

It isn't right that—that if trends continue—by the year 2000 nearly all of the poor people in America will be women and children. The rules of a decent society say, when you distribute sacrifice in times of austerity, you don't put women and children first.

It isn't right that young people today fear they won't get the Social Security they paid for, and that older Americans fear they will lose what they have already earned. Social Security is a contract between the last generation and the next, and the rules say: You don't break contracts. We are going to keep faith with older Americans. We hammered out a fair compromise in the Congress to save Social Security. Every group sacrificed to keep the system sound. It is time Ronald Reagan stopped scaring our senior citizens.

It isn't right that young couples question whether to bring children into a world of 50,000 nuclear warheads. That isn't the vision for which Americans have struggled for more than two centuries. And our future doesn't have to be that way.

Change is in the air, just as surely as when John Kennedy beckoned America to a new frontier; when Sally Ride rocketed into space and when Rev. Jesse Jackson ran for the office of President of the United States. By choosing a woman to run for our nation's second highest office, you send a powerful signal to all Americans. There are no doors we cannot unlock. We will place no limits on achievement. If we can do this, we can do anything. Tonight, we reclaim our dream. We're going to make the rules of American life work fairly for all Americans again.

To an administration that would have us debate all over again whether the Voting Rights Act should be renewed and whether segregated schools should be tax exempt, we say, Mr. President: Those debates are over. The issue of civil, voting rights, and affirmative action for minorities must not go backwards. We must—and we will—move forward to open the doors of opportunity.

To those who understand that our country cannot prosper until we draw on the talents of all Americans, we say: We will pass the Equal Rights Amendment. The issue is not what America can do for women, but what women can do for America.

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To the Americans who will lead our country into the Twenty-First Century, we say: We will not have a Supreme Court that turns the clocks back to the Nineteenth Century. To those concerned about the strength of American family values, as I am, I say: We are going to restore those values—love, caring, partnership—by including, and not excluding, those whose beliefs differ from our own. Because our own faith is strong, we will fight to preserve the freedom of faith for others.

To those working Americans who fear that banks, utilities, and special interests have a lock on the White House, we say: join us; a people's president; and let's have government by and for the American people again.

To an administration that would savage student loans and education in the dawn of a new technological age, we say: You fit the classic definition of a cynic; you know the price of everything, but the value of nothing. To our students and their parents, we say: We will insist on the highest standards of excellence because the jobs of the future require skilled minds.

To young Americans who may be called to our country's service, we say: We know your generation will proudly answer our country's call, as each generation before us. This past year, we remembered the bravery and sacrifice of Americans at Normandy. And we finally paid tribute—as we should have done years ago—to that unknown soldier who represents all the brave young Americans who died in Vietnam. Let no one doubt we will defend America's security and the cause of freedom around the world. But we want a president who tells us what America is fighting for, not just what we are fighting against. We want a president who will defend human rights—not just where it is convenient, but wherever freedom is at risk—from Chile to Afghanistan, from Poland to South Africa.

To those who have watched this administration's confusion in the Middle East, as it has tilted first toward one and then another of Israel's long-time enemies and wonder, "Will America stand by her friends and sister democracy?" We say: America knows who her friends are in the Middle East and around the world. America will stand with Israel always.

Finally, we want a president who will keep America strong, but use that strength to keep America and the world at peace. A nuclear freeze is not a slogan—it is a tool for survival in the nuclear age. If we leave our children nothing else, let us leave them this Earth as we found it—whole and green and full of life. I know in my heart that Walter Mondale will be that president.

A wise man once said, "Every one of us is given the gift of life, and what a strange gift it is. If it is preserved jealously and selfishly, it impoverishes and saddens. But if it is spent for others, it enriches and beautifies." My fellow Americans, we can debate policies and programs. But in the end what separates the two parties in this election campaign is whether we use the gift of life for others or only ourselves.

Tonight, my husband, John, and our three children are in this hall with

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me. To my daughters, Donna and Laura, and my son, John, Jr., I say: My mother did not break faith with me and I will not break faith with you. To all the children of America I say: The generation before ours kept faith with us, and like them, we will pass on to you a stronger, more just America.

Thank you.

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On the evening of July 19, 1984, the Democratic Convention at the Moscone Center in San Francisco was filled with an unusual number of children. Delegates had brought their daughters and granddaughters to witness a historic moment. Sixty-four years after women obtained the right to vote, Geraldine Ferraro would become the first woman in United States history to accept a major party's nomination for the office of vice president. Her speech that evening would emphasize the realization of the "American Dream."

