



The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream

By Barack Obama

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In July 2004, Barack Obama electrified the Democratic National Convention with an address that spoke to Americans across the political spectrum. One phrase in particular anchored itself in listeners' minds, a reminder that for all the discord and struggle to be found in our history as a nation, we have always been guided by a dogged optimism in the future, or what Obama called "the audacity of hope."

The Audacity of Hope is Barack Obama's call for a different brand of politics—a politics for those weary of bitter partisanship and alienated by the "endless clash of armies" we see in congress and on the campaign trail; a politics rooted in the faith, inclusiveness, and nobility of spirit at the heart of "our improbable experiment in democracy." He explores those forces—from the fear of losing to the perpetual need to raise money to the power of the media—that can stifle even the best-intentioned politician. He also writes, with surprising intimacy and self-deprecating humor, about settling in as a senator, seeking to balance the demands of public service and family life, and his own deepening religious commitment.

At the heart of this book is Barack Obama's vision of how we can move beyond our divisions to tackle concrete problems. He examines the growing economic insecurity of American families, the racial and religious tensions within the body politic, and the transnational threats—from terrorism to pandemic—that gather beyond our shores. And he grapples with the role that faith plays in a democracy—where it is vital and where it must never intrude. Underlying his stories about family, friends, and members of the Senate is a vigorous search for connection: the foundation for a radically hopeful political consensus.

A public servant and a lawyer, a professor and a father, a Christian and a skeptic, and above all a student of history and human nature, Barack Obama has written a book of transforming power. Only by returning to the principles that gave birth to our Constitution, he says, can Americans repair a political process that is broken, and restore to working order a government that has fallen dangerously out of touch with millions of ordinary Americans. Those Americans are out there, he writes—"waiting for Republicans and Democrats to catch up with them."

From the Hardcover edition.

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The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream By Barack Obama Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #13040 in Books
- Brand: Obama, Barack
- Published on: 2007-11-06
- Released on: 2007-11-06
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English

- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .90" w x 5.20" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Barack Obama's first book, *Dreams from My Father*, was a compelling and moving memoir focusing on personal issues of race, identity, and community. With his second book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama engages themes raised in his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, shares personal views on faith and values and offers a vision of the future that involves repairing a "political process that is broken" and restoring a government that has fallen out of touch with the people. We had the opportunity to ask Senator Obama a few questions about writing, reading, and politics--see his responses below. --Daphne Durham

20 Second Interview: A Few Words with Barack Obama



Q: How did writing a book that you knew would be read so closely by so many compare to writing your first book, when few people knew who you were?

A: In many ways, *Dreams from My Father* was harder to write. At that point, I wasn't even sure that I could write a book. And writing the first book really was a process of self-discovery, since it touched on my family and my childhood in a much more intimate way. On the other hand, writing *The Audacity of Hope* paralleled the work that I do every day--trying to give shape to all the issues that we face as a country, and providing my own personal stamp on them.

Q: What is your writing process like? You have such a busy schedule, how did you find time to write?

A: I'm a night owl, so I usually wrote at night after my Senate day was over, and after my family was asleep--from 9:30 p.m. or so until 1 a.m. I would work off an outline--certain themes or stories that I wanted to tell--and get them down in longhand on a yellow pad. Then I'd edit while typing in what I'd written.

Q: If readers are to come away from *The Audacity of Hope* with one action item (a New Year's Resolution for 2007, perhaps?), what should it be?

A: Get involved in an issue that you're passionate about. It almost doesn't matter what it is--improving the school system, developing strategies to wean ourselves off foreign oil, expanding health care for kids. We give too much of our power away, to the professional politicians, to the lobbyists, to cynicism. And our democracy suffers as a result.

Q: You're known for being able to work with people across ideological lines. Is that possible in today's polarized Washington?

A: It is possible. There are a lot of well-meaning people in both political parties. Unfortunately, the political culture tends to emphasize conflict, the media emphasizes conflict, and the structure of our campaigns rewards the negative. I write about these obstacles in chapter 4 of my book, "Politics." When you focus on solving problems instead of scoring political points, and emphasize common sense over ideology, you'd be surprised what can be accomplished. It also helps if you're willing to give other people credit--something politicians have a hard time doing sometimes.

Q: How do you make people passionate about moderate and complex ideas?

A: I think the country recognizes that the challenges we face aren't amenable to sound-bite solutions. People are looking for serious solutions to complex problems. I don't think we need more moderation per se--I think we should be bolder in promoting universal health care, or dealing with global warming. We just need to understand that actually solving these problems won't be easy, and that whatever solutions we come up with will require consensus among groups with divergent interests. That means everybody has to listen, and everybody has to give a little. That's not easy to do.

Q: What has surprised you most about the way Washington works?

A: How little serious debate and deliberation takes place on the floor of the House or the Senate.

Q: You talk about how we have a personal responsibility to educate our children. What small thing can the average parent (or person) do to help improve the educational system in America? What small thing can make a big impact?

A: Nothing has a bigger impact than reading to children early in life. Obviously we all have a personal obligation to turn off the TV and read to our own children; but beyond that, participating in a literacy program, working with parents who themselves may have difficulty reading, helping their children with their literacy skills, can make a huge difference in a child's life.

