



OBAMA

IN PURSUIT OF A
MORE PERFECT UNION

LESSON ONE

MEET BARACK OBAMA

EARLY YEARS AND BURGEONING IDENTITY

OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will use excerpts from the film and the Interview Archive to explore how different aspects of Obama's life and identity shaped his worldview and his decision to embrace a life of public service and politics.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- > What influences shaped Obama's identity as a young person?
- > How does Obama's personal search for identity reflect every American's search for identity?
- > In what ways is your personal identity similar to Obama's, and in what ways is it different?



LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- > Understand Barack Obama's early years through archival film footage of friends and family and first person interviews collected in the making of the documentary
- > Discuss and analyze the multiple perspectives presented through these viewpoints
- > Apply this understanding by organizing their learning with a Venn diagram that will be used throughout the curriculum



MATERIALS

Listed in order as they appear in the lesson:

- > Equipment to screen film clips and interview threads curated for this lesson
- > Copies of Handouts:
 - > One: Full transcript of Film Clips
 - > Two: More Perfect Union Venn Diagram
 - > Three: Interview Threads Transcripts



Two
55-minute
class periods



U.S. Government, Civics, U.S. History



All Handouts can be copied as PDFs or uploaded to a shared online platform. Access to the internet via a smartphone or laptop computer is necessary for the completion of this lesson.

ACTIVITIES



“ I am the son of a Black man from Kenya and a White woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a White grandfather who survived the Depression to serve in Patton’s army during World War II, and a White grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas.... And for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible

— **BARACK OBAMA**



OPENING

As a class, come to a consensus on a working definition of the word “identity.” It may be useful to begin with this version from [Merriam-Webster](#):

- > the distinguishing character or personality of an individual
- > the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others



PAIR AND SHARE

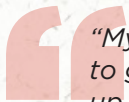
In pairs, have students write down the answers to the following questions and share with one another:

- > What influences shape a person’s identity?
- > How does your identity influence how you see the world and how you are seen?



READ ALOUD

Barack Obama in **Obama: In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union**¹:



“My parents met in Hawaii. My father was part of that first wave of young Africans to travel abroad to get an education. ... 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.” My mother had inculcated in me the sense that being African-American was a wonderful thing. You know, that it was special in some way. ...

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. ...

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 (at college), sort of rediscovering what was important to me -- --- and was active in a lot of campus activism.”



DISCUSS

- > What aspects of Obama’s identity does he refer to in this quote?
- > In what ways does his identity feel similar to yours? What about him is different from you?
- > What people, events, or concepts are the main influences of your own identity?

¹Interview excerpted from archival footage, television interview, July 25, 1999.

ANALYZING FILM AS TEXT

Let students know that you are going to watch clips from **Obama: In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union**.

Distribute **Handout One, Lesson One: Film Clip Transcripts**. Have students follow along with the transcript as they watch, underlining words, events, or place names that stand out as they learn more about Obama's identity.

FILM CLIPS

> **One: Early Childhood** (2:25)

This clip shares some of Obama's childhood in Hawaii and Indonesia.

> **Two: High School-College** (3:37)

In Clip Two, Obama and some of his friends recall his search for identity during high school and college.

After watching Clips One and Two, have students read out some of the terms from the transcripts that they believe point to influences on Barack Obama's identity.



DISCUSS

- > What people, places, and events influenced how he saw himself and the world as a young person?
- > How do you think these influences spurred him toward public service and politics?





Teacher Note: Before showing Clip Three, let students know that Obama graduated from Columbia University in New York and moved to Chicago to take a job as a community organizer, helping African American congregations advocate for better schools, neighborhoods, and economic opportunities. President Obama said of the time, “It was the best education of my life. It allowed me not only to learn some of the skills of organizing and politics, but, more importantly, it gave me a home. It sort of rooted me in a community of African Americans whose values and stories I soaked up.”

> **Three: Religious Life and Law School** (4:04)

Clip Three chronicles Obama’s decision to join the church, his desire to connect with his father’s side of the family, and his time in law school.

After watching Clip Three, have students read out some of the words and phrases they noted as they followed along on the transcripts that they believe influenced Obama’s identity.



DISCUSS

- > What stands out to you about Obama’s search for identity during his college career and his move to Chicago?
- > In what ways does the evolution of his identity during this period of his life differ from his childhood? How do you think identity changes over time?



Teacher Note: Let students know that after graduating with his law degree, Barack Obama returned to Chicago to practice civil rights law, and that’s when he married Michelle Robinson and later became a father to two daughters.

