



MARIO CUOMO

*“There is despair, Mr. President,
in the faces you don’t see...”*

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1932 Born in Queens, New York, the son of Italian immigrants
- 1956 Earned law degree from St. John’s University, tied for top of the class; accepted clerkship at New York State Court of Appeals
- 1963 Became adjunct professor at St. John’s Law School; elected president of the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Brooklyn
- 1975 Appointed New York’s Secretary of State by Governor Hugh Carey
- 1977 Unsuccessful bid for mayor of New York City
- 1979 Elected lieutenant governor of New York
- 1982 Elected governor of New York; reelected in 1986 and 1990

A “TALE OF TWO CITIES”: AN IMPASSIONED PLEA FOR A COMPASSIONATE AMERICA

“I could just feel that they were there with me, on every word,” he said. And it was true. In his keynote address to the 1984 Democratic Convention, Mario Cuomo lit up the crowd, confirming his place as one of the twentieth century’s most stirring political speakers as he set the standard for a more compassionate America and articulated a liberal agenda that continues into the twenty-first century. Often mentioned as one of the most gifted and inspiring political speakers of his generation, many Democrats clamored for the keynoter himself to run for President, a request he never granted.

By the time Governor Cuomo delivered this speech, the adulation of crowds was not an uncommon experience for this first-generation Italian-American, who had been born in a room above the family grocery store in Queens, New York. Top of his class at St. John’s University School of Law, clerk for a judge on New York’s highest court, practicing attorney and law professor at St. John’s, it was obvious to everyone that Mario Cuomo was a rising star. Governor Hugh Carey appointed him New York’s Secretary of State in 1975. He was elected lieutenant governor in 1978. He became New York’s fifty-second governor in 1982.

Cuomo’s intellect, strong handle on economics, visionary approach to many difficult issues, and especially his genuine compassion, made him one of the most popular governors in New York’s history. When running for reelection in 1986 and 1990, Cuomo received the highest percentage of votes and the largest margin of victory of any second- and third-term gubernatorial candidate in the state.

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- 1984 On July 17 gained national prominence as the keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention
 - 1992 Gave the nominating speech for Bill Clinton at the Democratic National Convention
 - 1994 Lost New York gubernatorial election
 - 1995 Began private law practice with a New York City firm; began hosting a weekly national radio talk show

This rare combination of qualities sets Mario Cuomo apart as a politician and as a speaker. In an interview with the author, Governor Cuomo explained that he looked for two very different qualities when assessing himself and others— “strength and sweetness.” By strength he meant taking decisive action and following through on one’s beliefs and convictions. Sweetness is an interesting word; one rarely hears it used in politics. To Cuomo, it stood for compassion, empathy, and actions and policies centered on helping people.

Judging him by his own standard, we can clearly discern both attributes. During his 12-year tenure as governor, his *strength* was amply demonstrated as he balanced the budget twelve times in a row while giving New Yorkers the biggest tax cut in state history, pushed through the largest economic development plan in the history of the state, and improved public safety, among other things, by building more prisons —actions more often associated with tough, bottom line – oriented Republicans.

The *sweet* side of Mario Cuomo is perhaps his defining characteristic. A deeply introspective man, Cuomo keeps a daily journal of his thoughts and feelings, and has seriously studied many religions and philosophies. But this sweetness has a



Ed Koch, Mayor of New York City; Walter Mondale, Democratic Presidential candidate; Geraldine Ferraro, Vice-Presidential candidate; and Governor Mario Cuomo waving during the 1984 Columbus Day Parade on Fifth Avenue, New York City.



(above) Mario Cuomo makes his first State of the State speech in 1983 before a joint session of the New York Legislature.

(left) President Ronald Reagan delivers a speech to exuberant supporters during the 1984 Republican National Convention.

