



# The Speech: Race and Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union'

*T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting*

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After Senator Barack Obama delivered his celebrated speech, "A More Perfect Union," on March 18, 2008, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd noted that only Barack Obama "could alchemize a nuanced 40-minute speech on race into must-see YouTube viewing for 20-year-olds." Pundits established the speech's historical eminence with comparisons to Abraham Lincoln's "A House Divided" and Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream." The future president had addressed one of the biggest issues facing his campaign-and our country-with an eloquence and honesty rarely before heard on a national stage.

*The Speech* brings together a distinguished lineup of writers and thinkers-among them Adam Mansbach, Alice Randall, Connie Schultz, and William Julius Wilson -in a multifaceted exploration of Obama's address. Their original essays examine every aspect of the speech-literary, political, social, and cultural-and are punctuated by *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Z. Jackson's reportage on the issue of race in the now historic 2008 campaign. *The Speech* memorializes and gives full due to a speech that propelled Obama toward the White House, and prompted a nation to evaluate our imperfect but hopeful union.

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