INTRODUCING THE MORE PERFECT UNION VENN DIAGRAM

Students will make notes on the diagram from the film clips, interview segments, and class exercises.

Print and distribute Handout Two, Lesson One: The More Perfect Union Venn Diagram

At this point in the lesson, students will start the exercise focusing on the “Obama” and “You” circles, and be able to say more about the “America” circle after they watch the interview segments in Step Four: A Close View —Interview Threads.

If helpful, use these specific prompts to get students started:

- > **Obama circle:** What have you learned about Obama’s view of his own identity?
- > **You circle:** What have you learned about yourself and your own identity?
- > **America circle:** What do you learn about American identity from the film clips and interview segments?
- > **Overlaps:** Add any additional ideas where these learnings overlap.



Teacher Note: Students will use this Venn diagram in each of the lessons as a visual organizer to note and keep track of which parts of the film and interviews are specific to Obama and his life, work, and presidency; which parts relate to each student; and which relate to America as a whole.

If students are unfamiliar with Venn diagrams, this definition from Merriam-Webster may be helpful: *A diagram that shows the relationship between groups of things by means of overlapping circles.*

A CLOSE VIEW— INTERVIEW THREADS

Three interview threads were created for this lesson to deepen students' understanding of how Obama's identity was formed and developed over time. Print and distribute **Handout Three, Lesson One: Interview Segments Transcripts**. As students watch the Interview Threads, have them follow along on the transcripts, underline details that catch their attention, and jot down questions and insights that come to mind.

Break students into groups to learn more about one of the following aspects of Obama's search for identity as a child and as a young adult. Have students appoint a recorder from each group, who will report back to the rest of the class about new, surprising, or interesting information they learned about Obama from the interview threads:

> Thread One: Family & Race

Anthony Peterson, Valerie Jarrett, and Ta-Nehisi Coates talk about the meaning of Obama's race and family as friends and outside observers.

> Thread Two: Political Awakening

David Maraniss, Loretta Augustine-Harris, and Laura Washington reflect on when and why Barack Obama decided to engage in politics.

> Thread Three: Faith

Reverend Alvin Love, Reverend Jeremiah Wright, and Michael Eric Dyson talk about Barack Obama's choices and identity with regard to the church.



Teacher Note: The filmmakers conducted over 40 interviews to produce **Obama: In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union**. The full interviews are available in the [Interview Archive](#) on the [Kunhardt Film Foundation website](#). A selection of these interviews, edited together here to create interview threads and aligned to the specific lesson topic, are available for your students' learning.



DISCUSS

Groups will discuss and report back to the class on:

- > How did hearing others' perspectives change or enhance what you saw in the clips where Obama tells his own story?
- > Did anything you saw in the clips change the notes you took on your Venn diagram?
- > What did you notice about the difference between how Obama talks about himself and how others talk about him?
- > How do you think these multiple perspectives might influence how he is seen when, later in life, he runs for political office?

CLOSING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using their notes and observations from their Venn diagrams, students discuss the following questions:

- How does Obama see himself, and how do friends, colleagues, and critics see him?
- How does a person's identity evolve through the course of their life?
- In what ways does learning about President Obama's identity influence how you think about your own identity?



HOMEWORK OR EXTENDED LEARNING

Students create a statement that expresses their own identity, similar to the Obama quote that opens this lesson.

Students present their statements to others in their lives who know them well — perhaps friends, family, teachers, or other adults — to get input on their own statements and stories.

Ask students to reflect on what they learned about themselves and their own identities through writing about themselves, and through the perspectives of others.

HANDOUT ONE, LESSON ONE

FILM CLIPS TRANSCRIPTS

CLIP ONE - EARLY CHILDHOOD

NEWS REPORTER:

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

NEWS REPORTER:

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.

