Clarion Review

Biography

Barack Obama: Voice of Unity, Hope, and Change
Libby Hughes
iUniverse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

No matter how the next four years go Barack Obama's name will represent for future generations a turning point in American politics. As the first black president of the United States he holds a vital place in history and his name will always be linked to the feeling of hope that swept through much of the citizenry during the 2008 election.

Libby Hughes has written a brief biography of Obama geared toward young people. While they may not yet be allowed to vote these readers certainly have complex opinions about who gets to run the country. Reaching back as far as his grandparents Hughes traces Obama's rise to fame by detailing his childhood his education his community outreach work his travels to Kenya his relationship to his wife and children and his political career.

The author of several biographies for teenage audiences Hughes displays writing that is clear concise and accessible to younger readers while maintaining a challenging level of discourse; she does not slip into a pedantic tone but maintains the highest level of respect for both her subject and her readers.

A few issues detract from the overall success of this biography which will be one among hundreds by the time the next presidential primary takes place. Often Hughes' narrative slips into the passive voice and loses its momentum. Also her word choice could be more effective. When writing about Michelle Obama Hughes includes this vague line: "She is totally honest about her marriage and everything." Specific examples instead of the umbrella phrase "and everything" would have better served the reader.

Hughes ends the biography immediately before the presidential election leaving her readers ignorant of the results. By not including the fact that he was elected president she renders her book obsolete before it even reaches the bookstore shelves.

On the more positive side Hughes reveals her own poetic spirit adding a welcome

literary texture to this biography. She writes “Barack marveled at the sight of the famous baobab tree framed against a dazzling sunset. Its branches clawed at the night sky like gnarled witches’ fingers.” Hughes uses lines like this to great effect when describing the places in Obama’s history like Hawaii Indonesia and Kenya.

Though a few problems keep Hughes’ book from reaching the highest standards of quality the biography does contain many interesting facts about Obama’s life and his attitude toward race. Students looking for a starting point would do well to pick up *Barack Obama: Voice of Unity Hope and Change*.

Only time will reveal the kind of president Obama will be; if he is as honest trustworthy and intelligent as Hughes makes him out to be then perhaps our country will be made stronger by its particular challenges. Perhaps we will be inspired to rise above our past mistakes and create a new world based on Obama’s hopeful vision.

Andi Diehn