

Read Sacha Baron Cohen's Speech on Standing Against Hate: 'We Always Have a Choice'

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By [Sacha Baron Cohen](#)

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Sacha Baron Cohen is a three-time Academy Award nominee, the recipient of the Anti-Defamation League's International Leadership Award, an actor, writer and anti-racist advocate. His undergraduate thesis, which was researched at the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, focused on cooperation between Black and Jewish communities during the civil rights movement. He is a founding member of Stop Hate for Profit.

Comedian and advocate Sacha Baron Cohen gave a speech at the 60th Anniversary of the March on Washington Saturday, asking people to choose truth and empathy over lies and hate.

Here is the full text of the speech, as prepared.

Reverend Sharpton, members of the King family—thank you for inviting me to join you today. This is an incredible honor.

I'm indebted to the legacy of Dr. King and the work of the King Center. When I was a 19-year-old university student doing my thesis on the civil rights movement, I visited Atlanta and stayed at the historic Butler Street YMCA. I've never forgotten how I was welcomed by the staff of the King Center and the people of Atlanta.

There, I learned about how Black Americans and Jewish Americans—and people of so many faiths—linked arms together, went to jail together, sacrificed their lives together, and achieved historic victories together for civil rights. Their brave alliance teaches a powerful lesson that we can never forget: when we are united, we can hasten the day—as Dr. King proclaimed—when all of “God’s children will be able to walk the earth in decency and honor.”

The power of our unity is exactly why those who stand in the way of equality and freedom seek to divide us. They appeal to the worst instincts of humanity, which often simmer just below the surface. I've seen it in my own work.

As Borat, the first fake news journalist, I interviewed some college students—three young white men in their ballcaps and polo shirts. It only took a few drinks, and soon they were telling me what they really believed.

They asked if, in my country, women are slaves. They talked about how, here in the U.S., “the Jews” have “the upper hand.” When I asked, do you have slaves in America?, they replied, “we wish!” “We should have slaves,” one said, “it would be a better country.”

Those young men made a choice. They chose to believe some of the oldest and most vile lies that are at the root of all hate. And so it pains me that we have to say it yet again. The idea that people of color are inferior is a lie. The idea that Jews are dangerous and all-powerful is a lie. The idea that women are not equal to men is a lie. The idea that queer people are a threat to our children is a lie.

At other times, I’ve seen people make a different choice.

As Borat, I once got an entire bar in Arizona to sing, “Throw the Jew down the well”—which revealed people’s indifference to anti-Semitism. But when I tried to film that same exact scene at a bar in Nashville, something different happened. People started to boo. And then they chased me right out of that bar.

Those people made the choice that brings us all here today—they chose to believe the truth: the truth that we are all deserving of respect, dignity, and equality, no matter who we are, what we look like, how we pray, or who we love.

We always have a choice.

Today, the choices we make are more important than ever because the forces of hate have a new weapon that was not available in 1963—social media. These social media platforms deliberately amplify content that triggers outrage and fear, including fear of “the other.”

This technology gives an advantage to the intolerant. They’ve gone from Klan rallies to chat rooms, from marches to message boards. It’s how they spread their filth, recruit new members, and plan their attacks. And we’ve all seen the deadly results. A surge in hate crimes. The murder of religious and ethnic minorities. And, on the other end of this Mall, an attack on democracy itself—hate and violence that should have no place in our pluralistic societies.

Today, we make a different choice—and we call on people everywhere to join us in standing up to hate, conspiracies, and lies, especially on social media.

To every person online, when someone tries to blame the problems of the world on vulnerable groups, don’t believe it. Don’t click on the conspiracy. Don’t “like” the lie. Learn the facts. “Education”—as Nelson Mandela said—“is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

To every corporation that advertises on social media, these platforms cannot survive without your dollars. Without your revenue, racist “influencers” cannot spew the lie that immigrants and people of color are trying to “replace” white Christians. Corporations—pull your ads from platforms that spread racism, hate, and bigotry.

To every social media CEO who has gotten rich off algorithms that help fuel the mental health crisis among our children and the polarization of our societies—change your business model. Stop hate for profit. For

once, use the billions of dollars you've made to build a product that is not toxic, but safe.

Finally, to elected officials... Here in the United States, it's been nearly 30 years since Congress passed meaningful internet regulations, in large part because social media companies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars blocking them. Meanwhile, from Pittsburgh to Buffalo and now Cedar Glen, hate in the virtual world kills in the real world. How many more people have to die? Congress, it's time to hold these social media companies accountable for the harm they cause.

We always have a choice. Today, as others spread lies, we choose truth. As others stoke conspiracies, we choose facts. As others fuel hate and division, we choose the empathy and the unity that allows us to make progress together, for equality, for decency, and for democracy, especially here in U, S, and A.

Thank you all very much.