

## Martin Dupuis and Keith Boeckelman: *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*

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The book by Martin Dupuis and Keith Boeckelman is among the first in-depth studies of the rise of the most intriguing figure in contemporary US politics – Illinois Senator Barack Obama. Writing a book about Obama at this stage is both taking a risk and simultaneously securing at least some success. Senator's current "rock-star" popularity means that any substantial literature on his persona and activity will not go unnoticed, though the book is apparently doomed for rapid obsolescence as Obama's political career is unravelling at quick pace.

In terms of genre, the work of Dupuis and Boeckelman defies clear characterization. It cannot be assessed as a political biography because the protagonist, at the time of the writing a junior US Senator, however promising a politician, had barely had 3 years' experience of Washington politics, to say nothing of international affairs.

This means that Senator Obama, aged 46, is only one big race from the actual beginning of his career as a politician of national scale. The book is also hardly a "life and times" story partially for the abovementioned reason but more importantly because portraying the upbringing and making of Barack Obama the Politician against the backdrop of the US social-political climate and culture is by far not the main theme of the work (though this issue is addressed in Chapter 1 and will undoubtedly provoke a number of standalone studies provided Obama becomes the President). Rather, it is a detailed account of a so far outstandingly successful political career start of a minority representative and the ideas as well as ideals behind it. It should also be noted that the book opens a series on women and minorities in politics for which, indeed, there could be no better starter.

In terms of structure, the book can be subdivided into three units. The first one comprises chapters 1 to 3, which chronologically reveal Obama's background, his first successful attempt at running for elected office of Illinois State Senator and the largest political achievement (once again, to the day of the book writing) of winning extremely competitive primaries and the race for the US Senate in late 2004. The second unit is given to vital political issues, namely chapter 4 dealing with fund-raising, the next one touching upon the impact of media and chapter 6 on the point of race in the campaign. The last unit covers the political outlook and message of Barack Obama and the assessment of his chances for higher office (chapters 7, 8 and 9). The book contains two appendices presenting Senator Obama in his own words, namely his groundbreaking speech to the Democratic Party National Convention in 2004 and his announcement to run for President.

The first unit pivots on both the primaries and the actual race for US Senate won by Barack Obama in 2004. The authors provide insights into Illinois and Chicago politics, overview the Senator's opponents, follow the vicissitudes of both races and dissect Obama's winning strategy as a heavily outspent and relatively unknown underdog during the primaries process followed by an easy ride against a Republican contender for the senatorial seat.

The second unit illuminates the major components of Senator Obama's success, which, as the Democratic Party presidential primaries revealed, proved to be lasting. They are his strong showing as a fund-raiser, ability to win over the media and to promote the

agenda of uplifting politics, i.e., invoke the rhetoric of national unity, bi-partisanship and change. Chapters 4 and 5, dealing with fund-raising and media, appear to be the best parts of the book as Dupuis and Boeckelman, who, at an early stage of Obama's long way to the White House race, managed to underscore and look deeply into those two crucial strengths of him as a politician.

Separate mention and credit should be given to the chapter on race in the US politics. The authors managed to foresee it as a major issue in 2008 presidential campaign and provided a quality overview of African-American politics in the US on both the federal level and in the state of Illinois in particular. Dupuis and Boeckelman came up with extensive analysis of the role race played in Obama's victorious 2004 US Senate bid, which may act as a reference and a case study for deeper research of the race factor in US elections.

Surprisingly little attention was paid to Barack Obama's staunch opposition to the Iraq War and the role his anti-war stance and rhetoric played in defining himself as a candidate of both principle and change. While the authors do touch upon the Senator's credentials as a member of Foreign Relations Committee in US Senate and describe his activity in the spheres of nuclear disarmament and promoting awareness of various African issues ranging from AIDS to education, the account of his crusade against the war which began long before the WMD skeletons in the closet of Bush administration were revealed, is absent from the book. Thus, the important study of the impact of his "no" vote in the US Senate on authorizing the military action, active participation in the anti-war

campaign both prior to and after the intervention and Obama's use of both in his bids for elected offices is yet to be undertaken.

The third unit is given to Obama's message and assessment of his chances for higher office. The tone of the last two chapters is obviously optimistic as Obama is given much credit for his ability to connect with voters, caution in dealing with ideologically divisive disputes such as equality versus merit or individualism versus communitarianism, and playing up the issues central to American values, such as the value of change, defying cynicism and promoting the culture of achievement or resurrecting the waning trust in the American dream.

The authors do not mask their liking for Obama and approval of his message by stating that they find him "compelling" and associating the Senator with "positive, issue-oriented campaigning and rhetoric". Despite that, Dupuis and Boeckelman claim to remain disinterested. However, they clearly fail in their intention at least in the instance of

Chapter 8. The authors look into three major themes of his message (vision of American Dream, political reform and post-partisan stance) all of which receive consistently favourable coverage and comments. Thus, the fact that the book contains little (though present) criticism or meagre mention of possible areas of improvement for Senator Obama should be noted as one of the drawbacks of Dupuis and Boeckelman's study.

However, "Barack Obama, the New Face of the American Politics" presents a generally accurate and extensive account of the early stage of Senator Obama's promising political career. Whether he fulfils the favourable predictions of the pundits like Dupuis and Boeckelman and lives up to rather high self-imposed standards of political behaviour remains yet to be seen. As for the book itself, it will definitely be of much interest and value to campaign managers and analysts, political strategists, spin-doctors and leadership students as well as all those interested in US politics and elections.