A Shining City on a Hill

It was a favorite phrase of President Reagan's and he returned to this image many times in his career. It came from John Winthrop, a Pilgrim, who in 1630 described his vision of his new American home: "For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill. The eyes of all people are upon us." Winthrop, in turn, had paraphrased a line from Matthew 5:13–16, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

Reagan, in his farewell address to the nation in 1989, said that that phrase, in his mind, communicated "a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace. . ."

very pragmatic focus. Cuomo created the largest homeless housing assistance program, the most extensive drug treatment network, a nationally recognized plan to help victims of AIDS, the largest program for the mentally ill in the U.S., appointed New York's first two women to serve on the state's high court, and inaugurated "The Decade of the Child" in New York State, introducing programs like "Child Health Plus" and the "Children's Assistance Program." As Governor he appointed the first and second women judges, the first black judge, the first Hispanic judge, and the first woman Chief Judge on the New York Court of Appeals.

In 1984, the Democratic party was facing a difficult election against an extremely popular president, Ronald Reagan, who, for four years had dominated the political landscape. In fact, in a campaign speech, Reagan boldly declared that "Four years ago . . . we proclaimed a dream of an America that would be a 'shining city on a hill.' . . . Well, now it's all coming together." Employment was indeed up, inflation was down, and prosperity was on the rise, especially for American business.

"I saw, heard and felt a rip-roaring keynote address at the Democratic convention this week. Gov. Mario Cuomo . . . put those Republicans right in their place. . . I emerged convinced that President Reagan could receive no more than 1.5 percent of the vote in November."

Thomas Hazlett, "A Dim View of the Shining City, Circa 1980," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 1984



(above) New York City Mayor Ed Koch and Governor Mario Cuomo show their support for fellow Democrat Walter Mondale, as he campaigns for the Democratic Party's nomination as presidential candidate.

(right) Wendy Moore, from Oakland, CA, pushes her daughter Taylor Woolridge, 11 months, with help from family friend Robbin Davis, from Berkeley, during the women's rights march.

(bottom right) Coal miners with lunch pails.



Mario Cuomo was chosen to deliver the keynote address to rally the Democratic faithful, draw traditional Democrats—who had defected to Reagan in 1980—back into the fold, and to attract independent votes; in essence, he had to highlight Reagan's potential electoral weaknesses. Making a brutal, penetrating attack on Ronald Reagan's presidency and on the conservative agenda, Cuomo pointed out that, yes, America was a “shining city on a hill” (a phrase Reagan had used quite effectively in his 1976 address to the Republican convention) to the rich and the fortunate, but that America was, in fact, “a tale of two cities,” taking a phrase from Charles Dickens. He lashed out at Reagan and the Republicans for their indifference to the poor, on the economic policies that he felt hurt the poor, and on what he called their “survival of the fittest” (a phrase from Darwin) philosophy where only the strong could survive to enjoy America's riches.

This speech, written entirely in his own hand, was much more than an attack on Ronald Reagan and his party. This speech was a passionate advertisement for a new kind of America—one where blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and all minorities could claim their share of America, where students could afford the education they needed to succeed, where women would truly be treated equally, where seniors and natural resources were truly protected, where the courts would protect freedom of reproductive choice, and where the government was “strong enough to use the words *love* and *compassion*.”

It did not, however, accomplish its immediate goal: Democratic candidate Walter Mondale was crushed by Ronald Reagan in the 1984 election and many of the problems that Cuomo articulated remain. This 1984 keynote, however, serves as a manifesto of sorts for issues that transcend the 1984 political environment.

“It was only after his stem-winder at the 1984 Democratic National Convention ... that Mario Cuomo pierced the larger American consciousness. ... Wherever he speaks, he dazzles audiences with his verbal virtuosity and moves them with the evocation of his oft-repeated theme of family.”

Robert Ajemian, “What to Make of Mario: Can Cuomo run for President by not running?” *Time* magazine, June 2, 1986

"A Tale of Two Cities"

Keynote Address, Democratic Convention, July 16, 1984

Mario Cuomo captivated the huge audience at the Democratic Convention at the San Francisco Cow Palace from the first sentence. Everyone sensed it, including the Governor. It was a magical moment for the audience and a career-making one for the speaker.

This long speech transformed the audience by combining Cuomo’s own strong and warm personality with masterful speechwriting and delivery. It was a course in the use of visual imagery, parallel sentence construction, emotionally rhythmic speech flow, and the use of a personal and intimate conversational tone. Written entirely in his own hand, Mario Cuomo’s keynote address was one of the great American political orations of the twentieth century.