Ferraro was nominated that evening by acclamation. Starting with the traditional roll call, the fourth state, Arkansas, passed to Ferraro's home state of New York. The chairman of the New York delegation cast all of their votes for her nomination and asked that Ferraro be nominated by acclamation. The 4,000 delegates responded by saying "aye" and pandemonium broke out on the convention floor. The crowd chanted while the band played "New York, New York," as Ferraro came out to accept her nomination for vice president.

The 1984 presidential campaign had been the longest in U.S. history. It began in early 1983 when eight contenders were vying for the Democratic nomination. By March 1984, the three remaining contenders were former Vice President Walter F. Mondale, Colorado Senator Gary Hart, and civil rights leader Jesse Jackson. Although Hart won some of the primaries, Mondale maintained the lead throughout the campaign and obtained the delegate majority needed for nomination at the convention.

Party activists hoped that Mondale's decision to name the first woman to a major political ticket would fuel his uphill race for the presidency. Nine million more women than men were expected to vote in the 1984 presidential election. This excess of female voters became known as the "gender gap." President Ronald Reagan was finishing up his first term. He was running for reelection and was winning in the polls. The country's economic recovery helped to create a sense of well-being and optimism that was working in the Republicans' favor. The Democrats were hoping that the selection of Ferraro as Mondale's running mate would persuade women voters to support him.

The National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) and the National Organization for Women (NOW) were instrumental in making this historic moment happen. They let the Democratic candidates know that they wanted a woman or minority person on the ticket as the vice presidential candidate. Mondale had told both organizations that he would seriously consider their demands. Mondale interviewed Black and Hispanic men and three women, Mayor Diane Feinstein of San Francisco, Governor Martha Layne Collins of Kentucky, and Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York. On July 12, 1984, Mondale announced Ferraro as his running mate.

The purpose of Ferraro's acceptance speech was to introduce herself to the American public and to establish her image as a candidate. In addition, she needed to relate her vision to Walter Mondale's and contrast it with the present Reagan administration. Ferraro had served as a Congresswoman in the House of Representatives for six years prior to her nomination as Mondale's running mate. Until that time, this dynamic, outspoken, 48 year



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old woman was relatively unknown to the public.

Ferraro begins her speech by establishing herself as an example of the American Dream. “My name is Geraldine Ferraro. I stand before you to proclaim tonight: America is the land where dreams can come true for all of us.” She creatively capitalized on the American Dream scenario, where the poor but talented heroine works hard and achieves success. Ferraro’s speech emphasizes her parents’ roots, her work and its challenges, and her commitment to her family.

Ferraro goes on to present familiar fantasy themes based on the lives of American heroes and identifies herself with them. She refers to other Americans that symbolized change: Reverend Jesse Jackson, the first Black man to run for president; John F. Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic president; and Sally Ride, the first woman astronaut. Then referring to her own nomination, she states: “By choosing a woman to run for our nation’s second highest office, you send a powerful signal to all Americans. There are no doors we cannot unlock. We will place no limits on achievement.” The speech also includes a description of the weaknesses and inadequacies of the Republican administration. The major concerns emphasized in the speech were reiterated throughout the campaign: the national debt, tax breaks for the wealthy, endangerment of social security, backsliding concerning civil rights, voting rights, women’s rights, and human rights abroad.

Ferraro’s speech that evening was well received. Polls taken after that evening indicated that the gap was lessening between the Republicans and the Democrats. As the presidential campaign continued, Ferraro drew huge crowds and generated a great deal of enthusiasm. However, the Mondale-Ferraro campaign was plagued by questions regarding Ferraro’s husband’s fiscal irregularities in his business, attacks regarding her inexperience with foreign policy issues and criticisms that Mondale’s appointment of Ferraro was another example of his surrendering to special-interest groups. The incumbents, President Reagan and Vice President Bush, won a landslide victory against Mondale and Ferraro in the November 1984 presidential election.

Although Ferraro did not become vice president, another barrier for women had fallen. Ferraro symbolized the possibilities for women in the leadership of this country. Ferraro also gave hope to women that there were no limits to what they could achieve.

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Geraldine Ferraro was Walter Mondale's running mate in the 1984 Democratic presidential campaign. She was the first woman to be nominated as a vice presidential candidate of a major United States party. On July 19, the final night of the 1984 Democratic Convention, Ferraro's nomination was approved by the delegates.

