

Is Barack Obama too nice to become the president of the United States? Reading *The Audacity of Hope* one might almost come to that conclusion. In his clear, fluent, even elegant, prose, he sets out his attitudes to the major issues he sees facing America and the world today - everything from school breakfasts to peace in the Middle East. He writes with disarming frankness about his faith and his family relations, and the compromises and disappointments of his political life. Always valuing consensus above antagonism, he rarely takes a hard line: despite deep ideological differences, he comes nearest to criticising George W. Bush personally when he describes him as ‘the kind of guy who would make for good company so long as the conversation revolved around sports and the kids.’ Nevertheless, he admires Clinton far more, and often refers to the policies that he tried, with popular support but in the teeth of vicious conservative opposition, to introduce.

If Barack Obama is elected President and is blessed with a Democratic majority in Congress, he might be exactly what the US needs. His main obstacle will be a conservative opposition doing everything possible to make his consensus politics look like weakness.