ANALYSIS

We get immediate insight into the workings of his mind and one of the reasons for Mario Cuomo’s great popularity in this first sentence. Notice how he describes the people of his state of New York as *the whole family*, setting the tone for a warm, inclusive, family-oriented message.

One sentence into the speech, he cuts to the chase. His no-nonsense directness, like Goldwater’s, is a great speech-writing tool, which immediately grabs this audience. By *skipping the stories and the poetry* (for which he is well known as an orator), he adds weight to what he is about to say to them.

He then further grabs the audience’s attention by commenting on something very current—still in people’s memories—something President Reagan said in a campaign speech just ten days before. In Ronald Reagan’s use of the phrase “shining city on a hill,” Cuomo saw great contradiction.

Here comes the first stinging jab at what he and Democrats believed was the vulnerable side of a very popular president. Cuomo paints vivid word pictures as he contrasts the stunning vistas from White House porticos and ranch verandas with the other “city” where many live in far different circumstances.

This paragraph is about as good as political speech writing ever gets. Instead of making general statements about how there are poor, elderly, homeless, and adrift youth in this “other city,” Cuomo literally brands disturbing visual images deep into our brain with choice phrases like *where the glitter doesn’t show*.

SPEECH

On behalf of the great Empire State and the whole family of New York, let me thank you for the great privilege of being able to address this convention.

Please allow me to skip the stories and the poetry and the temptation to deal in nice but vague rhetoric. Let me instead use this valuable opportunity to deal immediately with the questions that should determine this election and that we all know are vital to the American people.

Ten days ago, President Reagan admitted that although some people in this country seemed to be doing well nowadays, others were unhappy, and even worried, about themselves, their families and their futures.

The President said he didn’t understand that fear. He said, “Why, this country is a shining city on a hill.”

The President is right. In many ways we are “a shining city on a hill.”

But the hard truth is that not everyone is sharing in this city’s splendor and glory.

A shining city is perhaps all the President sees from the portico of the White House and the veranda of his ranch, where everyone seems to be doing well.

But there’s another city, another part of the shining city, the part where some people can’t pay their mortgages, and most young people can’t afford one, where students can’t afford the education they need, and middle class parents watch the dreams they hold for their children evaporate.

In this part of the city, there are more poor than ever, more families in trouble, more and more people who need help but can’t find it. Even worse: There are elderly people who tremble in the basements of their houses there, and there are poor who sleep in the city’s streets, in the gutter, where the glitter doesn’t show. There are ghettos where thousands of young people, without an education or a job, give their lives away to drug dealers every day.

There is despair, Mr. President, in faces you never see, in places you never visit in your shining city. In fact, Mr. President, this is a nation—Mr. President, you ought to know that this nation is more a “Tale of Two Cities,” than it is just a “shining city on a hill.”

Maybe, if you visited more places, Mr. President, you’d understand. Maybe if you went to Appalachia where some people still live in sheds, and to Lackawanna where thousands of unemployed steel workers wonder why we subsidize foreign steel; maybe if you stopped in at a shelter in Chicago and talked with some of the homeless there.

Maybe Mr. President, if you asked a woman who’d been denied the help she needs to feed her children because you say we need the money to give a tax break to a millionaire, or for a missile we couldn’t afford to use—maybe then you’d understand.

Maybe, Mr. President. But I’m afraid not. Because the truth is, ladies and gentlemen, this is how we were warned it would be.

President Reagan told us from the very beginning that he believed in a kind of social Darwinism. Survival of the fittest. “Government can’t do everything,” we were told. So it should settle for taking care of the strong and hope that economic ambition and charity will do the rest. Make the rich richer and what falls from the table will be enough for the middle class and those trying to make it, to work their way into the middle class.

The Republicans called it “trickle-down” when Hoover tried it. Now they call it “supply-side.”

It’s the same shining city for those relative few who are lucky enough to live in its good neighborhoods. But for the people who are excluded—but for the people who are locked out—all they can do is stare from a distance at that city’s glimmering towers.

It’s an old story. As old as our history.

The difference between Democrats and Republicans has always been measured in courage and confidence. The Republicans believe the wagon train will not make it to the frontier unless some of our old, some of our young, and some of our weak are left behind by the side of the trail.

