

Obama's 'Promised Land' offers inspiring story for young people

By Hillel Italie

The first volume of former President Barack Obama's memoir is coming out Nov. 17, two weeks after Election Day. It's called "A Promised Land" and will cover his swift and historic rise to the White House and his first term in office. The publication date for the second volume has not yet been determined.

"I've spent the last few years reflecting on my presidency, and in 'A Promised Land' I've tried to provide an honest accounting of my presidential campaign and my time in office: the key events and people who shaped it; my take on what I got right and the mistakes I made; and the political, economic, and cultural forces that my team and I had to confront then — and that as a nation we are grappling with still," Obama said in a statement recently.

"In the book, I've also tried to give readers a sense of the personal journey that Michelle and I went through during those years, with all the incredible highs and lows. And finally, at a time when America is going through such enormous upheaval, the book offers some of my broader thoughts on how we can heal the divisions in our country going forward and make our democracy work for everybody — a task that won't depend on any single president, but on all of us as engaged citizens."

Obama's book, like his previous ones, will be released by Crown, a division of Penguin Random House.

The 768-page book is the most anticipated presidential memoir in memory, as much or more because of the quality of the writing than for any possible revelations. He has been called the most literary president since Abraham Lincoln and has already written two highly praised, million-selling books: "Dreams from My Father" and "The Audacity

of Hope," both of which have been cited as aiding his campaign in 2008 and making him the country's first Black president.

Even with a substantial list price of \$45, "A Promised Land" is virtually guaranteed to sell millions of copies, and has an announced first printing of 3 million. Barnes & Noble CEO James Daunt likened the enthusiasm for Obama's book, which seems well positioned to become the best-selling presidential memoir in history, to the final volume of J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series.

Political

"This will be a book of rare consequence," Daunt said in a statement. "That it will sell as no other book has done since July 21, 2007 is immensely cheering to booksellers."

"Dreams from My Father" introduced us to a little known US Senator and to a writer of poetic grace. The Audacity of Hope gave thrilling vision to his ambitions for political office. A Promised Land now offers us a grand, lyrical narrative of his Presidency. This will be a book of rare consequence.

But "A Promised Land" will face challenges far different from most presidential memoirs, and even from former first lady Michelle Obama's blockbuster book, "Becoming," which came out two years ago and has sold more than 10 million copies. Because of the pandemic, the former president will likely be unable to match Michelle Obama's spectacular, all-star arena tour. Barack Obama also may find his memoir coming out at a time when the Nov. 3 election is still undecided and the country far more preoccupied with who the next president will be than with events of the past.

Obama has taken longer than most recent presidents to complete his

memoir, with the first volume coming nearly four years after the end of his second term. (George W. Bush's "Decision Points," a single volume, arrived within two years). He has been writing during unusual times, even before the pandemic spread earlier this year. His successor in the White House, Donald Trump, has attacked and upended achievements of the Obama administration ranging from the Iran nuclear treaty to "Obamacare." Whether Trump or Obama's vice president, Joe Biden, wins the election may well determine Obama's legacy and will shape how the book is read.

Obama is not the first president to publish more than one volume of memoirs; Dwight Eisenhower also wrote two. But he had been expected to write just one when Penguin Random House first announced, in February 2017, a multimillion joint publication deal with Barack and Michelle Obama. Recently, Crown Publisher David Drake cited the scale of Obama's ambition to write a book that captures the experiences of being president and offers an inspiring story for young people.

"As his writing progressed and the scope of the memoirs continued to grow, he ultimately decided to write two volumes," Drake said.

The November release will be welcomed not only by Obama readers, but by booksellers and fellow publishers who anticipate that the massive demand for "A Promised Land" will raise sales for everyone during the holiday season. Its popularity may also present another complication: The publishing industry has struggled with chronic printing shortages in the US over the past two years, leading to frequent delays. Drake said that Crown had taken several measures to minimize disruption, from printing one-third of the copies in Germany to arranging for a US plant that had been scheduled to close in October to remain open for two additional months. (AP)

Books

Variety



Musician Ted Nugent plays the national anthem before a President Donald Trump campaign event on Oct 27, in Lansing, Mich. The election has unleashed an avalanche of documentaries like no season before it. In a presidential election of enormous stakes, filmmakers have rushed to finish their films before Election Day. (AP)

Film

Films try to inform, sway, entertain the electorate

Ahead of US polls, landslide of docus

By Jake Coyle

The election has unleashed an avalanche of documentaries like no season before it.