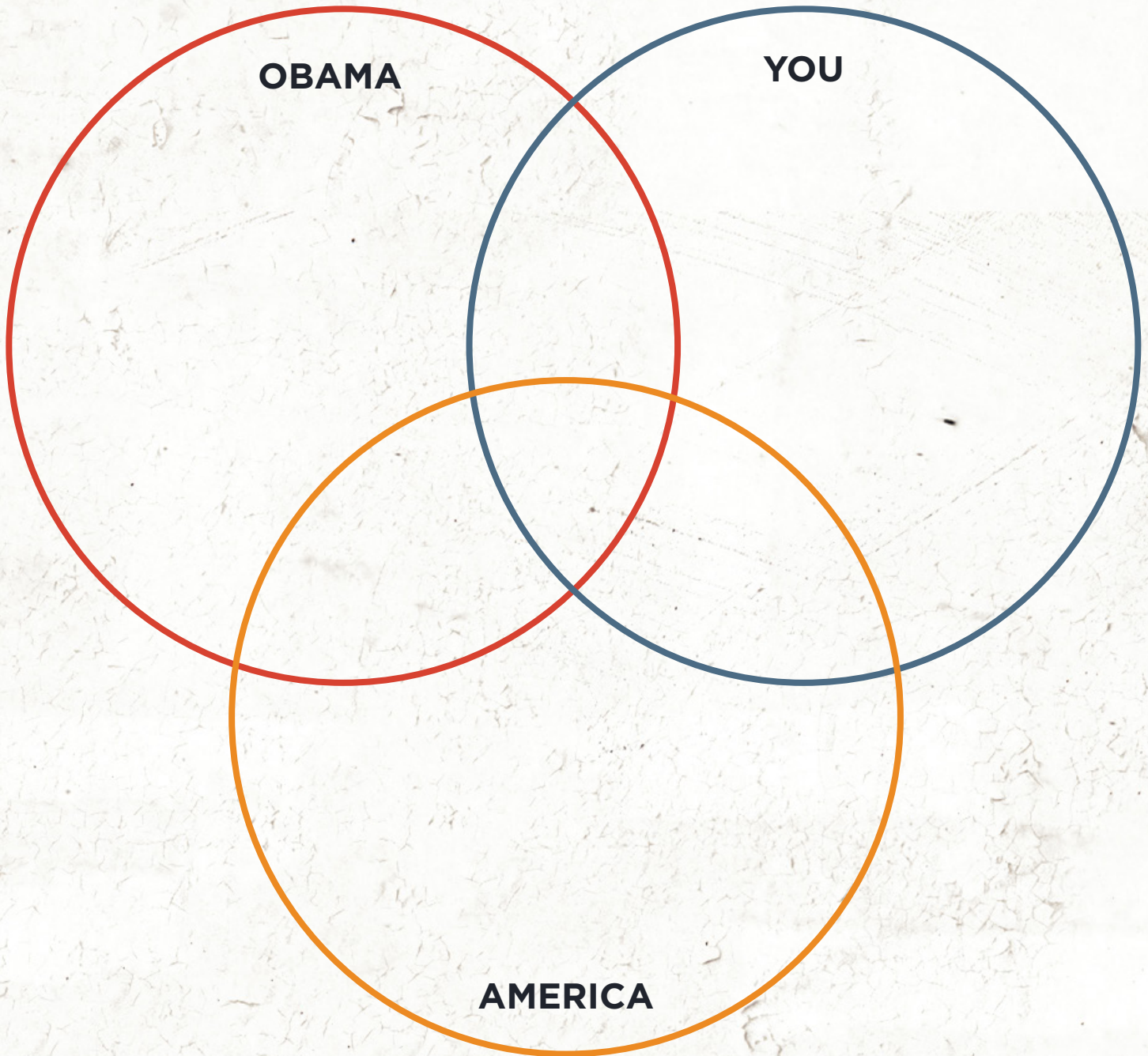
BARACK OBAMA:

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.

HANDOUT TWO, LESSON ONE

THE MORE PERFECT UNION VENN DIAGRAM

Directions: Use this Venn diagram to capture your ideas and analysis from this lesson.



Keep in mind:

- > How does this information relate to Obama's vision of a more perfect union?
- > How does it relate to your own vision of a more perfect union?

HANDOUT THREE, LESSON ONE

INTERVIEW THREADS TRANSCRIPTS

FAMILY & RACE

ANTHONY PETERSON

01:15:11:03 - 01:19:23:08

What I like to say is “race is not real, but race does matter.” And it’s not real because, biologically, it doesn’t add up to anything significant. There is more variation in what we call races than there is between what we call races.... When I think about Barry/Barack Obama, I think about how he had to, and part of this began before or at least in high school, he had to determine what it means to be a Black man in the United States. Because although he is only half Black, and in fact, that half of him that is Black didn’t come through that slave experience that many of us did. But what he had to deal with is that anyone who looks at him, anyone who interacts with him, anyone who connects with him, sees a Black man, or a Black boy and then a Black man. So, he has had to determine what does it mean to be a Black man, and I think there was some trial and error with him. I think playing a Black style of basketball was something he chose to do because he decided “I’m a Black guy, so I need to do this. But in Hawaii, because there were so few Black folks there and most of them were connected to the military and he wasn’t, I think that’s just the way he chose to go about it. He knows that people see him and see a Black boy, a Black man, but in Hawaii those ethnic issues are always out there. We don’t hide our ethnicity in the ways that some other folks do, so he just had to claim some things for himself.... I think when I talk about the confidence that I saw in 2004 at that Democratic Convention speech, I think that was a man who had claimed who he was for himself.

