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<https://www.elcorreo.eu.org/La-fin-de-Cowboys-The-Audacity-of-Hope-l-autre-reve-etasunien-Barack-Obama-sauveur-des-Etats-Unis-Peut-etre>

La fin de Cowboys ?The Audacity of Hope : l'autre rêve étasunien, Barack Obama, sauveur des États-Unis ? Peut-être...

Date de mise en ligne : lundi 23 octobre 2006

- Empire et Résistance - « Gringoland » (USA) -

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Par Richard Hétu

[La Presse](#). New York. Le dimanche 22 octobre 2006.

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[JPEG - 4.1 ko] **Barack Obama**

En lisant le nouveau livre de Barack Obama, une pensée s'impose d'emblée : le sénateur de l'Illinois, né d'une mère du Kansas et d'un père du Kenya, est peut-être le sauveur dont les États-Unis auront besoin après les huit années de George W. Bush à la tête du pays.

Dans ce livre, intitulé [The Audacity of Hope](#) (L'audace de l'espoir), le politicien de 45 ans s'adresse « à tous les gens de bonne volonté » - républicains, démocrates et indépendants - , leur offrant des réflexions lumineuses et rafraîchissantes sur une reconquête possible du « rêve américain ».

Le sénateur démocrate prépare-t-il une campagne à la Maison-Blanche en 2008 ? Dans son dernier numéro, le magazine Time lui a consacré sa couverture, se proposant d'expliquer « pourquoi Barack Obama pourrait être le prochain président ». À l'intérieur, le journaliste Joe Klein brosse le portrait d'une « figure fraîche » dont le charisme rappelle celui de Bill Clinton et peut-être encore davantage celui de Robert Kennedy.

La couverture du Time a donné le ton à une semaine médiatique en or pour Obama, qui a été invité à parler de son nouveau livre chez Oprah Winfrey et Larry King, entre autres.

À ceux qui l'interrogent sur ses ambitions présidentielles, Obama répond qu'il se concentre pour le moment sur les élections de mi-mandat, qui auront lieu le 7 novembre. Ayant été élu en 2004 pour un mandat de six ans, l'unique sénateur noir n'a pas à défendre son siège mais il fait campagne aux côtés de plusieurs candidats démocrates à la Chambre des représentants et au Sénat.

Sur son sofa, Oprah lui a dit : « Je vais animer cette émission pendant encore cinq ans, allez-vous annoncer ici votre candidature (à la présidence) ? »

Avec son sourire de rock star, Obama lui a répondu : « Je ne pense pas pouvoir vous refuser cela. »

Visage café au lait, pommettes saillantes, Barack Obama est à la politique ce que Tiger Woods est au golf : un Noir hyperdoué dont la popularité transcende les couleurs et les classes. Il a mis le feu à l'imagination des Américains le 25 juillet 2004, à l'occasion de la convention démocrate de Boston. Lors d'un discours de 17 minutes, il avait galvanisé les délégués et les téléspectateurs en évoquant l'espoir « d'un gamin malingre au nom bizarre, convaincu qu'il avait lui aussi sa place aux États-Unis. »

Après ce discours, le premier livre de Barack Obama, publié en 1995, avait passé plusieurs semaines au sommet des listes des meilleurs vendeurs. Dans cet ouvrage, intitulé *Dreams from My Father* (Les rêves de mon père), Obama fait le récit enlevé et émouvant de sa jeunesse.

Il est né à Honolulu de la brève union d'un étudiant kényan, fils de berger, et d'une étudiante américaine, fille d'un vendeur d'assurance-vie. Son prénom signifie « béni des dieux » en swahili. À sa deuxième année, son père a disparu de sa vie, retournant en Afrique après avoir fréquenté la prestigieuse université Harvard. Il est plus tard devenu conseiller économique au sein du ministère kényan des Finances.

Barack Obama a hérité ses valeurs de sa mère, une anthropologue qui s'est remariée avec un Indonésien. De six à 11 ans, il a vécu aux abords de Jakarta. Il a passé son adolescence rebelle avec ses grands-parents maternels, en Hawaï, tâtant de l'alcool et de la drogue (marijuana et cocaïne). Il a étudié la philosophie politique à l'université Columbia et le droit à Harvard, où il est devenu le premier Noir à diriger la Harvard Law Review.

Son premier livre se termine sur son voyage initiatique en Afrique, sur le continent de son père.

Dans son nouveau livre, il écrit, au sujet de cet homme absent : « Mon ambition féroce a peut-être été alimentée par mon père - par ma connaissance de ses succès et de ses échecs, par mon désir inavoué de mériter son amour, et par mes ressentiments et ma colère à son égard.

« Mais c'est la foi fondamentale de ma mère dans la bonté des gens et dans la valeur de la brève vie qui nous a été donnée - qui canalise ces ambitions », ajoute-t-il.

Après ses études à Harvard, Obama a travaillé comme activiste communautaire à Chicago, enseigné le droit constitutionnel et plongé en politique. Dans *The Audacity of Hope*, qui respire l'intelligence et l'empathie, il se présente comme un rassembleur, abordant avec finesse des sujets aussi divers que les valeurs, la foi, la Constitution et la politique étrangère des États-Unis.

Président Obama ? C'est peut-être trop beau pour être vrai.

