Excerpts from *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, by Barack Obama, Crown Publishers, 2006

**Prologue**
p. 9 *In this book* what I offer is something more modest: personal reflections on those values and ideals that have led me to public life, some thoughts on the ways that our current political discourse unnecessarily divides us, and my own best assessment – based on my experience as a senator and lawyer, husband and father, Christian and skeptic – of the ways we can ground our politics in the notion of a common good.

**Chapter 1 – Republicans and Democrats**
p. 22 *W*hat’s troubling is the gap between the magnitude of our challenges and the smallness of our politics – the ease with which we are distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our seeming inability to build a working consensus to tackle any big problem.

p. 39 *T*he Democratic Party has become the party of reaction. In reaction to a war that is ill conceived, we appear suspicious of all military action. In reaction to those who proclaim the market can cure all ills, we resist efforts to use market principles to tackle pressing problems. In reaction to religious overreach, we equate tolerance with secularism…. And increasingly we feel the need to match the Republican right in stridency and hardball tactics. p. 40 It is such doctrinaire thinking and stark partisanship that have turned Americans off of politics.

**Chapter 2 – Values**
p. 55 In every society (and in every individual), these twin strands – the individualistic and the communal, autonomy and solidarity – are in tension….p. 56 *F*inding the right balance between our competing values is difficult. p. 57 Unfortunately, too often in our national debates we don’t even get to the point where we weigh these difficult choices…. [O]ur democracy might work a bit better if we recognized that all of us possess values that are worthy of respect: if liberals at least acknowledged that the recreational hunter feels the same way about his gun as they feel about their library books, and if conservatives recognized that most women feel as protective of their right to reproductive freedom as evangelicals do of their right to worship.

p. 67 *A*s a country, we seem to be suffering from an empathy deficit…. I believe a stronger sense of empathy would tilt the balance of our current politics in favor of those people who are struggling in this society.

**Chapter 3 – Our Constitution**
p. 90 Ultimately, though, I have to side with Justice Breyer’s view of the Constitution – that it is not a static but rather a living document, and must be read in the context of an ever-changing world. p. 92 What the framework of our Constitution can do is organize the way by which we argue about our future. All of its elaborate machinery – its separation of powers and checks and balances and federalist principles and Bill of Rights – are designed to force us into a conversation, a “deliberative democracy” in which all citizens are required to engage in a process of testing their ideas against an external reality, persuading others of their point of view, and building shifting alliances of consent.

**Chapter 4 – Politics**
p. 105 Neither ambition nor single-mindedness fully accounts for the behavior of politicians, however. There is a companion emotion, perhaps more pervasive and certainly more destructive…. That emotion is fear. Not just fear of losing – although that is bad enough – but fear of total, complete humiliation. p. 109 Most of the other sins of politics are derivative of this larger sin – the need to win, but also the need not to lose. Certainly that’s what the money chase is all about.

p. 109 Few lobbyists proffer an explicit quid pro quo to elected officials. They don’t have to. Their influence comes simply from having more access to those officials than the average voter, having better information than the average voter, and having more staying power when it comes to promoting an obscure provision in the tax code that means billions for their clients and that nobody else cares about.

Book summary courtesy of the Progressive Women’s Alliance of West Michigan.
p. 115 The longer you are a senator, the narrower the scope of your interactions. You may fight it... But your schedule dictates that you move in a different orbit [wealthy donors] from most of the people you represent.... The problems of ordinary people... become a distant echo rather than a palpable reality....

p. 115 Few people these days have the time or inclination to volunteer on a political campaign.... And so, if you are a candidate in need of political workers or voter lists, you go where people are already organized. For Democrats, this means the unions, the environmental groups, and the prochoice groups. For Republicans, it means the religious right, local chambers of commerce, the NRA, and the antitax organizations. p. 116 [T]o my mind, there's a difference between a corporate lobby whose clout is based on money alone, and a group of like-minded individuals... coming together to promote their interests; between those who use their economic power to magnify their political influence... and those who are simply seeking to pool their votes to sway their representatives. The former subvert the very idea of democracy. The latter are its essence.

p. 121 [Influence of the media] Simple math tells the tale. In the thirty-nine town hall meetings I held during my first year in office, turnout at each meeting averaged four to five hundred people, which means that I was able to meet with maybe fifteen to twenty thousand people. Should I sustain this pace for the remainder of my term, I will have had direct, personal contact with maybe ninety-five to one hundred thousand of my constituents by the time Election Day rolls around. In contrast, a three-minute story on the lowest-rated local news broadcast in the Chicago media market may reach two hundred thousand people. In other words, I – like every politician at the federal level – am almost entirely dependent on the media to reach my constituents.