Having described what he believes is the “real” condition of the lives of many Americans, he launches a frontal assault directly on the president. Even his repeated use of the term *Mr. President* is sarcastic, a classic crowd-pleasing technique at political conventions.

Note the use of the word *maybe*. He implies that the President has no idea of how Americans live, and then names the places where he might go to see the real America. The places Cuomo names are not chosen randomly; they are places in which there are large numbers of Democrats who have not participated in the boom of the first Reagan term.

Notice the continued dramatic use of sarcasm. This is tricky to do successfully, but when not overdone and especially when backed up with facts, it is one of the best techniques for building momentum with an already friendly crowd.

Again, by sticking to verifiable statements, Cuomo exhibits another speech-writing skill as he “spins” those factual statements into something that sounds and feels downright horrible. Reagan never said he believed in “a kind of social Darwinism,” but Cuomo’s lawyer-like arguments make it as real as if he had.

In making the analogy to Hoover, the former Republican president, whom many felt did nothing to alleviate the suffering of the poor during the early stages of the Depression, Cuomo is making a very strong, negative comment about the Republican party and, by inference, Reagan himself.

And now, like a symphony, he returns to the shining city theme and summarizes the differences he’s just enunciated with the rest of the country.

With an already worked-up convention audience, Cuomo takes that momentum and expands the scope of the speech to talk about his party. Notice how he uses the Republicans’ own favorite theme—family—and makes the case that it is the Democrats who care more for “the whole family.” But again, notice how effectively he uses visual imagery.

Paraphrasing the famous Biblical phrase, “The meek shall inherit the earth,” Cuomo blasts the Republicans’ “Darwinian” philosophy and then accents the Democrats’ “family values.”

Cuomo extends that image further with a poetic first sentence. Franklin Roosevelt was a hero to most Democrats and many others. But it’s not just Roosevelt’s image he’s invoking, it’s Roosevelt saving the country, and, by implication, Roosevelt—the wheelchair-bound man—being left by the wayside. Who could conceive of that? He then leads the audience in a superbly emotional paragraph through his vision of America—and what it could be like.

Now he reminds his listeners of what Democrats have done for them.

It is always important in a long speech to come back and provide an overview of the purpose of the speech.

A critical technique here: Cuomo knows that he and his party are up against a master communicator in Ronald Reagan. To have credibility with his audience, he must acknowledge that and then provide the strategy for overcoming it.

Great word play here, much like that of another extraordinary orator and word artist, Reverend Jesse Jackson.

And, again, Cuomo returns to his main theme.

Drawing biblical imagery from the tower of Babel, Cuomo is telling the party, which had had its internal disagreements, that if they want to win, they have to come together.

The strong—the strong, they tell us—will inherit the land!

We Democrats believe that we can make it all the way with the whole family intact.

We have. More than once.

Ever since Franklin Roosevelt lifted himself from his wheelchair to lift this nation from its knees—wagon train after wagon train—to new frontiers of education, housing, peace. The whole family aboard. Constantly reaching out to extend and enlarge the family. Lifting them up into the wagon on the way. Blacks and Hispanics, people of every ethnic group, and Native Americans—all those struggling to build their families and claim some small share of America.

For nearly fifty years we carried them to new levels of comfort, security, dignity, even affluence.

Some of us are in this room today only because this nation had that confidence. It would be wrong to forget that.

So, we are at this convention to remind ourselves where we come from and to claim the future for ourselves and for our children.

Today our great Democratic Party, which has saved this nation from depression, from fascism, from racism, from corruption, is called upon to do it again—this time to save the nation from confusion and division, from the threat of eventual fiscal disaster, and most of all, from a fear of a nuclear holocaust.

In order to succeed, we must answer our opponent’s polished and appealing rhetoric with a more telling reasonableness and rationality.

We must win this case on the merits.

We must get the American public to look past the glitter, beyond the showmanship—to reality, to the hard substance of things. And we will do that not so much with speeches that sound good as with speeches that are good and sound.

Not so much with speeches that bring people to their feet as with speeches that bring people to their senses.

We must make the American people hear our “Tale of Two Cities.”

We must convince them that we don’t have to settle for two cities, that we can have one city, indivisible, shining for all its people.

We will have no chance to do that if what comes out of this convention is a Babel of arguing voices. If that’s what’s heard throughout the campaign—dissonant voices from all sides—we will have no chance to tell our message.