Ferraro was born in Newburgh, New York, on August 26, 1935. Her father, Dominick Ferraro, an Italian immigrant and a restaurateur, died when she was eight years old. Her mother, Antonetta, moved the family to the South Bronx and worked in the garment district crocheting beads on dresses to support the family. Antonetta Ferraro felt strongly about her children becoming well-educated. Ferraro, bright and determined, obtained scholarships to attend Marymount School and Marymount College. She graduated from Marymount College in 1956 and became an English teacher in Queens, New York. She attended Fordham University Law School in the evenings. In 1960, Ferraro passed the bar exam. During that same year, she married John Zaccaro, a real-estate developer. Ferraro decided to keep her single name as a tribute to her mother.

Ferraro practiced civil law part-time while raising three children. In 1974, she became assistant district attorney in the Investigations Bureau of Queens and the following year, headed the Special Victims Bureau for victims of domestic violence and rape. She quit the District Attorney's office in 1978, and ran for a seat in the House of Representatives. Ferraro won the election and was reelected in 1980 and 1982.

In Congress, Ferraro earned the image of an "organization Democrat," a team player. She supported the Equal Rights Amendment, economic-equity issues, and legalized abortion. However, she made the Democratic party, not the feminist movement, her vehicle for action. After gaining a reputation for hard work and skilled speaking, Ferraro was chosen as chair of the Democratic Platform Committee. She was instrumental in constructing the campaign platform for the July 1984 Democratic National Convention. With the aid of the National Women's Political Caucus, she was identified as one of the most appropriate running mates for Walter Mondale. It is felt that Mondale selected Ferraro because she would mobilize older voters, young voters, and of course, women.

Ferraro became a national figure as she campaigned vigorously and debated her Republican opponent, Vice President George Bush, on television. However, during the campaign there was a lengthy controversy concerning her husband's finances, and the Catholic Church attacked her for supporting legalized abortion. The Mondale-Ferraro ticket was crushingly defeated by the incumbents Reagan and Bush in the November election.

After the presidential elections, Ferraro finished out her term in Congress and returned to practicing law. In 1992, she lost a close race for the Democratic nomination for a Senate seat from New York. Ferraro in recent years has been active in writing about women's human rights issues and works as a partner in a private law firm.



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Glossary

running mate - the candidate running for a subordinate place on a ticket, often the candidate for vice president

Democratic Convention - a convention held by the Democratic party to nominate their candidates for political office and to describe their position on current issues.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) - attempted amendment to the U.S. Constitution stating that equal rights cannot be denied based on sex. It would invalidate many state laws that discriminate against women. Submitted in 1923 and approved by Congress in 1972, ERA did not receive ratification by enough states to become an amendment.

National Women's Political Caucus - an organization dedicated to increasing women's participation in politics at all levels; founded in 1971.

feminist movement - a political movement that works to achieve equal rights for women and men. The history of American feminism began soon after the Revolution in the late 1700's.

Comprehension Questions

1. What is Geraldine Ferraro best known for? (recall)
2. How would you describe Geraldine Ferraro? (attributes)
3. What major events influenced the public's feelings about Ferraro? (order)
4. Ferraro was a Catholic, but she supported legalized abortion. What were the conflicts between these two beliefs? (relationship)
5. Why do you think that Ferraro focused on using the Democratic party rather than the feminist movement to create change? (inference)
6. Do you think the Democratic party was helped or hurt by having a woman run for vice president? (evaluation)



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Quotes

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There are no doors we cannot unlock.

We will place no limits on achievement.

We must — and we will — move forward to open the doors of opportunity.

Because our faith is strong, we will fight to preserve the freedom of faith for others.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was the goal of Ferraro's acceptance speech? What theme did she focus on?
2. Discuss women leaders of the world from past to the present. When do you feel the United States will have a woman president? Why?
3. Do you think life would be different for women today if Mondale and Ferraro had won the election in 1984? Why or why not?
4. How do you think Ferraro felt as the first woman nominated as vice president of a major United States party? How do you think it would feel to be the first of your group to accomplish something?
5. Summarize the major advances for women in the U.S. since they obtained the right to vote. What doors have they unlocked?

Additional Readings

Ferraro, Geraldine and Linda B. Francke. 1985. *Ferraro: My Story*. New York, NY: Bantam Books

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Shogun, Robert. 1985. The 1984 US Election— An Overview. (pp 26-38) *The Americana Annual*. Danbury, CT: Grolier Inc.