Chapter 5 – Opportunity
p. 159 [W]e should be asking ourselves what mix of policies will lead to a dynamic free market and widespread economic security, entrepreneurial innovation and upward mobility.... Let's start with those investments that can make America more competitive in the global economy: investments in education, science and technology, and energy independence.

p. 181 Government policies can help these workers, with little impact on market efficiency. For starters, we can raise the minimum wage.... It's also time to update the existing system of unemployment insurance and trade adjustment assistance.... Finally, to help workers gain higher wages and better benefits, we need once again to level the playing field between organized labor and employers. p. 183 As a complement to Social Security, we should take the best and most affordable of these ideas and begin moving toward a beefed-up, universally available pension system that not only promotes savings but gives all Americans a bigger stake in the fruits of globalization.

Chapter 6 – Faith
p. 197 [encountering an antiabortion protester] I told him I understood his position but had to disagree with it. I explained my belief that few women made the decision to terminate a pregnancy casually; that any pregnant woman felt the full force of the moral issues involved and wrestled with her conscience when making that heart-wrenching decision; that I feared a ban on abortion would force women to seek unsafe abortions.... I suggested that perhaps we could agree on ways to reduce the number of women who felt the need to have abortions in the first place.

p. 219 What our deliberative, pluralistic democracy does demand is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values.... If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons and seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or invoke God’s will and expect that argument to carry the day. If I want others to listen to me, then I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

Chapter 7 – Race
p. 244 [Affirmative action] Many Americans disagree with me on this as a matter of principle, arguing that our institutions should never take race into account, even if it is to help victims of past discrimination. Fair
enough – I understand their arguments, and don’t expect the debate to be settled anytime soon. But that shouldn’t stop us from at least making sure that when two equally qualified people – one minority and one white – apply for a job, house, or loan, and the white person is consistently preferred, then the government, through its prosecutors and through its courts, should step in to make things right. We should also agree that the responsibility to close the gap can’t come from government alone; minorities, individually and collectively, have responsibilities as well.

p. 255 We could begin by acknowledging that perhaps the single biggest thing we could do to reduce such poverty is to encourage teenage girls to finish high school and avoid having children out of wedlock…. We should also acknowledge that conservatives – and Bill Clinton – were right about welfare as it was previously structured: by detaching income from work, and by making no demands on welfare recipients other than a tolerance for intrusive bureaucracy and an assurance that no man lived in the same house as the mother of his children, the old AFDC program sapped people of their initiative and eroded their self-respect. Any strategy to reduce intergenerational poverty has to be centered on work, not welfare – not only because work provides independence and income but also because work provides order, structure, dignity, and opportunities for growth in people’s lives.

Chapter 8 – The World Beyond Our Borders
p. 301 I believe that our strategic goals at this point should be well defined: achieving some semblance of stability in Iraq, ensuring that those in power in Iraq are not hostile to the United States, and preventing Iraq from becoming a base for terrorist activity. In pursuit of these goals, I believe it is in the interest of both Americans and Iraqis to begin a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops by the end of 2006…. p. 302 The fact is, close to five years after 9/11 and fifteen years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the United States still lacks a coherent national security policy. Instead of guiding principles, we have what appear to be a series of ad hoc decisions, with dubious results. Why invade Iraq and not North Korea or Burma? Why intervene in Bosnia and not Darfur?… How do we treat countries like China that are liberalizing economically but not politically? Do we work through the United Nations on all issues or only when the UN is willing to ratify decisions we’ve already made?

p. 308 We should start with the premise that the United States, like all sovereign nations, has the unilateral right to defend itself against attack…. I would also argue that we have the right to take unilateral military action to eliminate an imminent threat to our security…. p. 309 Once we get beyond matters of self-defense, though, I’m convinced that it will almost always be in our strategic interest to act multilaterally rather than unilaterally when we use force around the world…. When the world’s sole superpower willingly restrains its power and abides by internationally agreed-upon standards of conduct, it sends a message that these are rules worth following, and robs terrorists and dictators of the argument that these rules are simply tools of American imperialism. Obtaining global buy-in also allows the United States to carry a lighter load when military action is required and enhances the chances for success.

Chapter 9 – Family
p. 334 In light of these facts, policies that strengthen marriage for those who choose it and that discourage unintended births outside of marriage are sensible goals to pursue. [welfare reform and tax plan elements that reduced the marriage penalty, community-based programs that have a proven track record in preventing unwanted pregnancies – both by encouraging abstinence and by promoting proper use of contraception, marriage education workshops.] p. 335 But all in all, I have little sympathy for those who would enlist the government in the task of enforcing sexual morality. Like most Americans, I consider decisions about sex, marriage, divorce, and childbearing to be highly personal – at the very core of our system of individual liberty…. Moreover, I don’t believe we strengthen the family by bullying or coercing people into the relationships we think are best for them – or by punishing those who fail to meet our standards of sexual propriety.

Epilogue
p. 361 I know that my satisfaction is not to be found in the glare of television cameras or the applause of the crowd. Instead, it seems to come more often now from knowing that in some demonstrable way I’ve been able to help people live their lives with some measure of dignity. p. 362 My heart is filled with love for this country.