New York Governor Mario Cuomo delivers the keynote address to the Democratic National Convention.

To succeed we will have to surrender small parts of our individual interests, to build a platform we can all stand on, at once, comfortably, proudly singing out the truth for the nation to hear, in chorus, its logic so clear and commanding that no slick commercial, no amount of geniality, no martial music will be able to muffle the sound of the truth.

We Democrats must unite so that the entire nation can. Surely the Republicans won't bring the country together. Their policies divide the nation into the lucky and the left out, the royalty and the rabble.

The Republicans are willing to treat this division as victory. They would cut this nation in half, into those temporarily better off and those worse off than before, and call that division "recovery."

We should not be embarrassed or dismayed if the process of unifying is difficult, even at times wrenching.

Unlike any other party, we embrace men and women of every color, every creed, every orientation, every economic class. In our family are gathered everyone from the abject poor of Essex County in New York to the enlightened affluent of the gold coasts of both ends of our nation. And in between is the heart of our constituency. The middle class. The people not rich enough to be worry-free but not poor enough to be on welfare. Those who work for a living because they have to. White-collar and blue-collar. Young professionals. Men and women in small business desperate for the capital and contracts they need to prove their worth.

Using alliteration—repetition of initial letters and sounds (*chorus, clear, commanding* and *martial music*)—and powerful one-liners (*Those who work for a living because they have to.*) leave an indelible impression and keep the audience focused during a long speech such as this one.



Governor Mario Cuomo, Jesse Jackson, and Representative Charles Rangel, New York (1990).

Cuomo's compassion for "ordinary" people is strongly evident here as he enumerates six different groups he and the Democratic Party will fight for. Parallel sentence construction using the word *for* gives this section even more power.

We speak for the minorities who have not yet entered the mainstream.

We speak for ethnics who want to add their culture to the mosaic that is America.

We speak for women indignant that we refuse to etch into our governmental commandments the simple rule "thou shalt not sin against equality," a commandment so obvious it can be spelled in three letters: E R A (which stands for Equal Rights Amendment).

We speak for young people demanding an education and a future.

We speak for senior citizens terrorized by the idea that their only security—their Social Security—is being threatened.

We speak for millions of reasoning people fighting to preserve our environment from greed and stupidity and fighting to preserve our very existence from a macho intransigence that refuses to make intelligent attempts to discuss the possibility of nuclear holocaust with our enemy. Refusing because they believe we can pile missiles so high that they will pierce the clouds and the sight of them will frighten our enemies into submission.

We're proud of this diversity. Grateful we don't have to manufacture its appearance the way the Republicans will next month in Dallas, by propping up mannequin delegates on the convention floor.

But while we're proud of this diversity as Democrats, we pay a price for it.

The different people we represent have many points of view. Sometimes they compete and then we have debates, even arguments. That's what our primaries were about. But now the primaries are over and it is time to lock arms and move into this campaign together.

If we need any inspiration to make the effort to put aside our small differences, all we need to do is to reflect on the Republican policy of divide and cajole and how it has injured our land since 1980.

The President has asked us to judge him on whether or not he's fulfilled the promises he made four years ago. I believe as Democrats that we ought to accept that challenge. And just, for a moment, let us consider what he has said and what he has done.

Inflation is down since 1980. But not because of the supply-side miracle promised to us by the president. Inflation was reduced the old-fashioned way, with a recession, the worst since 1932. We could have brought inflation down that way. Now how did he do it? Fifty-five thousand bankruptcies. Two years of massive unemployment. Two hundred thousand farmers and ranchers forced off the land. More homeless than at any time since the Great Depression in 1932, more hungry in this world of enormous affluence, the United States of America. More hungry, more poor—and most of them women. And he created one other thing: a nearly \$200 billion deficit threatening our future.

Now we must make the American people understand this deficit, because they don't. The President's deficit is a direct and dramatic repudiation of his promise in 1980 to balance our budget by 1983. How large is it? That deficit is the largest in the history of the universe. President Carter's last budget had a deficit less than one-third of this deficit. It is a deficit that, according to the President's own fiscal advisor, may grow as much as \$300 billion a year for "as far as the eye can see." And, ladies and gentlemen, it is a debt so large that almost one-half of our revenue from the income tax goes just to pay the interest on it each year. It is a mortgage on our children's futures that can only be paid in pain and that could bring this nation to its knees. Don't take my word for it—I'm a Democrat.