Dozens of films, exploring issues from gerrymandering to white supremacists, have sought to illuminate the many issues and trends voters are confronting at the polls on Tuesday. In a presidential election of enormous stakes, filmmakers have rushed to finish their films before Election Day, to try to inform, sway and entertain the electorate.

A sense of urgency, in particular, drives many of the films which have streamed, aired on TV and played in theaters in the weeks ahead of Nov 2. The woeful state of movie theaters due to the pandemic hasn't enabled a box-office breakout like Michael Moore's 2004 election-year documentary "Fahrenheit 9/11," but the sheer deluge of docs this year has put politics at the top of countless streaming-service queues.

Here's a rundown of highlights from an election-year documentary landslide.

■ **"All In: The Fight for Democracy":** Liz Garbus and Lisa Cortés' film details the contested election of Georgia's governor in 2018, with potentially relevant lessons about voter suppression for 2020. Stacy Abrams, the Democratic candidate and a producer of "All In," relates her experience in her razor-thin loss to Brian Kemp, a Republican, who as Georgia's secretary of state had a pivotal role overseeing the election. (Kemp, who won by 50,000 votes, put more than 53,000 voter registrations, most of them from minorities, on hold ahead of voting.) "All In" uses Abrams as an entry point for a larger history of disenfranchisement in America. (On Amazon Prime)

■ **"Agents of Chaos":** Alex Gibney's two-part HBO documentary returns to the 2016 election of Donald Trump to investigate claims of Russian interference. Gibney struggles to come to firm conclusions on Trump's alleged collusion or how much of an effect Russian trolls had. But he makes a powerful argument that Russian's meddling in American de-

mocracy is undeniable and remains cause for alarm. The prolific Gibney also this month released "Totally Under Control" (Hulu), a highly critical portrait of the White House's management of the pandemic.

■ **"537 Votes":** Like several of this fall's documentaries, the lesson of Billy Corben's "537 Votes" is clear: Vote. The "Cocaine Cowboys" filmmaker's HBO movie returns to Florida 2000 to chronicle the divergent paths of strategy employed by high-minded, out-foxed Democrats and more rough-and-tumble, win-at-all-costs Republicans in the historic recount between George W. Bush and Al Gore. The film, produced by Adam McKay, throbs with a Miami beat, outlining the crucial context of the Elián González saga on the all-important Cuban-American vote in Florida. "537 Votes" is a reminder of how much your vote can matter, and how politicized counting it can get.

■ **"Kill Chain: The Cyber War on America's Elections":** Simon Ardizzone, Russell Michaels and Sarah Teale's documentary may lead all others in its ability to keep you up at night. The HBO film, relying on cyber-security experts and experienced hackers, details how hackable US voting technology really is. One interviewed hacker describes how he broke into Alaska's 2016 election system just to see if he could. Another, an election-security expert named Harri Hursti, tracks down supposedly unbreachable voting machines to tinker with their vulnerabilities. He finds a widely used model on eBay, on sale for about \$80 each.

■ **"Slay the Dragon":** In a voting landscape where district maps take strange, misshapen forms, "Slay the Dragon" is expert at reading between the lines. Barak Goodman and Chris Durrance's film is about gerrymandering, the partisan drawing up of districts to make more elections virtually uncontested. "Slay the Dragon," streaming on Hulu, clearly explains the often-complicated manipulations of districts. But it does more than that, tracing how redrawn electoral maps have affected things as disparate as the Flint Water crisis and the election of Trump. Most of all,

it shows how gerrymandering has helped fuel our heated politics, removing incentive for compromise.