VALERIE JARRETT

1:04:46-1:07:09:18

I do remember the first time I read *Dreams from My Father*. I’ve now read it several times since and each time I see a different message and part of him that I didn’t necessarily focus on the first time. But I was struck by how candid he was about the painful parts of his childhood and coming of age and reckoning with being an African American from mixed parents. Grappling with the anger that comes when one is abandoned by one’s own father, particularly for

boys. I think that was a hard thing for him and he’s struggled. On the other hand, as he’s often said to me since, the people who loved him most in the world were White and so that allowed him this sense of belonging or expectation of being able to connect in the way that maybe some African Americans did not. But I do remember thinking what a candid, honest, portrayal of your evolution. Interestingly similar to his wife “becoming” in her story but from very different childhoods. Both raised though with very common values. And those values of hard work and excellence and resilience I think are part of what led him to be the extraordinary president and human being that he is today.

I think the fact that Michelle had come from two parents who loved each other dearly, a brother who was a buddy and partner and literally shared a bedroom for most of their childhood, extremely close, just not in proximity but in spirit, reminded Barack Obama of what he didn’t have. And I think he hungered for that and he used Michelle’s father as a role model. Someone who believed in hard work and family and sacrifice, who was present in the lives of his children, even though he obviously was in great pain quite often from MS and how he overcame that pain in order to be an integral part of his family life. He died not long after Barack came on the scene, I think the stories that both Michelle and her mom and Craig told him of their upbringing helped him understand the kind of father he wanted to be. He wanted to be the father he never had.

TA-NEHISI COATES

01:06:22:17-1:09:18:21

If you think about Black experiences and plural, I think there are two that predominate, and that is the experience of coming out of the South and dealing with the kind of direct and often brutally violent and in-your-face sort of racism. And then there’s the Black experience that is related to that. You know, most often for those of us who came or whose relatives came from the South, in the North, the grinding sort of poverty of the cities, the kind of racism that’s writ in the policies segregates us for instance, to public housing. Like my mom lived in public housing. That’s sort of like the story of my lineage. My dad from Philadelphia living in that sort of grinding poverty. And so those are I think

the two stories that we see in terms of most Black politicians, I would say for the most part. And then you have certain people who maybe who grew up because of class reasons maybe did not have to directly deal with that even though in those cases, they aren't really that far from it. I mean, Barack Obama was from Hawaii. And that's not to say that Hawaii is a racial utopia, you know, a non-racist utopia. That's not what I'm saying. But the very geography is different. Black people are not just a minority; they are a significant minority there.

The entire notions and assumptions that you see on the mainland, while they may be diffused and it may be some of that there, it's just not — it's not as prevalent, it's not the same sort of thing. So the first thing was to be there. And here's another level of it, 'cause that's not enough. You know what I mean. Like, you could be there and you could have White parents or White grandparents or whatever who don't actually love you and communicate their racism to you and so while he does describe certain instances where it was there for his grandparents, it's really no doubt that they loved him and accepted him.

And then the third level was his mom who was White was very clear that you are Black, you know what I mean, like, there's — so he never had the — I think in addition to that, he never had in a major way like any sort of schizophrenia about what he was because his mom was really, really clear with him about that and bought him books and took him to see things. So even if it was not communicated to him in a way that it was to say, me and most Black people, it's just in the air, it's what you are, you know what I mean, there's no intellectual — it was there for him. And I think that is highly, highly unusual. There are very, very few — there are a lot of Black people throughout history who are biracial, who had White parents. That's not particularly uncommon. I think that gets overrated when people talk about his experience. You know, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, we have a long history of Black people who have White parents. That's not really what it is. It's that plus those other things that make it just fundamentally different.