The Audacity of Hope

Barack Obama, one year later

By Andrew Miller

[The Harvard Politics review.](#)

Summer 2006

When Barack Obama stepped up to the podium at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, few outside of Illinois knew anything about him. That soon changed. Following his enormously well-received keynote address, his name began to take on almost messianic connotations. Democrats nationwide heralded Obama as the man who could best revitalize the party and reflect its ideals, while pundits of all stripes began to speculate that the White House may lie in his future. Increasingly aware of his growing celebrity, and also of the nearly-impossible expectations set out for him, Obama coasted to an easy election victory in November. The hard part lay ahead.

The day before he was sworn in, Obama was asked during a makeshift press conference, "What is your place in history ?" Laughing, he reminded the reporter that he hadn't yet cast a single vote. That question, however, encapsulates the conundrum that the junior senator from Illinois still faces today. Obama must strike a balance between maintaining his place in the national consciousness and projecting the image of a humble, diligent senator. The extent to which he has achieved that balance over the last year demonstrates the true depth of Obama's political acumen.

A Workhorse

Obama's committee assignments represented an auspicious beginning to his Senate career. The Environment and Public Works Committee, responsible for infrastructure projects and environmental regulation, presents the chance for Obama to work on Illinois-specific issues while bolstering his progressive credentials. The Foreign Relations Committee provides him with much-needed international affairs experience, and offers a platform for him to voice his discontent with the Bush administration's foreign policy. The third in his trio of assignments, the Veterans' Affairs Committee, provided Obama with his first shot at a substantive legislative achievement.

"There are two models for people in Congress," said Republican Congressional strategist Joe Gaylord in an interview with the HPR. "Some are workhorses, and some are showhorses-clearly, he has chosen the workhorse model." Obama's work on veterans' issues has helped him develop that reputation. Late in 2004, a Chicago Sun-Times article revealed that disabled veterans in Illinois and five other states had been receiving significantly less compensation from the federal government than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. Working with his Illinois colleague Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), Obama organized hearings to investigate the issue, then co-sponsored legislation that allowed veterans to petition for compensation. Recent work on legislation concerning everything from lead-poisoning guidelines to incentives for ethanol-compatible car engines has further enhanced his hardworking image.

First in Hype, Last in Seniority

With a national profile vastly out of proportion to his Senate seniority, Obama recognized the necessity of maintaining a positive reputation within the chamber. "In the Senate, even more than in the House, tradition and collegiality play a key role," said Democratic communications consultant Lisa Davis in an interview with the HPR. Contrasting Obama's approach with that of former Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, Davis praised Obama for giving due deference to his Senate elders, thereby avoiding the pitfalls that have trapped intensely hyped senators in the past. "Hype is like the sirens of Greek mythology," she argues. "If you listen, it will kill you."

Gaylord, too, emphasized Obama's keen understanding of Senate decorum. "This is a person who understands the courtesies and responsibilities of getting along with colleagues in a legislative chamber." Gaylord stressed Obama's strong working relationships with other Senators as pivotal to his success during his first year in office.

A Cautious Superstar

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Obama has hardly ignored the national spotlight. Rather, he has shifted the kinds of media events he attends from generic celebrations of him and his personality-Oprah and David Letterman-to more substantive public appearances. His recent Daily Show visit notwithstanding, Obama has focused primarily on two modes of media exposure : campaigning and opining.

Obama has made public appearances with, among others, Virginia Gov.-elect Tim Kaine, Arizona Senate candidate Jim Pederson, and New Jersey Gov.-elect Jon Corzine. As a result, Obama has managed to build his national profile one local rally at a time, while currying favor with party leaders nationwide. The strategy seems to be working almost too well-a recurring concern at rallies featuring Obama is that the out-of-stater will draw all the attention away from the local politician.

When not campaigning, the brunt of Obama's media exposure seems to revolve around specific issues, including environmental protection, judicial appointments, and especially Iraq . It is hard to go a week without hearing or reading about Obama's commentary on the lead-up to war, Bush's diplomatic conduct, or possibilities for future withdrawal. And when Obama talks, the nation listens : dozens of papers across the U.S. covered his Iraq-themed lecture at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

Obama has also conducted a relatively unnoticed campaign to build his national network of financial supporters. His new PAC, called the Hope Fund, has already raised close to a million dollars for the 2006 elections, attracting the support of such big-name donors as investor Warren Buffett and director Steven Spielberg. While these smaller events do not receive the same level of media exposure as appearances on the Tonight Show, they do help strengthen Obama's personal following among wealthy, influential activists. This element of his overall strategy, more than anything else, strongly suggests an interest in national office at some point in the future.

Another Hillary ?

Looking forward to Obama's future in the Senate and beyond, comparisons with a certain colleague from New York become inevitable. "He seems to be taking a lot of direction from Hillary," noted Davis as she compared their approaches to Senate politics. She, like Obama, developed a reputation for her strong work ethic in the Senate, while also founding a well-funded PAC and enhancing her national visibility.

While Gaylord agreed that the two Senators have undertaken similar strategies as high-profile newcomers, he argued that Obama and Clinton couldn't be more different in style. Gaylord asserted that Clinton, like former Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, has the tendency to make rhetoric sound particularly divisive. "Obama falls more into the Reagan archetype," he explained. "He manages to make nearly everything he says sound non-threatening."

The most common avenue of comparison, of course, relates to their respective presidential ambitions. Clinton is widely expected to make a White House bid in 2008, while Obama's convention speech established him as a prime contender for the job. Though any speculation about Obama's plans is premature, there seems to be little doubt that he has deliberately put himself in prime position to be a major player on the national stage for some time.

[How to get *The Audacity of Hope*](#)