

## Investigating Language and Power Dynamics in Obama's Farewell Speech: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

Every word spoken, every sentence constructed, and every discourse contains ideological weight that reflects the power structures within society. In the political landscape of the United States, presidential speeches hold a special position as a genre of discourse that not only reflects the individual vision of a leader, but also represents the aspirations, values, and identity of the nation. This phenomenon becomes even more significant when analyzed through the lens of critical discourse analysis, which allows researchers to uncover layers of meaning hidden behind linguistic constructions. This study uses critical discourse analysis to examine Barack Obama's farewell speech as a complex discourse practice that reflects and shapes contemporary American socio-political reality. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework, this study analyzes the speech in terms of its textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions during the contentious transition to the Trump administration. Textual analysis reveals the strategic use of language with carefully chosen vocabulary and grammatical constructions, reinforcing the themes of unity and democracy. At the discourse practice level, the speech employs

effective rhetorical strategies, including personal addresses and compelling narratives to build emotional connections with the audience. Sociocultural analysis shows deep integration with the American institutional context, evidenced by the strategic choice of location in Chicago, acknowledgment of racial challenges, and calls to overcome intensifying political polarization. Findings indicate that Obama's farewell speech illustrates how political discourse functions as an instrument for maintaining and transforming democratic values during critical political transitions. The speech's power stems from its sophisticated linguistic construction and its capacity to respond to the broader sociopolitical context with profound nuance.

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Speech, Barack Obama, Rhetorical Strategy, Language and Power*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is never neutral. Every word spoken, every sentence constructed, and every discourse carried ideological weight that reflected the power structures within society (Van Dijk, 2017). This fundamental premise became the starting point for understanding the complexity of the relationship between language and power, particularly in the context of contemporary politics (Fairclough, 2013). When a political leader speaks, they are not only conveying information, but also constructing reality, shaping collective identities, and maintaining or challenging the existing social order. This phenomenon becomes even more relevant when we observe how world leaders use language as an instrument to mobilize support, legitimize policies, and construct social narratives (David, 2014; Shenhav, 2015; Zurriyati, Rahman & Alaqqad, 2023).

In the political landscape of the United States, presidential speeches have a special position as a genre of discourse that not only reflects the individual vision of a leader but also represents the aspirations, values, and identity of the nation (Gusthini, Sobarna & Amalia, 2018). Presidential speeches, especially those delivered at significant moments in time, serve as cultural endowments that both crystallize the spirit of the times and provide an interpretive framework for political events (Lodhi et al., 2018; Sparrow, 2008; Heo & Park, 2016). One of the most significant moments in contemporary the United States of America's political history was President Barack Obama's farewell speech on January 10, 2017, in Chicago, Illinois. Delivered at the end of Obama's two terms in office, the speech

was not only a reflection on his presidency's achievements but also a complex political statement about the future of the United States of America's democracy.

Obama's farewell speech had a unique historical dimension because it was delivered in the context of a tense transition of power to Donald Trump's reign. This moment was marked by deep political polarization, rising populist sentiment, and challenges to the values of liberal democracy that had long been the foundation of the United States of America's political system (Rudolph, 2021; Pease, 2021; Levitsky & Way, 2025).

Therefore, in such circumstances, Obama's rhetorical strategy, word choice, and discourse construction become crucial to analyze, not only in terms of persuasive effectiveness but also through a critical lens that interrogates the ideological work of his language. This speech serves as both a farewell message and a political manifesto that upholds a certain vision of the United States and democracy amid the threat of political disruption. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, it is important to explore how Obama's call for unity, democratic values, and national identity can simultaneously legitimize existing power structures and normalize certain ideologies as universal truths during a period of transitional politics. Thus, this study aims to unravel the rhetorical strategies used to strengthen national cohesion as well as the more subtle ideological mechanisms in reproducing the dominant narrative of American democracy.

The importance of analyzing Obama's speeches through the lens of CDA lies in this approach's ability to reveal how power operates through language in a democratic political context. According to Rivera & Plant (2016) and Smithers (2009), Barack Obama, as the first African-American president in the history of the United States, occupies a unique position in the power structure. His identity as a minority who has reached the highest position in the political hierarchy creates complex discursive dynamics, in which he must navigate the differing expectations of various constituencies. An analysis of the discursive strategies can provide insights into how power is negotiated and legitimized in a society (see Hansson, 2015; Sharndama, 2016; Barkessa, 2019; Lynggaard, 2012; Supeno, Setiawan & Purwati, 2017; Raza, Imran & Shah, 2024).