POLITICAL AWAKENING

DAVID MARANISS

01:39:05:19 - 1:41:03:02

Chicago is the — in many ways the end of the arc of Obama's search for self-identity. He arrived in Chicago just coincidentally within the same period as Michael Jordan got to Chicago and became the most famous athlete in the world, Oprah Winfrey arrived in Chicago

and became the most famous celebrity in the world in some ways. And Barack Obama who was anonymous also got there in the early 80's — you know, mid 80's. But when he got there, he went to the South Side of Chicago and was for the first time feeling himself in the embrace of a real Black community. That was essential to his whole search. Finally, it was there. He worked as an organizer with poor people on the deep South Side of Chicago. He got to know the ministers, the reverends of that part of Chicago and really the Obama that you — you hear today, the cadences he learned. He didn't have those cadences. He learned them on the South Side of Chicago. You know, he has two speeches. One is sort of a professorial academic constitutional lawyer speech, and the other is an emotional speech. And that's what he learned in Chicago from Black Chicago, from the reverends there. There were all of these women, older women that he worked with who embraced him much like the secretaries did in New York and he felt that warmth and really for the first time really felt fully part of the African American community in the United States. And that's what Chicago gave him, is that sense at last of home.

LORETTA AUGUSTINE-HERRON

01:43:04:00-1:45:48:02

I always thought he was going to be president. It's easy to say because people say, "Hindsight is 20/20." But even when we had our meetings, and our strategy plannings, and our training... I was telling Yvonne. He was training us one day, and I said, "You know, he is going to be our first Black president." And she said, "You think so?" I said, "Oh yeah." It was something about him that I really always believed that. We've come a long way. You look at the way a person responds, what they do, how they do it. And so you know that they're going to keep climbing up that ladder, but he still had the personality and the knowledge to be president. And people seem to always — people like Barack. I didn't know exactly what his plans were, but I knew that he was learning the system and he never said, "Well, I need to do this," or "I need to do that." But he kept meeting people and understanding how everything fit together. And the other thing that I looked at though, every time we had a project or a program we wanted, we had to sit down with a politician and play Captain May I? You know, we wanted to do the Employment and Training Center. We sat down with representatives of the city. We met with the mayor. We met with people who were over at the Employment and Training Department for the city, but it was always a matter of taking our ideas to someone in politics, and trying to get approved. What

I saw was though, because we always were playing this game of Captain May I?, because we weren't actually sitting at that table where the power was, and for him I think at some point he realized that he needed to be at the table. And I think that's when he had his political aspirations. I think that's where it came from, and I guess once he got there, and it's nothing like timing also and I think the time was right for him to take that step into politics.

LAURA WASHINGTON

1:17:34-21-1:19:30:07

Project Vote (in Chicago) was a voter registration drive that Barack Obama was hired to run. He — he came in, I think, after he had been at Harvard. And brilliantly got to know the city, got to understand the politics of the city, and got to figure out — and he's, and he's brilliant at understanding the politics of the city and the strategy that he needed to do to get folks registered. And raise the bar and the energy around Black political empowerment in a way that we hadn't seen since Harold Washington.

The man was brilliant at strategically thinking about all the things he had to do, all the steps he had to take to get to that grand prize in the White House. He knew he had to not only understand community organizing, but political organizing. He understood he had to start to develop relationships. He understood he had to start to build the chits that he would need. The things that he would go back to people and ask for in return. And so, the voter registration drive was just one example of that. It gave him a chance to get to know the power players. He got a chance for him to develop relationships. To develop the chits he would need to become an elected official.

I remember asking him how high did he want to go? And his answer, like any good politician was, "I just want to serve the people. I just want to do what's best for the people." He was extremely ambitious. Nobody writes a book about their life when they're 30 years old. Nobody comes from Harvard and Columbia and comes to the South Side of Chicago to do some organizing for some little community group you never heard from. Unless he's got a plan. Nobody runs for Congress when he's as young as he did, unless you have a plan. So, I think — I think he knew he wanted to get as high as he could. President, I don't think anybody thought that was coming. And certainly not at the time that I first met him.