Ask the Republican investment bankers on Wall Street what they think the chances are this recovery will be permanent. If they're not embarrassed to tell you the truth, they'll say they are appalled and frightened by the President's deficit. Ask them what they think of our economy, now that it has been driven by the distorted value of the dollar back to its colonial condition—exporting agricultural products and importing manufactured ones.

Ask those Republican investment bankers what they expect the interest rate to be a year from now. And ask them what they predict for the inflation rate then.

How important is this question of the deficit?

Think about it: What chance would the Republican candidate have had in 1980 if he had told the American people that he intended to pay for his so-called economic recovery with bankruptcies, unemployment, and the largest government debt known to humankind? Would American voters have signed

Having acknowledged the varied constituencies that made up the Democratic Party, Cuomo moves to the vital task of uniting these constituencies under one umbrella.

In the next part of this speech, Cuomo goes deeply into the details. Notice, as you read this, how expertly he translates policy—something that people have little or no interest in—into examples that have real-life punch. By frequently using rhetorical questions and by translating details into human images (*more hungry, more poor—and most of them women*), he keeps his audience's attention.

the loan certificate for him on Election Day? Of course not! It was an election won with smoke and mirrors and with illusions. It is a recovery made of the same stuff.

And what about foreign policy? They said that they would make us and the whole world safer. They say they have, by creating the largest defense budget in history, one that even they now admit is excessive; by escalating to a frenzy the nuclear arms race; by incendiary rhetoric; by refusing to discuss peace with our enemies; by the loss of 279 young Americans in Lebanon in pursuit of a plan and a policy no one can find or describe. We give monies to Latin American governments that murder nuns and then lie about it. We have been less than zealous in our support of the only real friend we have in the Middle East, the one democracy there, our flesh and blood ally, the state of Israel.

Our foreign policy drifts with no real direction other than a hysterical commitment to an arms race that leads nowhere, if we're lucky. And if we're not, it could lead us to bankruptcy or war.

Of course we must have a strong defense. Of course Democrats believe that there are times when we must stand and fight. And we have. Thousands of us have paid for freedom with our lives. But always when we've been at our best—our purposes were clear.

Now they're not. Now our allies are as confused as our enemies. Now we have no real commitment to our friends or our ideals, not to human rights, not to the *refuseniks* [Russian dissidents], not to Sakharov, not to Bishop Tutu and the others struggling for freedom in South Africa. We have in the last few years spent more than we can afford. We have pounded our chest and made bold speeches. But we lost 279 young Americans in Lebanon and we are forced to live behind sandbags in Washington.

How can anyone say that we are stronger, safer, or better?

That's the Republican record.

Every speaker who speaks on a substantive topic must address the details. Cuomo did this brilliantly. In the end, however, the most critical goal in a speech like this is to inspire the party faithful—to generate an emotional, not an intellectual response.

That its disastrous quality is not more fully understood by the American people is attributable, I think, to the President's amiability and the failure by some to separate the salesman from the product.

It's now up to us to make the case to America. And to remind Americans that if they are not happy with all the President has done so far, they should consider how much worse it will be if he is left to his radical proclivities for another four years unrestrained by the need once again to come before the American people.

With the crowd already worked up, notice how he uses simple language and short sentences to attack, over and over again, the sitting President and the effects of his policies. But especially note how easy it is to follow and pay attention as he does this. This is because he uses eleven successive rhetorical questions—another brilliant oratorical device for hooking an audience.

If July brings back Ann Gorsuch Burford [Reagan's first EPA Administrator]—what can we expect of December? Where would another four years take us? How much larger will the deficit be? How much deeper the cuts in programs for the struggling middle class and the poor to limit that deficit? How high the interest rates? How much more acid rain killing our forests and fouling our lakes?