Furthermore, Obama's farewell speech was delivered at a time when the United States of America was facing various internal and external challenges that threatened social cohesion and political stability (Turner & Parmar, 2020). Rising economic inequality, racial polarization, the threat of extremism, and demographic changes have created collective anxiety that has been exploited by populist political forces (Bostdorff, 2017; Wibisono, 2023). In this context, President Obama's speech can be understood as an attempt to maintain the hegemony of liberal-democratic ideology through the construction of a narrative that emphasizes unity, tolerance, and optimism (Telatar, 2014). However, a critical discourse analysis moves beyond examining Obama merely as a communicator of democratic ideals, it also interrogates his role as a producer and legitimizer of political ideology. This requires acknowledging the tensions between his unifying rhetoric and structural inequalities that persisted during his administration, including racial disparities in criminal justice, economic inequality, and controversial foreign policy decisions such as deportation policies (Golash-Boza, 2018).

Therefore, while Obama employed various discursive strategies to position his vision of the United States as a more attractive alternative to the strengthening populist narrative, a critical analysis must examine this rhetoric potentially functioned to naturalize ongoing systemic contradictions rather than fundamentally challenging them. This lens reveals not only the persuasive mechanism of his discourse but also ideological work performed by such rhetoric in maintaining existing power and ideology structures even while appearing to contest them.

This study is also relevant in the context of contemporary political communication studies, which increasingly focus on the role of language in shaping political reality (Perloff, 2021). In the era of post-truth and disinformation, the ability to critically analyse how political leaders use language to influence and shape public opinion is becoming increasingly critical (Rahmani & Saeed, 2024; Deligiaouri, 2018; López-García & Pavía, 2019). Obama's speech, with its rhetorical complexity and unique political context,

provides an ideal case for exploring the dynamics between language, power, and political legitimacy in liberal democracy.

To understand the complexity of the discourse in Obama's speech, an analytical framework is needed that can reveal the layers of meaning hidden beneath the textual surface. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the approach developed by Norman Fairclough, offers the appropriate analytical tools to dissect the dynamics of language and power in a political context (Fairclough, 2023). Fairclough views discourse as a social practice that cannot be separated from the power structures in society (Fairclough, 2020). According to this perspective, every text is a product of specific social conditions and at the same time contributes to reproducing or transforming those conditions (Fairclough, & Fairclough, 2015; Paltridge, 2022).

Fairclough's (2023) Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that aims to analyze texts and discourse practices in relation to power relations, domination, and resistance in society. This framework allows researchers to not only identify the linguistic strategies used, but also to understand how these strategies function in maintaining or challenging existing power structures. The dimension of discourse practice, as explained by Fairclough, includes the production process involving specific work methods, workflows, and institutional routines, as well as the consumption process, which can vary depending on the social context in which the text is presented. Meanwhile, the sociocultural practice dimension refers to contexts that transcend the text itself, covering specific situations to broader institutional practices, including the relationship between media, society, culture, politics, and economics that influence the production and interpretation of texts.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model (2013; 2020; 2023) is employed as an integrated critical analysis framework for examining Obama's speeches. In the first dimension (textual analysis), this study traces word choice, grammatical patterns, and rhetorical strategies, with an emphasis on the mechanisms of meaning that operate through the absence of silence and deletion, presuppositions, and modality restrictions

such as hedging, causality, futuristic orientation, and the obscuring of agency through passive voices or nominalization, to examine the construction of inclusion, as well as the limitation or deferral of commitment and responsibility. The second dimension (discursive practice) then maps how these textual configurations are produced, disseminated, and interpreted in specific institutional contexts, while the third dimension (social practices) connects them to power relations, dominant ideological formations, and broader historical-political contexts, thereby facilitating interpretations of how democracy can be symbolically affirmed while normalizing or allowing unchecked—structural inequality.