Q: Do you ever find time to read? What kinds of books do you try to make time for? What is on your nightstand now?

A: Unfortunately, I had very little time to read while I was writing. I'm trying to make up for lost time now. My tastes are pretty eclectic. I just finished Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, a wonderful book. The language just shimmers. I've started *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin, which is a great study of Lincoln as a political strategist. I read just about anything by Toni Morrison, E.L. Doctorow, or Philip Roth. And I've got a soft spot for John le Carre.

Q: What inspires you? How do you stay motivated?

A: I'm inspired by the people I meet in my travels--hearing their stories, seeing the hardships they overcome, their fundamental optimism and decency. I'm inspired by the love people have for their children. And I'm inspired by my own children, how full they make my heart. They make me want to work to make the world a little bit better. And they make me want to be a better man.

From Publishers Weekly

Illinois's Democratic senator illuminates the constraints of mainstream politics all too well in this sonorous manifesto. Obama (*Dreams from My Father*) castigates divisive partisanship (especially the Republican brand) and calls for a centrist politics based on broad American values. His own cautious liberalism is a model: he's skeptical of big government and of Republican tax cuts for the rich and Social Security privatization; he's prochoice, but respectful of proliferators; supportive of religion, but not of imposing it. The policy result is a tepid Clintonism, featuring tax credits for the poor, a host of small-bore programs to address everything from worker retraining to teen pregnancy, and a health-care program that resembles Clinton's Hillary-care proposals. On Iraq, he floats a phased but open-ended troop withdrawal. His triangulated positions can seem conflicted: he supports free trade, while deploring its effects on American workers (he opposed the Central American Free Trade Agreement), in the end hoping halfheartedly that more support for education, science and renewable energy will see the economy through the dilemmas of globalization. Obama writes insightfully, with vivid firsthand observations, about politics and the compromises forced on

politicians by fund-raising, interest groups, the media and legislative horse-trading. Alas, his muddled, uninspiring proposals bear the stamp of those compromises. (Oct. 17)

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Review

"He is one of the best writers to enter modern politics."

—Jonathan Alter, *Newsweek.com*

"[Barack Obama] is that rare politician who can actually write- and write movingly and genuinely about himself...In these pages he often speaks to the reader as if he were an old friend from back in the day, salting policy recommendations with colorful asides about the absurdities of political life...[He] strives in these pages to ground his policy thinking in simple common sense...while articulating these venomous pre-election days, but also in these increasingly polarized and polarizing times."

—Michiko Katutani, *New York Times*

"[Few] on the partisan landscape can discuss the word 'hope' in a political context and be regarded as the least bit sincere. Obama is such a man, and he proves it by employing a fresh and buoyant vocabulary to scrub away some of the toxins from contemporary political debate. Those polling categories that presume to define the vast chasm between us do not, Obama reminds us, add up to the sum of our concerns or hint at where our hearts otherwise intersect...Obama advances ordinary words like 'empathy', 'humility', 'grace' and 'balance' into the extraordinary context of 2006's hyper-agitated partisan politics. The effect is not only refreshing but also hopeful...As you might anticipate from a former civil lawyer and a university lecturer on constitutional law, Obama writes convincingly about race as well as the lofty place the Constitution holds in American life...He writes tenderly about family and knowingly about faith. Readers, no matter what their party affiliation, may experience the oddly uplifting sensation of comparing the everyday contemptuous view of politics that circulates so widely in our civic conversations with the practical idealism set down by this slender, smiling, 45-year-old former state legislator who is included on virtually every credible list of future presidential contenders."

—*Los Angeles Times*

"What's impressive about Obama is an intelligence that his new books displays in abundance."

—*Washington Post Book World*

"An upbeat view of the country's potential and a political biography that concentrates on the senator's core values."

—*Chicago Tribune*

"The self-portrait is appealing. It presents a man of relative youth yet maturity, a wise observer of the human condition, a figure who possesses perseverance and writing skills that have flashes of grandeur. Obama also demonstrates a wry sense of humor...His particular upbringing gives him special insights into the transition of American politics in the 1960s and '70s from debates over economic principles to a focus on culture and morality, and into the divisiveness, polarization and incivility that accompanied this transition."

—Gary Hart, *The New York Times Book Review*

"America's founders set a high standard for political writing, and most contemporary efforts fall woefully short. How nice, then, to have a politician who can write as well as U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. ... *The Audacity of Hope* ... is fascinating in its revelation of Obama as someone who considers and questions, rather than asserts and declares. In nine focused chapters, Obama shows himself an agile thinker. This is an idea book, not a public-policy primer."

—Elizabeth Taylor, *Philadelphia Daily News*

“Not only is Obama a good writer, his mind is top-shelf, his heart tender.”

—Les Payne, *Newsday*

“A thoughtful, careful analysis of what needs to be done to preserve our freedoms in a time of terror.”

—Newton N. Minow, *Chicago Tribune*

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Greta Harty:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in each way. By being competitive today, people have do something to make all of them survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yeah, by reading a publication your ability to survive enhance then having chance to remain than other is high. To suit your needs who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream book as nice and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

Pamela Pinkham:

Often the book The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream has a lot of information on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was published by the very famous author. The author makes some research prior to write this book. That book very easy to read you can get the point easily after looking over this book.

Linda Long:

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