What kind of Supreme Court will we have? What kind of court and country will be fashioned by the man who believes in having government man-

date people's religion and morality? The man who believes that trees pollute the environment, that the laws against discrimination go too far, the man who threatens Social Security and Medicaid and help for the disabled. How high will we pile the missiles? How much deeper will be the gulf between us and our enemies? And, ladies and gentlemen, will four years more make meaner the spirit of our people? This election will measure the record of the past four years. But more than that, it will answer the question of what kind of people we want to be.

We Democrats still have a dream. We still believe in this nation's future, and this is our answer to the question. This is our credo:

We believe in only the government we need, but we insist on all the government we need.

We believe in a government that is characterized by fairness and reasonableness, a reasonableness that goes beyond labels, that doesn't distort or promise to do what it knows it can't do.

We believe in a government strong enough to use the words *love* and *compassion* and smart enough to convert our noblest aspirations into practical realities.

We believe in encouraging the talented, but we believe that while survival of the fittest may be a good working description of the process of evolution, a government of humans should elevate itself to a higher order, one which fills the gaps left by chance or a wisdom we don't understand.

We would rather have laws written by the patron of this great city, the man called the "world's most sincere Democrat," St. Francis of Assisi, than laws written by Darwin.

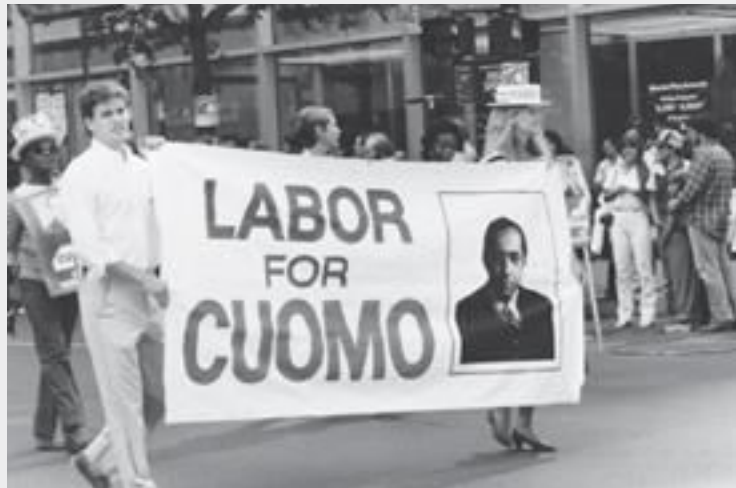
We believe, as Democrats, that a society as blessed as ours, the most affluent democracy in the world's history, one that can spend trillions on instruments of destruction, ought to be able to help the middle class in its struggle, ought to be able to find work for all who can do it, room at the table, shelter for the homeless, care for the elderly and infirm, and hope for the destitute.

We proclaim as loudly as we can the utter insanity of nuclear proliferation and the need for a nuclear freeze, if only to affirm the simple truth that peace is better than war because life is better than death.

We believe in firm but fair law and order, in the union movement, in privacy for people, openness by government. We believe in civil rights and we believe in human rights.

We believe in a single fundamental idea that describes better than most textbooks and any speech what a proper government should be: The idea of family, mutuality, the sharing of benefits and burdens for the good of all, feeling one another's pain, sharing one another's blessings, reasonably, honestly, fairly, without respect to race or sex or geography or political affiliation.

Launched by a reference to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech given over two decades earlier, Cuomo is able to harness the speech's exquisite emotional power, and succinctly and expertly set the course for the future. Once again he uses parallel sentence construction to drive the momentum (twelve uses of the phrase *we believe*).



Labor activists carry a banner featuring New York Governor Mario Cuomo during a 1982 Labor Day parade.

Like Dr. King's use of geographical locations to provide a sense of place and give breadth to his speech, notice how these specific examples make Cuomo's point concrete.

Mario Cuomo gained the respect of so many because he infuses so much substance into his emotional orations. Here he condenses fifty years of Democratic history, with specific reference to programs and presidents, stirring pride by mentioning the heroes of the party and backing it up with facts.

Speeches done well are musical symphonies with their own entrancing rhythm. After two long sentences heaped with detail, Cuomo hammers it home with a short sentence with two short, punchy phrases.

And, keeping the music rolling, Cuomo pulls in more parallel construction, this time with five successive *We cans*.