Through a critical discourse analysis of Obama's farewell speech, this study aims to uncover the discursive mechanisms used to build consensus, manage contradictions, and maintain ideological hegemony. Thus, this study not only contributes to the understanding of Obama's specific style of political communication, but also provides broader insights into how power operates through language in the context of contemporary democratic politics. This analysis is expected to provide a useful critical perspective for understanding the political dynamics of the United States and their implications for the future of global democracy.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The subject of this study is Barack Hussein Obama, the 44th President of the United States who served two terms from January 20, 2009, to January 20, 2017 (Onwumechili, 2017). Obama, as the first African American president in U.S. history, held a unique position in the United States of America's political power structure. His background as a senator from Illinois, a professor of constitutional law, and a community activist adds dimension to the analysis of his political discourse. Obama was also chosen as the subject of this study based on his reputation as a skilled orator and his ability to use language to mobilize political support among diverse demographics.

The primary data for this study is the complete transcript of Barack Obama's farewell speech delivered on January 10, 2017, at McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois. This speech was chosen as the object of analysis because of its historical significance as the farewell speech of the first African-American president in the United States history, as well as its unique political context during the transition of power to the Donald Trump administration. Critically, this study acknowledges the complex and potentially contradictory nature of President Obama's positionality, while his racial identity represents a history of euphoria in American political symbolism; hence, his political power necessitates careful examination of how this identity may have been deployed discursively. Rather than treating Obama's minority identity as inherently oppositional, this paper interrogates how his racial identity may have functioned both as a site of resistance and as a legitimizing mechanism for dominant neoliberal ideologies. Therefore, the analysis maintains critical distance from romanticizing his historic position, instead scrutinizing how ideology and identity intersect, overlap, and sometimes obscure one another within his farewell discourse.

The selection of this speech was also based on its rhetorical complexity and its representativeness of Obama's overall political communication style. Secondary data sources include contextual documentation such as media reports, contemporary political analysis, and academic literature relevant to Obama's presidency and the political context of the United States in 2016-2017. This secondary data serves to enrich the analysis of sociocultural practices and provide the necessary context for a comprehensive interpretation.

The data collection procedure was carried out through several systematic stages. First, the official transcript of Obama's farewell speech was extracted, with audio-visual recordings available on digital media platforms. Second, contextual data was collected through a review of academic literature, mainstream media reports, and historical documentation relevant to the political transition period. Third, source triangulation was conducted to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data collected.

Data analysis was analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive analysis method that integrated the three dimensions of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework to deepen our understanding of the tension between Obama's inclusive rhetoric and structural inequality that remains unspoken or only mentioned in passing. The analysis process began with textual analysis, which included the identification and categorization of linguistic features such as lexical choices, syntactic structures, modalities, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies. The second stage involved the analysis of discursive practices that explored intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and the process of text production-consumption in an institutional context. The third stage was the analysis of sociocultural practices that linked linguistic findings with power structures, dominant ideologies, and relevant socio-historical contexts. To ensure the validity of the analysis, this study applies the principles of reflexivity and methodological transparency. Each stage of the analysis is systematically documented, and interpretations are supported by explicit textual evidence. Equally significant, this framework is used to highlight instances where discourse merely affirms inclusion symbolically, while at the same time maintaining or allowing structural inequality to persist unchallenged.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Textual Analysis

In the context of textual analysis, the study is not limited to the linguistic structures that appear in discursive events, but also includes various multimodal elements. The concept of "text" in the modern sense encompasses various forms of communication, including images, sounds, colors, and songs. Microanalysis within Fairclough's framework is a fundamental component that focuses on detailed linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, semantics, sound systems, and cohesive organization at the sentence level. This approach provides an important foundation for understanding how language is used as a tool for constructing meaning and power in discourse. This broader perspective allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how meaning is constructed through various modes of

communication. Fairclough proposes that each text can be analyzed through three main elements: representation, relations, and identity. These elements form an analytical framework that allows for a deeper understanding of how texts function in a broader social context. This analytical approach is preferred because it allows for a more integrated understanding of how various elements of language interact to create meaning and reinforce power dynamics within a text.

When he speaks, President Obama often uses positive words, to analyze the positive word choice in Barack Obama's speech transcripts, we need to identify words that have positive connotations and represent hope, success, and unity such as "Reverse a Great Recession", these words show that there has been success in overcoming the economic crisis (Campagna-Pinto, 2015; Ferrara, 2013). "Reboot our auto industry" might be described as the revitalization of the auto industry as a positive achievement. In the context of his speech, the term "revitalization" indicates that the auto industry, which previously suffered a drastic decline and faced great challenges, managed to rebound and function well. The phrase "longest stretch of job creation" in Barack Obama's speech not only highlights sustainable job creation, but also refers to the context of the post-recession economy, the social impact on people's well-being, and an effective communication strategy to build optimism (Jordan & Picciano, 2019; Chahinez & Samira, 2024).