■ **"The Fight":** The American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed 20 lawsuits this year over voting by mail and more than 400 legal actions against the Trump administration, figures to play a role in any legal challenges in a disputed tally. In "The Fight," streaming on Hulu, documents the ACLU in its battles against the Trump administration, giving an intimate look at the attorneys on the front lines in cases including LGBTQ rights, immigrant rights and reproductive rights. Elyse Steinberg, Josh Kriegman and Eli Despress, the makers of the excruciatingly entertaining Anthony Weiner doc "Weiner," captures a legal bulwark in motion, trailing both how cases are built and how their crusading lawyers keep up with the frantic pace.

■ **"Not Done: Women Remaking America":** Sara Wolitzky's documentary, which premiered Tuesday on PBS, looks back on the last few years of the women's movement, starting with the Women's March the day after the inauguration of Trump — still the largest demonstration in American history. With interviews including Gloria Steinem, #MeToo founder Tarana Burke, Shonda Rhimes and Time's Up co-founder Tina Tchen, "Not Done" surveys four turbulent years in an expansive women's movement that kicked off #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, and is sure to dramatically affect the election.

■ **"Boys State":** How are younger generations processing the politics they've been raised in? Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine's wildly entertaining documentary, a prize-winner at Sundance now streaming on Apple TV+, answers that question by filming the Boys State camp in Texas, where some 1,100 17- and 18-year-old boys annually gather to create a mock government with two parties, established platforms and fast-moving campaigns. It's a microcosm of American politics, where some teenagers have gleaned dirty tricks from today's Washington and others believe idealistically in change. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Khloe Kardashian says she had tested positive for the coronavirus.

The reality star confirmed her previous diagnosis in a Wednesday sneak peek clip of "Keeping Up with the Kardashians." The bedridden Kardashian spoke in the video with a hoarse voice.

"Just found out that I do have corona," she said in the teaser of the episode, which was filmed months ago. A teaser in September showed Kardashian being tested for the virus.

"I have been in my room," she continued. "It's gonna be fine, but it was really bad for a couple days."

Kardashian said her symptoms included coughing, shaking, vomiting, headaches along with cold and hot flashes. She said she had a burning sensation while coughing.

The video clip was released a day after her sister, Kim Kardashian West, drew hefty criticism for celebrating her lavish 40th birthday vacation with a large group on a private island during the pandemic. She posted a few group photos on social media of herself with family and friends, who were all unmasked. (AP)

LONDON: British artist Tracey Emin says she was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year and is in remission after an operation.

In an interview published Wednesday, Emin told the website Artnet that a malignant tumor was discovered on her bladder in the spring.

She said she had surgery in the summer in which many of her reproductive organs were removed and she was fitted with a stoma bag.

The 57-year-old artist said that at the time the tumor was discovered, she was working on a painting of a malignant lump.

"It's exactly the same as my bladder with the tumor in it, before I knew I had the cancer — it's brilliant!" she told Artnet.

A member of the "Young British Artists" movement that shook up the art world in the 1990s, Emin is renowned for works including "My Bed" — a mess of disheveled sheets, empty bottles, cigarette butts.

Emin, who has a show of new work opening in Brussels this week, said she has been unable to

paint since her operation. She said she feels she still has lots of work left to do. (AP)

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump can still be a potent television draw, although in the case of "60 Minutes" this past week, it probably wasn't what he intended. The 17.4 million people who



Emin



Kardashian

watched the CBS newsmagazine, featuring interviews with Trump and Democratic opponent Joe Biden, was the show's biggest audience in more than two years, the Nielsen company said. This was despite an angry president releasing an unedited version of his talk with Lesley Stahl on Facebook three days in advance because he didn't like the questions.

Since "60 Minutes" had been averaging 10.3 million viewers so far this season, clearly some people wanted to see the broadcast after hearing about the controversy, or saw the full tape and were curious about how CBS edited it. Stahl made one reference to the dispute in her introduction, saying "we had prepared to talk about the many issues and questions facing

the president, but in what has become an all-too-public dust-up, the conversation was cut short."

It was the biggest "60 Minutes" audience since March 25, 2018, another episode that Trump surely didn't want people to see since it featured an interview with adult film star Stormy Daniels. She alleged she had an affair with Trump, who denied it. (AP)