

Obama tome sheds scant light

Michelle Obama: First Lady of Hope

By Elizabeth Lightfoot; The Lyons Press; Paperback; \$14.95; 240 pages ISBN: 978-1-59921-521-1

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"I will never forget the unabashed affection the president-elect displayed [Election Day] as, with the whole world watching, he said, 'I would not be standing here without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family, the love of my life, the nation's next First Lady, Michelle Obama.'

...I thought of the 20-year-old Michelle who wondered in her college thesis if she would always feel like an outsider. I thought of the Michelle Obama of last February who said she was really proud of her country for the first time because it seemed that hope was making a comeback...

On November 4, 2008, hope did not just make a comeback. Hope won." —



Excerpted from Chapter 12 (pages 165-167)

It's just a couple of weeks since Election Day and already available is this biography of Michelle Obama which includes coverage of her husband's history-making victory as the first African-American to ascend to the presidency.

Almost as stunning as that amazing feat is the speed with which Elizabeth's Lightfoot has managed to publish this very timely tome about the First Lady-to-be.

Lightfoot, a Harvard grad who also has a Master's

degree in journalism from Columbia University, has worked as a reporter for the Associated Press.

Unfortunately, as the author freely admits, she has "been denied access to Michelle and her close friends and family" while doing her research, so it's no surprise that the final text definitely has the second-hand feel of an observer standing at a considerable distance from her subject.

Half of the insights made here sound like the casual observations of your average political junkie or couch potato who followed the campaign closely.

The rest is comprised of copious quotes from TV talking heads or ordinary folks who might have had a brief brush with greatness, encountering Michelle in some capacity either in childhood, college or during her professional career.

At least the author never avoids any of the well-aired controversial issues surrounding Michelle, such as

questions about her senior thesis at Princeton and her patriotism. In this regard, Lightfoot proves to be very loyal, protective and is quick to defend and dismiss allegations made by detractors as unfair.

The upshot is that what we have here is essentially a book-length fanzine except sans all the glossy pictures. I'd say it's a safe bet that a bio of more substance will arrive soon, since the new First Family will undoubtedly inspire a veritable cottage industry of writers to wax poetic about their unlikely achievement.

Highly recommended only if you've been in a coma for the past two years and want to know how a guy named Barack Obama became the president of the United States, or if you're impatient for a keepsake with a photo of him and his wife on the cover to display on your coffee table.

Otherwise wait, because the definitive memoir about Michelle is yet to be released.

Author eyes Hurston's vindication

Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston

By Anthea Kraut; University of Minnesota Press; Paperback; \$25; 320 pages; illustrated ISBN: 978-0-8166-4712-5

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"Although I studied ballet and modern from an early age, jazz dance was my greatest love... In these predominantly white spaces, no mention was made of the African-American origins of the idiom... It was not until my junior year at Carleton College... that I confronted the racial dynamics that went unspoken in those suburban jazz dance classes... It became clear just how much jazz dance, that quintessentially American form, owed to African-derived traditions... Why had it been so easy to participate in and become passionate about a dance form without learning its history?"

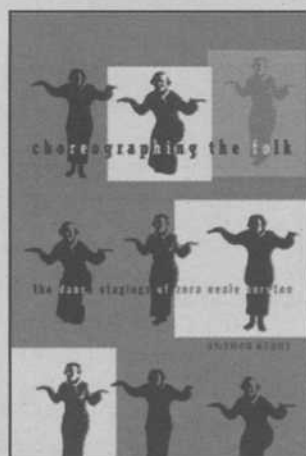
As I continued my study of American dance history in graduate school at Northwestern, my interest in 'invisibilized' histories only deepened. I learned that Zora Neale Hurston had staged a concert with a spectacular Bahamian dance finale about which little was known. What began as a quest for information about Hurston's theatrical revues gradually ex-

panded as I uncovered connections between Hurston and a number of leading dance figures.

To a great extent, the recovery project also became a case study of invisibilization — an attempt to understand the conditions that enable certain subjects and performances to be forgotten — as well as an inquiry into the implications of restoring those subjects and performances to the historical record... For Hurston's stage work... did play a role in the composition of American dance as we know it today." — Excerpted from the Preface (pages ix-x)

Most people think of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) as a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a literary icon fondly remembered as the author of the novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God." However, many forget that she was also a gifted choreographer whose innovative productions helped transform the landscape of modern dance. Sadly, due to racism, she never received the credit she deserved for her contributions to this then-emerging field.