Further, the use of phrase "Open a new chapter" suggests a hopeful new beginning, especially in international relations, such as with Cuba, which shows positive changes and new potential opportunities (O'Connor & Cooper, 2021; Mousavi & Nourigholamizadeh, 2018). Meanwhile, "Secure the right to health insurance" emphasizes the importance of access to health insurance as a basic right for every citizen, reflecting the government's commitment to improving people's well-being. The phrase "Yes we can, yes we did" embraces optimism and the belief that people have the collective ability to achieve seemingly difficult goals, and encourages enthusiasm and a sense of unity among listeners (citizens). Together,

these three phrases create a powerful narrative of progress and challenges, and encourage active participation in building a better future.

President Obama's speech also contains phrases such as inclusivity, active participation, and collective belief. For instance, phrase "Belongs to everybody" captures the spirit of inclusivity and a sense of shared ownership of an institution like the White House, emphasizing that every citizen has the right to feel represented and involved in the governing process. In addition, "Show up, dive in, stay at it" is an invitation for people to actively engage in social change, encouraging them to not only be spectators but also doers in the struggle for justice and progress. Meanwhile, "Hold fast to that faith" emphasizes the importance of a shared belief in achieving a greater goal, reminding listeners of the core values that underpin this nation and encouraging them to hold on to hope despite challenges. This phrase also creates a bridge between political idealism and the concrete actions expected of citizens, just like what President Biden tried to emphasize in his inauguration speech (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023). Together, these three phrases create a powerful narrative of shared responsibility in building a better future.

This textual analysis shows how various linguistic elements, from word choice to rhetorical structure, work together to create effective discourse. A holistic approach allows us to see how meaning is formed not only through individual words, but also through complex interactions between various elements of language. Furthermore, this analysis reveals how contemporary political discourse utilizes various linguistic strategies to achieve complex communicative goals. From building optimism to encouraging active participation, from affirming inclusivity to reinforcing shared values, the use of language in political contexts demonstrates the power of discourse in shaping social and political realities. Thus, textual analysis within Fairclough's CDA framework not only provides an understanding of how language is used in specific contexts, but also reveals how discourse plays a role in the construction of broader social and political meanings.

### ***Discourse Practice***

When analyzing discursive practices, Fairclough argues that this analytical dimension aims to explore and identify the persuasive strength of statements, specifically examining their capacity to motivate action or their power to affirm and convince. In this context, the political speech (or the oral text produced) is shaped by discourse practices that determine how it is produced. Hence, the discourse practice analysis focuses on the production, consumption, and reproduction of texts. In analyzing Barack Obama's speech, discourse practice analysis can be conducted by examining how the speeches are constructed through their structure, context, and interaction with the audience.

In President Obama's speech, he began with a warm greeting, "Hello Chicago, it's good to be home," which created a familiar and comfortable atmosphere for the audience and demonstrated his ability to connect emotionally with the audience. Obama then used a clear narrative structure to recall the accomplishments of his presidency, highlighting the progress made in various areas such as economic recovery and job creation (Roos & Reccius, 2024). In this way, he not only celebrates successes, but also builds a sense of pride and hope in the audience, inviting them to reflect on the journey together and the potential for a better future. The use of rhetoric in Barack Obama's speech is very effective, especially through the repetition of the phrase "if I had told you," which strengthens the argument and emphasizes the remarkable achievements during his time in office. Through this use of rhetoric, Obama not only conveys information, but also creates a narrative that empowers and motivates the audience to actively participate in social change (Savage, 2021).

The speech reflected the post-election political situation in the United States, where Obama openly acknowledged the racial challenges that still exist. By addressing this issue, he demonstrated an awareness of complex social realities and the importance of open dialogue about race (Dyson, 2020; Tesler, 2020). He

emphasized that community involvement in the democratic process is critical to achieving progress, encouraging individuals to be active participants in politics rather than mere spectators. This creates a collective sense of social responsibility.

