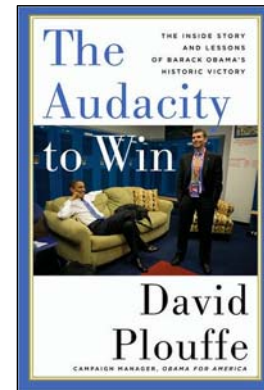


David Plouffe, **The Audacity to Win: The Inside Story of Barack Obama's Historic Victory**, New York: Viking Adult, 2009, 400 pp., \$18.45 (hardcover).

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In *The Audacity to Win*, David Plouffe, who managed Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, recalls in detail both its triumphs and its pitfalls from an insider's point of view. The "Obama for America" team won a historic election by addressing the needs of the modern American constituency and by using emerging technologies to communicate its message of reform. In doing so, the team challenged the political norm and created a political movement that could have a pivotal impact on future elections, including the upcoming presidential election of 2012.



Plouffe reviews what the team accomplished and how its methods differed from the conventional. Traditional politics is primarily based on party lines and reliance on popular, established figureheads, as well as on large donations. Obama's campaign, though, emphasized other facets of America: the importance of the social milieu and people's hunger for change after years of failing policy; a war driven by ambiguous motivations; and the stubborn partisanship that dominates Washington.

The 2008 presidential election also demonstrated a fundamental shift in political messaging and coverage. While traditional media filter the information they present to the public, the Internet allows users to obtain more information about the candidates themselves. Using e-mail, cell phones, and social media Web sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and MyBarackObama.com, the Obama campaign reached its followers directly. This online strategy was critical in mobilizing the grassroots supporters that Obama needed to win. The presidential candidate was dedicated to reaching a completely new demographic of voters—primarily those who were young and/or who were first-time voters. This would have been impossible without strategic use of the Internet.

The Obama campaign's message of political reform and bipartisanship in Washington made decision making easier throughout the campaign and was refreshing to potential voters. In the face of adversity, the Obama team did not have to make hard choices regarding political retaliation, because such behavior was not consistent with its strategy of reformation. By reaching out to independents and expanding the electorate, Obama was able to bring the change he promised to pursue in Washington into the campaign itself. He chose not to make political attacks on the Clinton and McCain campaigns; instead, he provided Americans with facts and allowed them to decide for themselves.

Although the national constituency often viewed the campaign as the race between only Obama and McCain, a large portion of the Plouffe's book is dedicated to the primary contest between Obama and Hillary Clinton. In a sense, that challenge was the most difficult portion of the campaign for the Obama team. It faced an extremely well-funded front runner who had the support of former President Bill Clinton.

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The Obama team's revolutionary strategy took a lot of criticism from Democratic Party heads throughout the nation, especially during the primary election, but the team's dedication to its message and grassroots supporters paid off.

*The Audacity to Win* offers an insider's take on the campaign and on the influence Obama had on the American people. Plouffe documents landmark changes in the way successful campaigns can be run, and he seems to believe that if the American people support these changes, the Democratic Party will continue to persevere in subsequent elections. His narrative literary style makes for an easy read—more so than would an academic format—and it allows him to introduce personal information without lessening the impact of his observations. While Obama's celebrity may attract a less-political audience to his book, the author's outline of the electoral process provides sketchy explanation and may not be understood by that same audience.

The most recent edition of the book features a new final chapter titled "2010 and Beyond," in which Plouffe outlines the failures of the Republican Party and encourages readers to support Democratic Party policies in future elections. His obvious partisanship and Republican-bashing views are somewhat to be expected, coming as they do from an outspoken, dedicated, liberal author. However, this chapter is inconsistent with the bipartisan nature of the Obama campaign described in the previous 18 chapters. Overall, *The Audacity to Win* offers a unique perspective on a significant political campaign that resulted in the election of the first African-American President of the United States. In the final chapter, Plouffe urges Americans to garner valuable lessons learned from the 2008 presidential election, and to reinforce the spirit of change that Obama began that year. The author clearly believes the American people to be vehicles of change in this country, and that only by fighting for what they believe is right can the United States transform itself into the country they desire it to be.