



## Lend an ear to these leaders

By Marco R. della Cava, USA TODAY  
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You don't have to rap or rock to get a Grammy. Just talk. This year's spoken word nominees include three for whom yakking is a profession: Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Jimmy Carter, all past winners in the category. But how do they measure up on that drive to the in-laws?

USA TODAY's Marco R. della Cava offers observations after listening to the 14 CDs (OK, some of the 14 CDs) in these sets by two past presidents and a candidate who hopes to be next.



By Ethan Miller, Getty Images



By Jum Money, AP



AP

### The voice

**Bill Clinton: *Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World***

Clinton's famously disarming drawl is in full force in this reading of his book, almost making philanthropy sound as sexy as club-hopping.

**Barack Obama: *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream***

Obama's rhetorical skills need no introduction, but working within the boundaries of prose means there's no room for improvised poetry

**Jimmy Carter: *Sunday Mornings in Plains: Bringing Peace to a Changing World***

Carter has morphed from country boy to president back to world-famous country boy, and his delivery is never more endearingly grandfatherly than here.

### The pace

Oddly accelerated, bordering on the zip of an infomercial; then again, he's trying to get through a full day of reading.

Easy like a summer breeze; you half expect to hear the creak of a rocking chair or the clink of a lemonade glass.

Live Sunday school sessions from 2001. (Note to publishers: All authors should record their as-read-by readings with an audience.)

**The message** With seemingly infinite examples of altruism, Clinton does a compelling job of guilt-tripping you off the couch and into action.

The book's inspirational campaign-trail moments often digress into inside-the-Beltway anecdotes that can make NPR sound like shock-jock hour.

Technically, a dissection of the Book of Isaiah. But the real message is that everyone can have a chat with a man who refuses to march quietly into history.

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**The highlight** Clinton's retelling of the story of Oseola McCarty — an elderly African-American laundress who gave away \$150,000 saved over decades — crystallizes what Giving is all about.

Obama-eye-view insights into the complex perspective of black Americans, who worry about the negative aspects of rap culture but are angered by attempts to demonize black youths.

It's common to hear a Sunday school teacher talk about sin and forgiveness. But it's not every day that lessons on bridging differences use peace in the Middle East as their framework.

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**The lowdown** Clinton may be a master orator, but five CDs of your favorite anyone is too much.

The man has something, and it's missing in a canned setting. Like flowers need sunshine, Obama needs an audience to come alive.

The live setting banishes that "I'm sealed in a closet reading this to you" sound often found in audiobooks, resulting in an engaging road companion.