His speech is aimed at a broad audience, with a particular focus on the younger generation. By mentioning his children, Malia and Sasha, and other individuals such as Michelle and Livan Robinson, Obama creates a deep emotional connection with the audience. These mentions not only strengthen personal bonds, but also show recognition of the contributions of individuals who play a role in social change. This made the message more relevant and relatable to the audience, encouraging them to feel directly involved (Gleason & Hansen, 2023).

In addition to that, Obama actively invites the audience to participate in social change with phrases like "grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself". This creates a sense of collective responsibility among the audience to contribute to society and encourages them to get involved (Wanless & Berk, 2021). After Barack Obama's final speech, there were many articles and interviews that addressed the themes raised in the speech. leading media outlets such as the New York Times, the Atlantic and Politico published in-depth analyses that explored messages about engagement in democracy, racial challenges and hope for the future. these articles often highlighted how Obama encouraged people to actively participate in the political process and confront social issues head on.

Moreover, a YouTube video titled "Emotional: Obama Final Speech as President-try not to cry" appeared, featuring emotional moments from the speech. the video aims to capture viewers' reactions to emotional moments, such as when President Obama expresses his pride in fatherhood and reflects on the United States of America's racial (and historical) struggles. The appearance of this video shows how the speech serves not only as an official statement, but also as a source of inspiration that can evoke emotion and spark discussion among the public. Through the combination of op-eds, interviews and emotional videos, Obama's messages

continue to live and thrive on different media platforms, creating space for people to reflect on the challenges they face and inspiring them to become more involved in social and political issues, reinforcing the relevance of the speech in today's context (Obama, 2020).

An analysis of the discursive practices in Obama's speech shows how a political speech can serve as a catalyst for social change. Through a combination of strong narrative structure, personalization of the message, and a concrete call to action, this speech not only inspires but also mobilizes the audience to actively participate in the democratic process. Equally important, this analysis reveals how discursive practices can shape and be shaped by the broader socio-political context. Obama's speech is an example of how political discourse can be used to build bridges between individual experiences and collective aspirations, between historical reflection and future vision, and between political idealism and concrete action in a democratic society.

### **Socio-cultural Practice**

Sociocultural practices are a dimension that relates to another event and context outside the text that has an impact on the appearance of the text due to culture, politics, or society (Handayani et al. 2022). The analysis of sociocultural practices consists of investigating what happens within a particular sociocultural framework. The relationship between texts and sociocultural practices is not direct, but mediated through discourse practices. Gölbaşı (2017) states that Fairclough makes three levels of analysis in sociocultural practices consisting of situational, institutional, and social levels.

The analysis of the socio-cultural practices in Barack Obama's farewell address shows how the social and cultural context influences the message conveyed. At the Situational Level, Barack Obama's farewell address in Chicago contains a very important context. Obama delivered the speech in his hometown of

Chicago in an emotional setting, as it was his farewell after two terms as president. Opening lines like "Hello Chicago, it's good to be home" noted the closeness to the audience and added a personal touch to the speech.

He acknowledged that "race remains a powerful and often divisive force" in society, showing an understanding of the social challenges facing the United States of America, especially in the aftermath of the election (Dyson, 2020). The audience's response of applause illustrates how this message resonated with many in Obama's presence who supported the idea of talking directly about race and encouraging open dialogue. The audience seemed to connect with this call to solve social problems.

On an Institutional Level, the speech emphasized Obama's role as a leader of the country, encouraging people to get involved in nation-building. he reminded that "if you're disappointed in your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself," emphasizing the importance of active participation in a democratic system (Singh, 2020). when Obama made this call, the audience cheered in support, confirming that they were willing to participate in the political betterment of their country. In addition, Obama reminded the audience that the "White House" does not belong to the president alone, but to all Americans, saying, "We've made the White House a place that belongs to everyone," a statement that illustrates how he wants to make the White House a symbol of inclusiveness and openness for all levels of society (Stuckey, 2023).

In Social Level, this speech is very much related to social issues that exist in society, such as social polarization and the challenges posed by racial tensions. President Obama urged the audience to get out of the "information bubble" and interact directly with people who have different views so that they can see the world from a broader perspective. the audience's response with cheers and applause when he said this shows their support for the importance of opening spaces for dialogue and overcoming social polarization. in doing so, he wants to

build collective awareness and social responsibility in the midst of a polarized society. This message was also reflected in his call to remember the spirit of the founding fathers who created the United States of America, a nation that must continue to strive for justice and equality. This speech became a call to collective action, inviting everyone to actively participate in the democratic process and build bridges across cultures to address the challenges at hand. The cheers and support of the audience throughout the speech showed that they were ready to answer the call, given the importance of building a better future together (Obama, 2020).

