

Diverse Experiences In Barack Obama's Dreams From My Father: A Story Of Race And Inheritance

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Abstract

Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance is a fictional memoir authored by Barack Obama, the forty-fourth President of the United States of America, and it contains his remarkable life story in his own words written with grace and precision. He was elected and reelected President of the United States in 2008 and in 2012. He is also the author of *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, *Of Thee I Sing: A Letters to My Daughters*, and *A Promised Land*. It is an interior journey, a boy's search for his father through the search as a workable meaning for his life as a black American. A fictional memoir promises feats worthy of record, conversations with famous people, and a central role in important events but this memoir implies a summing up, a certain closure that hardly someone of his years still busy charting his way through the world. According to Obama, this book is also about his black brothers and sisters, all their various struggles. Although not born in Kenya, Barack Obama is thought of as a native son where he confronts the bitter truth of his father's life and at last reconciles his divided inheritance.

Key Words: Race, Dreams, Identity, Inheritance, Experiences

Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance is a fictional memoir authored by Barack Obama, the forty-fourth President of the United States of America and it contains his remarkable life story in his own words written with grace and precision. He was elected president of the United States in 2008, and he was re-elected for a second term in 2012. He is also the author of *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters*, and *A Promised Land*.

Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance is a refreshing, revealing portrait of a young man asking big questions about identity and belonging. The son of a black African father and a white American mother, President Obama recounts an emotional odyssey. He retreats the migration of his mother's family from Kansas to Hawaii, then to his childhood home in Indonesia.

He discusses the cultural debates around guns, abortions, and rap lyrics which leads Bill Clinton's third way, a scaled-back welfare state without grand ambition, sharp edges, bread and butter issues. The collective story of Faulkner's reminder that the past is never dead and buried; it is not even past touches his own. The bombs of Al Qaeda have marked, the world of plenty and world of want, between the modern and ancient, between these supported set of values and those who not like them, lives of children on Chicago's South Side, unthinking application of force, a longer prison sentences, and more military hardware. His part is to understand the struggle and to find his place in it.

His mother died after the publication of this book, and she spent her previous ten years doing what she loved. She travelled the world, helping woman by sewing machine or milk cow, or an education that might give them a foot hold in world's economy. She managed her illness with grace and good humor. Barack Obama observes: "In his daughters, he sees his mother every day" (2). He discusses the opportunity arose to write this book after he was elected the first black President of the *Harvard Law Review*. It contains limits of civil rights litigation bringing about racial equality. He remembers the stories that his mother, her parents told him as a child.

He recalled his first year as a community organizer in Chicago and his awkward steps toward manhood. His past left feeling exposed and even slightly ashamed. He worked thirty-three years as a lawyer active in the social and political life of Chicago. His parents' brief union, a black man and white woman, an African and an American. He has troubled heart, mixed blood, and the divided soul. He sounded like he was trying to hide from himself. He did not fault people their suspicions. He sat at his father's grave, and spoke to him through Africa's red soil.

It is an interior journey, a boy's search for his father through the search as a workable meaning for his life as a black American. A memoir promises feats worthy of record, conversations with famous people, and a central role in important events but this memoir implies a summing up, a certain closure that hardly someone of his years still busy charting his way through the world. He said that this book is also about his black brother and sisters, all their various struggles.

Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance is based on journals or the oral histories of his family. The dialogues that were actually said or relayed to him. The characters are the people he has known and name of the most characters have been changed for the sake of privacy. He tries to write an honest account of a particular province of his life. It is to his family though his mother, his grandparents, and his siblings, stretched across oceans and continents. He dedicates

this book for their constant love and support. He hopes that the love and respect he feels for them shines through on every page.

His mother would admit with a hint of a smile that his father could be bit domineering but it is just that he is basically a very honest person that makes him uncompromising sometimes. His mother preferred a gentler portrait of his father. Barack's grandfather would tell him that Barack's father could handle any situation and that made everybody like him. He would tell him that there is something Barack could learn from father like confidence that the secret to man's success.

When Barack searching through the closets in search of Christmas ornaments, he found an old photographs of his father at that point where his own memories began, his mother had already begun a courtship with the man would become her second husband and he sensed without explanation why the photographs had to be shared away. His father was an African, a Kenyan of the Luo Tribe born on the shores of Lake Victoria in a place called Alego. The village was poor, but Barack Obama's paternal grandfather Hussein Onyango Obama had been a prominence farmer, an elder of the tribe, a medicine man with healing powers.

At the age of twenty-three, Barack Obama Sr. arrived at the University of Hawaii as the institutions' first African student. He studied econometrics and helped to organize the International Students Association of which he became the first president. His father met an American girl in a Russian Language Course, and they fell in love. The girl's parents wary at first but won over by his charm and intellect, the young couple married, and she bore them a son to whom he bequeathed his name. Barack means "blessed" in Swahili, an African language. Barack was his father's name too. But neither of the boy's parents called him Barack. He was always Barry. Barack Obama Sr. won another scholarship to pursue his Ph.D. at Harvard but not the money to take his new family with him. So, he returned to Africa to fulfill his promise to the continent, a separation occurred, the mother and the child stayed behind, but the bond of love survived the distance.