The disrespect she was shown was very similar to the way in which African-American jazz artists were denigrated in their day, while many of the White imitators who arrived in their wake,



such as the Gershwins and Tommy Dorsey, were celebrated as cultural geniuses. While seminal jazz greats like Satchmo, Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington may have belatedly gotten their due, the same can't be said for dance where Hurston's name is still never

mentioned in the same breath as the Caucasians generally credited with accelerating the acceptance of modern during the period between the two world wars.

Now, thanks to Anthea Kraut, author of "Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston," the slight has finally been rectified. For, the detail-oriented Professor Kraut, who teaches dance at the University of California — Riverside, goes to great pains, here, to re-authenticate Hurston's scores and theatrical stagings, while simultaneously raising suspicions about some of her competitors who undoubtedly benefited from their lack of melanin. A choreographic legacy restored!

Taco Bell lawyers targeting 50 Cent

NEW YORK (AP) — Rapper 50 Cent is facing a challenge to his street cred — from Taco Bell. Lawyers for the fast-food chain are calling his federal lawsuit, filed in Manhattan, another attempt to "burnish his gangsta rapper persona by distorting beyond all recognition a bona fide, good faith offer." The squabble is over a fake letter sent out by Taco Bell Corp. asking 50 Cent to change his name for one day to 79 Cent, 89 Cent or 99 Cent to help publicize its value menu.

In return, the company offered to donate \$10,000 to the charity of his choice. The rapper, whose real name is Curtis Jackson, has sued for trademark infringement. Jackson's attorney, Peter Raymond, says he wonders why Taco Bell would use his client's name in an ad campaign.

Bits 'n' Pieces

Houston police beat Donald Driver's father; investigation underway

(TMS) — The allegation is that some members of the Houston police department had an ongoing dispute with the family of Green Bay Packer wide receiver Donald Driver. It was that dispute which supposedly led to last week's brutal beating of Driver's father Marvin. The Houston Police Department has issued a statement saying it takes the assault allegations "very seriously and will begin a thorough investigation into the matter." Driver family members are alleging that the officers took Marvin Driver behind a service station, beat him, forced him to swallow something and then beat him again. The senior driver was last reported in the intensive care unit of a Houston hospital. Hermann Hospital officials also report some bleeding on the brain apparently resulting from blunt force trauma.

Why did Tyra Banks finance an operation for a man to become a woman?

(TMS) — For reasons which are not entirely clear, television talk-show host Tyra Banks is reportedly financing an operation which will physically convert model Isis King from a man to a woman. Isis is the transgender contestant who earlier this year made history by competing on Banks' "America's Next Top Model" reality show. Although born a male, the 22-year-old Isis asserts he has always felt female. He has been taking the hormone replacement but could not afford the full conversion operation which is estimated to run between \$20,000 and \$35,000. Isis was born Darrell Walls. Banks provided no explanation as to why she was paying for the operation which some people view as morally objectionable.



Transgender model Isis King

Michael Jackson strikes out-of-court deal with Bahraini prince



Michael Jackson

LONDON (AFP) — Pop megastar Michael Jackson cancelled a London court appearance Monday after reaching a settlement with a Bahraini prince suing him for \$7 million. Jackson was to have appeared at the High Court in London to defend himself over allegations made by Sheikh Abdulla bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the second son of the king of Bahrain. But he called off his trip to Britain at the last minute after his legal teams in London struck an out-of-court deal. The prince demanded the repayment of several advances he says he made as part of a joint music project in Bahrain, which Jackson pulled out of.

Record producer John Forte's sentence commuted

Rapper/producer John Forte, who worked closely with the Fugees before being sent to prison on drug charges, had his sentence commuted Monday by President George W. Bush. The musician was arrested at Newark International Airport in 2000 for possession with intent to distribute cocaine and conspiracy to distribute. Police discovered Forte with two briefcases filled with liquid cocaine, which they estimated were worth \$1.4 million. He was sentenced to the mandatory minimum of 14 years and was serving time in Fort Dix, New Jersey. He will be released December 22 after serving just over seven years. He must serve five years of supervised probation.



John Forte