
HANDOUT ONE, LESSON ONE

FILM CLIPS TRANSCRIPTS

CLIP ONE - EARLY CHILDHOOD

NEWS REPORTER:

Meet Barack Obama, a Harvard-educated Chicago civil rights attorney.

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Obama has done and seen much in his 34 years of life. He was raised in Hawaii, Indonesia, and is one of very few African Americans who can boast of tangible living proof of African roots.

BARACK OBAMA:

My parents made me appreciate different cultures, but the notion that one culture or one race was superior to another was not in my sort of wiring, so to speak. My parents met in Hawaii. My father was part of that first wave of young Africans to travel abroad to get an education. They ended up getting married, having me. My father decided he wanted to get his PhD, and obtained a scholarship to go to Harvard. He moved there, but the separation made it difficult for them to stay together. Not to mention, this was an interracial couple at the brink of the Civil Rights Movement. My mother was from Kansas and she was born to a pair of fairly typical midwestern, White Americans in a lot of ways.

What made them remarkable was that they ended up being more open-minded and accepting of difference and diversity than, I think, was maybe typical of their generation and their time. So, I don't think that there was a sense of my difference, racially, as I was growing up. I mean, Hawaii was a... sort of a unique kind of melting pot. Then when I was six my mother remarried an Indonesian.

And we moved to Indonesia, which certainly made me feel different, but it had more to do with the fact that I was an American living in a third-world country than the fact that I was an African American. It probably wasn't until I came back from Indonesia and I was around ten years old or so that it became an issue. I obtained a scholarship to a prep school in Hawaii. At that point, suddenly I looked around and said, "There aren't that many folks who look like me."

CLIP TWO - HIGH SCHOOL THROUGH COLLEGE

BARACK OBAMA:

By the time I was an adolescent and was struggling with issues of racial identity and a father not being in the house, I reacted by engaging in a lot of behavior that's not un-typical of Black males across the country. I played a lot of basketball, didn't take school that seriously, got into fights, drank and consumed substances that weren't always legal. And that was also at a time when "Roots" was first appearing on television, and there were just a lot of icons of Black identity — "Shaft" and "Superfly" — forced me to figure out as I moved through high school that what did it mean to be a Black man in America? And also embrace my mixed heritage.

PHIL BOERNER:

We both went to Occidental College in the fall of 1979 as freshmen, and we were in the same dormitory. Barack was always very self-confident; he was fun to be around and easy-going and a good conversationalist.

BARACK OBAMA:

It turned out that I really liked to read, and I liked to argue politics with my professors, and I really, sort of like a sponge, started soaking up a lot of uh information, and spent the first two years there, sort of rediscovering what was important to me — and was active in a lot of campus activism.

CROWD:

Divest! Divest! Divest! Divest! Divest! Divest!

PHIL BOERNER:

There were student groups that were trying to get the college to divest from investing in South Africa.

PHIL BOERNER:

There was a rally in front of where the board was meeting, the trustees, and Barack was the first speaker at that rally.

BARACK OBAMA:

Alright. We called this rally today to bring attention to Occidental's investments in South Africa, and Occidental's lack of investment in multicultural education. here is no —

PHIL BOERNER: Barack did a staged thing where he was carted off, supposedly by Afrikaners, I guess to sort of symbolize what was going on in South Africa. It was just one of the many issues along with the 1980 election and bringing back the draft that was being discussed on campus.

BARACK OBAMA:

That was the first time that I had spent a lot of time on the mainland United States. I became close to a collection of African American professors and Latino activists, and international students, and it was a terrific period of growth for me. But after two years at Occidental, I decided that I needed a change. It was a small liberal arts college.

So I transferred to Columbia University in New York City, and became very interested in issues of social change and politics and public policy and government and started really thinking more seriously about who I was and what I wanted to be.

CLIP THREE - RELIGIOUS LIFE AND LAW SCHOOL

ALVIN LOVE:

Once he made his decision to join the church, you could see a marked difference in his groundedness. I think prior to that, Barack was searching for himself; both himself in the African American community, but also himself in the faith community. I think it had real value and real meaning to him.

AUMA OBAMA:

I got a letter. I was in Germany studying. And the letter — I looked at the sender and it was Barack Obama. And the thing that really startled me when I got the letter, was that he had — it had — the same handwriting as my father's. And my father used to write to me and, you know, so I was like — what is going on? This is like, I don't know, two years or three years after my father has died. So, I opened the letter kind of feeling really strange, and it turns out to be Barack Obama, Jr.

I grew up knowing that I had a brother in Hawaii because my father was very proud of him. And his mother always sent Barack's school results, so we knew about him. But as a child, you don't really relate. We got to meet each other in Chicago, finally. We decided on that, we needed to get to know each other. And immediately it was like, this is somebody I've known all my life. And we didn't stop talking for about two days. He asked me so many questions about family, about his father — in particular about his father. I think it was a big hole in his life. We don't know the reasons why his

father couldn't see him more, be around him more, but I could at least relay to him that your father loved you very, very much. He came and visited me in Kenya, and in that time we continued talking.

Although I couldn't fill this hole that Barack had lived with all his life, I could reduce it because it was filled with family and stories that were not just made up. And I think that was something that he needed to have, and it helped in his development and what he was trying to do with his life.

JERRY KELLMAN:

We were taking a walk and he said, "I've decided to go to law school," and I said, "OK, that's reasonable. Why?" You know. And he talked about power, that he didn't see having the — getting enough power to change things through community organizing. And he wanted to have some kind of platform to be able to create greater change.

BARACK OBAMA:

I was 27 when I got to law school. It meant that I had gotten a lot of errant energy out of the way. I knew why I was there and what I wanted to get out of it.

KEN MACK:

When I first met him, he seemed he was a Black guy from Chicago with this African-sounding name, and I had no idea of his unusual background. He had a very, sort of, wise presence about him. He always had something that was a little different to say that seemed a bit more well thought out than the other students.

BARACK OBAMA:

I had learned, as an organizer, to be able to articulate a position and express myself, and I had great enthusiasm for the subject matter. I think when you're interested in something, you end up doing well. And I ended up elected as the first African American president of the Law Review at Harvard.

KEN MACK:

It was obvious from the beginning that Barack was gonna be a formidable candidate. He just impressed people around him. But when Barack was elected, I frankly was a bit surprised. Race was a huge issue in the Harvard Law Review, as it was everywhere else in this society. And everybody understood that this was going to be a huge symbol.

BARACK OBAMA:

I think it's a good sign. I think it's a sign of progress. Although, I'm honored and I think people can say that my election symbolizes some progress, at least within the small confines of the legal community. I think it's real important to keep the focus on the broader world out there and see that for a lot of kids, the doors that have been opened to me aren't open to them.