Obama swaddled in a tale that placed him in the center of a vast and orderly universe. There were many things, he did not understand in the abridged version his mother and grandparents offered. His father looked nothing like the people around him. He was black as pitch; his mother was white as milk that was barely registered in his mind.

He recalled a story that dealt with the subject of race when he got older, and it would be repeated more often as if it captured the essence of morality tale that his father's life had become. Even though he was a Kenyan, he understood the promise of American dream and the universal right of man. When Obama was a teenager, he had grown skeptical of his father's truthfulness.

Most white Americans at that time, never gave black people much thought. The unspoken codes that governed life among the whites kept contact between the races to a minimum. In his grandparents' memories, the images are fleeting when black people appear at all in the Kansas. Later at bank where Toot worked, she made acquaintance of the janitor Mr. Reed, the door keeper of the building, a person with a medical degree trained to take care of the health of animals. One day a secretary in the office told Toot that she should never, "Call no nigger 'Mister'" (18). After sometime later, she found Mr. Reed weeping in a corner of the building. When she asked him about what was wrong, he dried his eyes and respond with a question, "What we have ever done to be treated so mean?" (18). She did not have an answer on that day to console him but the question stayed in her mind. Sometimes Barack's grandparents discussed once when Ann gone to bed. They discussed that Toot to keep calling Mr. Reed "Mister," although she understood with a mixture of relief, sadness, and the careful distance that janitor maintained whenever they passed each other in the hall. At the same time, Gramps began to decline invitations from his coworkers to go out for a beer, and he would tell them that he had to get home to keep the wife happy. The word racism was not in even their vocabulary.

Barack did not blame his mother or grandparents for this and his father might have preferred the image they created for him indeed he might have been complete in its creation. Their stories did not tell him why his father left. They could not describe what it might have been like had he stayed. Like the janitor Mr. Reed, his father became a respectable man in someone else's narrative.

Ann married to an Indonesian named Lolo, another student she had met at the University of Hawaii; by the time they had lived in Indonesia for over three years. Lolo possessed good manners and easy grace of his people. Barack and Ann moved to Indonesia. It took less than six months to

Barack to learn Indonesian's language, its customs, and its legends. That's how things were, a long adventure, and the reward of a young boy's life. Living in Jakarta the capital of Indonesia was a great adventure for a six-year-old boy. He went to a local public school for two years and a catholic school. He wrote that he wanted to be president when he grew up while studying first and third grade. Lolo wanted to make sure Barack that he could stand up for himself. So, he taught him how to box. Lolo said, "Of course it hurt, sometimes you can't worry about hurt. Sometimes you worry only about getting where you have to go" (40).

Ann was concerned that Barack might fall behind English. So, every day, she woke him up at four in the morning to teach him English lessons before school. She told Barack, "This is no picnic for me either, Buster" (48). She also taught him American history, and most of all, she wanted him to know about the black civil rights movement. Because of his mother, nine-year-old Barack began to understand what being black meant in the United States. Ann worried about her son. So, she sent Barack back alone to live with his grandparents when he was ten.

Barack tried his best to fit in and find friends in Punahou, a top private school in Hawaii. Mostly he tried not to stick out too much. One day, he found that his father was coming to visit and he had not seen him in eight years since his father left him when he was just two.

Barack knew his father as strong and heroic like an African prince by the stories told by his mother. His father Barack Obama Sr. planned to come to Barack's new school and speak to his class. He talked about life in Kenya when Barack followed his father into the sound, "he lets out a quick shout, bright and high, a shout that leaves much behind and reaches out for more, a shout that cries for laughter" (71). After their month together, Barack Obama Sr. returned to Kenya. He taught African style dances to Barack. Barack did not know it at the time, but he would never see his father again.

Barack never worked hard in high school. He was very smart but he did not push himself to be a top student. However, he did love to read, and like his mother, he was interested in American history especially black history. Barack agreed to go to Kenya after graduation, and it was a chance to get to know his father better but he died in a car accident one year before Barack graduated.

The death of his father made Barack take life more serious. He gave more thought to his future. He wanted to help black communities and hoped to make poor people's lives better. He kept a diary of his thoughts and experiences. He became more serious and mature person. After graduating from Columbia, Barack moved to Chicago and Illinois. He became a community organizer, and his job was to work directly with poor people to fix problems. He believed that the best way to change the lives of the poor was through the law.

To be a lawyer, he needed to go to law school. So, he applied to Harvard Law School in Boston, Massachusetts. But before the classes started, he had a trip that was on his mind for many years. He flew to Kenya then Barack finally met his father's family in Africa. He had many half-brothers and half-sisters there. Kenya was not like any place Barack had ever seen. He met his grandmother, and she told him the stories about his father that Barack's mother had no way of knowing. She introduced Barack, "This is your sister, who used to play with you on her knee. This is your brother, who has come all the way from America to see you" (432). She described his father as a child, smart, restless, and eager to make the most of his life.

In her backyard were the graves of both his father and grandfather. Barack cried when he kneeled down to pay his respects, "When my tears were finally spent, I felt a calmness wash over me" (429). He had dreams about his father, and they became as *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. By the time he left two weeks later, Barack felt that he was part of the family. Although not born in Kenya, Barack Obama was in the thought of being a native son where he confronted the bitter truth of his father's life and at last reconciled his divided inheritance.

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