FAITH

REVEREND ALVIN LOVE

1:08:11-07-1:10:31:23

We often talked about his need for a personal relationship with the Lord and to find his space, the place where he could be most comfortable. One of the things that I — that I encouraged him to do was to try to find a church that was outside of the organizing project. You know, I'm — it could've been — I really think back now, it could've been real easy for me to draw him to my church and you know, that would've been it, but I always encouraged him to try to do it outside of this. Because if you join one of the churches inside, then it might set up kind of a competition with other groups and they're wondering why didn't you join us? And if you didn't join me, then I don't want a part of it and I encouraged him to go to a church of a pastor that I was familiar with, a Reverend L. K. Curry, who has been the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church and he went there to meet with him and I don't think Reverend Curry trusted him too much and so it was Reverend Curry that sent him to Trinity and he began his relationship over there with Trinity. But we always talked about the need for him to be spiritually grounded if he was going to do this kind of work in the church and then even if he wasn't, he needed to be spiritually grounded and he needed to make that decision for himself and by himself. Once he made his decision to join the church, you could see a marked difference in his groundedness. Prior to that, Barack was searching for himself; both himself in the African American community but also in the faith community and I think when he became a part of the church, that search was over and he — you know, he delved into really building on that relationship and making that structure, that foundation strong in his life. I think it had real value and real meaning to him.

JEREMIAH WRIGHT

1:14:24-01-1:18:22:08

His experience of the Black church was zero. So we began talking about that. As we talked more about the church, in one of the conversations, I mentioned that at the end of my studies at Chicago, I had studied under Fazlur Rahman. He said, "The Muslim?" I said, "Yeah. I was doing Islam in West Africa under him." And we began talking about it 'cause that's when I found out he had family members who were Muslim and we began talking about the similarities and differences. I found him to be a very intelligent young man and our conversations increased in terms of his just stopping by to talk about issues. Not necessarily what's going

on in Chicago and how we can unify but picking up on our conversations about “the news media says there’s a fight between Christians and Muslims. I’ve got family members who are Christian and Muslim in the same family.” And yeah, I remember that because when he said he was interested in public office, I never met any politician prior to him who was interested in those kinds of things. So it stands out vividly.

He wanted to make an intelligent decision about his faith. I think the rest of his life in terms of his identity, he had a pretty good grasp on, it was just uncertainty. And I would say I was able to help him work through some of his questions, some of his doubts to the point of his being certain when he walked the aisle to join the church; it was not that all doubts are settled, but God accepts you with your doubts. I read that in the passage of scripture where the father says, “I believe but I got some unbeliefs,” just some stuff I don’t understand, that that’s normal and that an unexamined faith is not a faith worth having, so yeah, I would concur that I was able to help him accept Christianity with doubts. Not every doubt was settled, not every question was answered, but he didn’t feel like he was out of place. I said, “Welcome to the Club.”

I think that President Obama’s joining Trinity before he was a senator, before he was a candidate for the presidency gave him visibility among a large — very large number of persons in the Black community and when he — not just at Trinity but when he would go to different places and say he was a member of Trinity, that bought him — bah?— I had people who couldn’t even pronounce his name asking me who he was when he started running. I said, “He’s a regular guy, he’s a church member.” “For real?” I said, “Yeah.” “With a name like that?” I said, “Yeah, with a name like that.” I know several commentators that since the election have said he joined for that reason. I don’t know that that’s true, I know it gave him creds, yeah. He joined the legal counseling ministry with a legal background where we ask all new members to pick a ministry and become active in that, particularly with a church our size. So he’s just not coming in on Sunday anonymously, leaving on Sunday anonymously but have your life interwoven with the lives of other persons whether in your profession or not.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON

01:17:19:16 - 01:19:50:11

There is no doubt that Jeremiah Wright helped to establish the religious authenticity of his parishioner Barack Obama because, remember, Obama doesn’t grow out of a Black religious tradition. There might be some great baptist churches in Hawaii, but not many African American religious acolytes congregate there en masse. So, when he came to Chicago, he got a real dose of that Black tradition of preaching and singing and the kind of ecstatic orality and the kind of combusive and vehemently visceral engagement with the truth. The body invested, the lungs invested, the soul invested, the emotions stimulated. He got a sense of that when he came to Chicago, and Obama was quite practical about the choice of a church, right, which is the one that gives me the greatest entrée into these communities as a community organizer and also as a Black man interested in kind of reconnecting with some of his Black roots and then stimulating them in many ways. And Trinity United Church of Christ was an ideal bed for such activities in a tremendous womb with an incredibly elastic heart and soul that gave him and afforded him the opportunity to engage, great choir, great preaching, upwardly mobile Black communities that are still committed to struggling and working-class Black people. It was an ideal place, and it gave him an authentic dose of that experience and inculcated him and included him in a very serious way that allowed him to feel it as an organic part of his growth and evolution and development. It gave him a sense of identity and a kind of at-homeness with the Black experiences that, in one way, had been foreign to him because he hadn’t been raised in and reared in the kind of rich tapestry of Black identity that you find in a Black church.