An analysis of sociocultural practices in Obama's speech shows how a political text can serve as a bridge between various dimensions of social life. Through careful use of language and a deep understanding of context, this speech not only reflects social reality but also attempts to shape the direction of social change. The consistently positive audience response throughout the speech—demonstrated through applause and cheers—indicates that the key messages successfully reached their target. This shows how effective sociocultural practices can mobilize public support and encourage constructive social change.

A critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's farewell speech reveals how language and power are intertwined in the construction of political meaning. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework, this paper demonstrates that Obama's farewell speech is not merely a series of formal words, but a complex discursive practice that reflects and shapes the contemporary United States of America's socio-political reality. In the context of a contentious transition of power to the Trump administration, this speech holds particular significance, yet this analysis challenges Obama's superficial interpretation of the rhetorical framing of democracy and unity. It critically interrogates how such appeals may function as depoliticizing mechanisms that obscure fundamental disagreements over material conditions, systemic inequalities, and a competing vision of justice. Textual analysis reveals the use of structured and strategic language, with careful word choice and

grammatical constructions that support the overarching message of unity and democracy. Nevertheless, this study questions whether this result contributes to the reproduction of liberal hegemony by framing political contestation as a problem to be overcome rather than a legitimate expression of structural complaints. Discursive practices are evident through effective rhetorical strategies, including the use of personal addresses and powerful narratives to build connections with the audience.

However, this analysis examines how such strategies may simultaneously work to limit more radical political challenges and keep opposition within boundaries that do not challenge the existing political system. Particularly, given the rise of populist movements that explicitly rejected the political establishment Obama represented.

Further, at the sociocultural level, the speech is deeply connected to the situational, institutional, and social context of the United States of America. The choice of Chicago as the location, the acknowledgment of racial challenges, and the call to overcome polarization reflect a deep understanding of contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. Obama successfully integrated individual messages with a collective narrative about the United States of America's democracy, encouraging active participation in political and social processes. In conclusion, Obama's farewell speech was not merely a vehicle for ideological transformation, but a strategic moment when political discourse managed discontent and reinforced democratic legitimacy within sociopolitical ambiguity. However, by reformulating core values through calls for public responsibility, inclusion, and government administration trust, the speech opened limited space for ideological adjustments that remained persuasive. Through critical analysis, it is revealed that the power of this speech lies not only in its linguistic construction, but also in its ability to respond to and shape the broader socio-political context. In an era of increasingly

sharp political polarization, this study provides valuable insights into the role of language in mediating the relationship between power, identity, and social change.

## CONCLUSION

A critical discourse analysis of Presidents Barack Obama's farewell speech reveals how language and power are intertwined in the construction of political meaning. Textual analysis reveals the use of structured and strategic language, with careful word choice and grammatical constructions that support the main message of unity and democracy. Discursive practices are evident through effective rhetorical strategies, including the use of personal addresses and powerful narratives to build connections with the audience. The speech upholds liberal democratic values amid deepening polarization. Further, Obama's rhetorical strategies (personal address and powerful narratives) simultaneously interact with counter discourse, including conservative media framing his presidency as divisive and marginalized. Especially critiques regarding inadequate attention to systemic racism and economic inequality.

Furthermore, Obama's speech positions itself against or neutralizes oppositional voices. His acknowledgement of racial challenges responds both to conservative accusations of identity politics and leftist critiques of unfinished racial justice campaign. Thus, this dialogic analysis avoids treating Obama's political speech discourse as the sole authoritative account. At the sociocultural level, the speech textually signaling authenticity, discursively invoking grassroots origins, positioning Obama within urban (multiracial spaces) contrasting Trump's rural base (homogenous). The analysis, moreover, critically examines whose voices are centered and marginalized, interrogating whether participatory democratic ideals mask structural barriers to genuine political agency. Thus, the study reveals not only what Obama's discourse accomplishes but what it forecloses and whose concerns it sidelines, providing crucial insights into language's role in mediating power, identity, and social change.

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