We believe we must be the family of America, recognizing that at the heart of the matter we are bound one to another, that the problems of a retired school-teacher in Duluth are our problems. That the future of the child in Buffalo is our future. The struggle of a disabled man in Boston to survive, to live decently, is our struggle. The hunger of a woman in Little Rock, our hunger. The failure anywhere to provide what reasonably we might, to avoid pain, is our failure.

For fifty years, we Democrats created a better future for our children using traditional Democratic principles as a fixed beacon, giving us direction and purpose, but constantly innovating, adapting to new realities. Roosevelt's alphabet programs; Truman's NATO and the G.I. Bill of Rights; Kennedy's intelligent tax incentives and the Alliance for Progress; Johnson's civil rights; Carter's human rights and the nearly miraculous Camp David Accord.

Democrats did it, and Democrats can do it again.

We can build a future that deals with our deficit. Remember this, that fifty years of progress under our principles never cost us what the last four years of stagnation have. And we can deal with that deficit intelligently, by shared sacrifice, with all parts of the nation's family contributing, building partnerships with the private sector, providing a sound defense without depriving ourselves of what we need to feed our children and care for our people. We can have a future that provides for all the young of the present by marrying common sense and compassion.

We know we can, because we did it for nearly fifty years before 1980.

And we can do it again. If we do not forget, forget that this entire nation has profited by these progressive principles. That they helped lift up generations to the middle class and higher. That they gave us a chance to work, to go to college, to raise a family, to own a house, to be secure in our old age, and before that to reach heights that our own parents would not have dared to dream of.

That struggle to live with dignity is the real story of the shining city, and it's a story, ladies and gentlemen, I didn't read in a book or learn in a classroom. I saw it and lived it, like many of you. I watched a small man with thick calluses on both hands work fifteen and sixteen hours a day. I saw him once literally bleed from the bottoms of his feet, a man who came here uneducated, alone, unable to speak the language, who taught me all I needed to know about faith and hard work by the simple eloquence of his example. I learned about our obligation to each other from him and from my mother. And they asked to be protected in those moments when they would not be able to protect themselves. This nation and its government did that for them.

And that they were able to build a family and live in dignity and see one of their children go from behind their little grocery store in South Jamaica, on the other side of the tracks where he was born, to occupy the highest seat in the greatest state in the greatest nation, in the only world we know, is an ineffably beautiful tribute to the democratic process.

And, ladies and gentlemen, on January 20, 1985, it will happen again. Only on a much, much grander scale. We will have a new President of the United States, a Democrat born not to the blood of kings but the blood of immigrants and pioneers. We will have America's first woman Vice President, the child of immigrants, and she will open with one magnificent stroke a whole new frontier for the United States. It will happen, if we make it happen—if you and I make it happen.

I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, for the good of all of us—for the love of this great nation, for the family of America—for the love of God, please, make this nation remember how futures are built.

Thank you and God bless you.

Already a powerful and masterfully written speech, we come now to my favorite part: the extremely loving personal example of Cuomo's own father. See the compelling word pictures that he paints about his father, listen to the rhythm of the sentences, and feel the emotion coming out of this one paragraph!

And how beautifully he projects his success onto his parents and then patriotically links it to the values of this country.

Now with the audience exactly where he wants them, Cuomo takes all of this energy and emotion and, exactly as a keynote speaker must, connects it with the candidates, Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro.

In closing he returns to the family theme he began with in the first paragraph, uses the traditional triplet for maximum closing momentum, includes a reference to God, and takes advantage of the relationship he has so carefully constructed with the audience to make a powerful, personal appeal that caps off a magnificent speech and a truly inspiring performance.

THE SPEECH—WHAT TO LOOK FOR: This speech is as soft and sensitive as it is hard hitting, a wonderful and difficult combination. Through a combination of personal stories and inspired use of language, Cuomo brings himself, his life, and his beliefs into the speech. One of the most celebrated political speeches, it achieved its impact with warmth, humanity, and compassion.

THE DELIVERY—WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Since Cuomo wrote every word of his speech, you can sense his complete “ownership” in the delivery as he pauses, changes voice tone often and rouses the crowd.

THE PERSON—QUALITIES OF GREATNESS: As “The Conscience of the Left,” he is admired for his humanity and equally respected for his strong and pragmatic leadership skills, keen intellect, and deep philosophical vision.