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Is Barack Obama A Racist?

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By [Timothy D. Naegele](#)^[1]

As the first year since Barack Obama's election as president passes into history, it is worthwhile to read (or reread) and reflect on his "Dreams from My Father," which was first published in 1995, when he was 33 years old. In his preface to the 2004 edition—only a scant five years ago, when the book was republished—he does not disavow or even soften his often-harsh sentiments at all. However, he does mention that his mother died of cancer right after the book was first published; and in retrospect, he might not have written the same book about an "absent parent," his father, but instead might have celebrated her life.^[2] He loved her, and writes: "[S]he was the kindest, most generous spirit I have ever known, and . . . what is best in me I owe to her."^[3]

The book is still relevant and instructive today because it provides a window into his core beliefs—unfiltered by aides or the pandering to voters that so often takes place when a politician is running for public office. These core beliefs came into being many years before we heard his name or knew how to pronounce it; and they are being reflected in his actions and policies that affect each of us. Also, the book warrants a careful reexamination at this juncture in his presidency, when a growing number of Americans are having second thoughts or "buyers' remorse" about the man in the White House.

Barack Obama is not his Kenyan father, nor his mother. Perhaps he comes closest to being his maternal grandparents, "Toot" and "Gramps." They loved him dearly and nourished him when he was growing up as a "half-breed"—his term, not mine^[4]—caught between two cultures, one white and the other non-white. He writes lovingly about his grandparents: "They had sacrificed again and again for me. They had poured all their lingering hopes into my success. Never had they given me reason to doubt their love; I doubted if they ever would."^[5] Later, he would write: "I looked out the window, thinking about my mother, Toot, and Gramps, and how grateful I was to them—for who they were. . . ."^[6]

Because of his looks and not his parentage or lineage, he made a conscious decision to be black. Once he made it, he

seemed to put the white world behind him and to identify with the “victimization” of blacks. For example, he writes: “[T]o admit our doubt and confusion to whites, to open up our psyches to general examination by those who had caused so much of the damage in the first place, seemed ludicrous, itself an expression of self-hatred—for there seemed no reason to expect that whites would look at our private struggles as a mirror into their own souls, rather than yet more evidence of black pathology.”^[7] In these and other similar statements, he evidenced how far he had traveled from the white world of his mother and her parents who raised him.

The transformation seems to have started when young “Barry” Obama returned to Hawaii from Indonesia, where he had been living with his mother and her second husband, to live with her parents and enroll at Honolulu’s elite, ethnically and culturally diverse Punahou School—where his sense that he “didn’t belong continued to grow.”^[8] He began hanging around and identifying with the few black Punahou students and other black teenagers “whose confusion and anger would help shape [his] own.”^[9] He writes about loneliness that made him want to run “back into the sort of pain a boy could understand,”^[10] and he speaks about “the sense of abandonment [he’d] felt as a boy.”^[11] Also, he writes that he was “trying to raise [himself] to be a black man in America,”^[12] and “living out a caricature of black male adolescence, itself a caricature of swaggering American manhood.”^[13]

It was during this time that he developed a “ledger of slights.”^[14] He adds: “I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the two worlds would eventually cohere.”^[15] Still at Punahou, he would recall: “[T]he only thing you could choose as your own was withdrawal into a smaller and smaller coil of rage, until being black meant only the knowledge of your own powerlessness, of your own defeat. And the final irony: Should you refuse this defeat and lash out at your captors, they would have a name for that, too, a name that could cage you just as good. Paranoid. Militant. Violent. Nigger.”^[16]

One wonders whether on some level Obama thought in those terms about the whites who made his future successes possible? If not, why was he choosing to identify so much with the “victimization” of blacks and with anti-white feelings? Is that the anger he “inherited” from his Kenyan father with multiple wives, who was a stern disciplinarian and loved him so much that the father spent only one month of his life with young Barry when he was 10 years old^[17], and effectively abandoned him the rest of the time? In his own words, he reflects on his feelings as that 10-year-old when his father visited Hawaii: “I began to count the days until my father would leave and things would return to normal.”^[18] Also, he acknowledges his anger.^[19]

Later, in Kenya, he realizes what his life might have been like when he views a photo album of his father’s third wife and their family. “They were happy scenes, all of them, and all strangely familiar, as if I were glimpsing some alternative universe that had played itself out behind my back. . . . Here it was, I thought, what might have been. And the recognition of how wrong it had all turned out . . . made me so sad that after only a few minutes I had to look away.”^[20] However, he expresses great love for his father too, and places him on a pedestal at times^[21]—and there is mention of the fact that his father was highly educated, generous and never held a grudge.^[22] There is no claim or insinuation that his father was a racist; and his mother certainly was not a racist.^[23]

At Occidental College in Los Angeles, Obama hung out with blacks too^[24], but seemed to mellow somewhat. He writes: “I had stumbled upon one of the well-kept secrets about black people: that most of us weren’t interested in revolt; that most of us were tired of thinking about race all the time. . . .”^[25] In writing about a young multiracial student named Joyce, he quotes her as saying: “It’s not white people who are making me choose. Maybe it used to be that way, but now they’re willing to treat me like a person. No—it’s *black people* who always have to make everything racial. *They’re* the ones making me choose.”^[26] Yet, Obama rejects her beliefs, and allies himself with others who are “alienated.”^[27] He seems to mellow somewhat again by admitting: “My identity might begin with the fact of my race, but it didn’t, couldn’t, end there.”^[28]

When he arrived in New York City to attend Columbia University, he became “Barack” as opposed to “Barry,”^[29] and he asked rhetorically: “Where do I belong?”^[30] Also, he asked: “Did any of us [know where we belonged]? Where were the fathers, the uncles and grandfathers, who could help explain this gash in our hearts?”^[31] Leaving a theater in New York with his mother and half-sister Maya, he observed: “The emotions between the races could never be pure. . . . Whether we sought out our demons or salvation, the other race would always remain just that: menacing, alien, and apart.”^[32] Later, in writing about his times in Chicago and the stories he had heard from the black

leadership, Obama says: “They had arisen out of a very particular experience with hate. That hate hadn’t gone away; it formed a counternarrative buried deep within each person and at the center of which stood white people—some cruel, some ignorant, sometimes a single face, sometimes just a faceless image of a system claiming power over our lives.”[\[33\]](#)

Yet, as he was about to embark on his life in Chicago (before attending law school), he reflected: “[T]his community I imagined was still in the making, built on the promise that the larger American community, black, white, and brown, could somehow redefine itself—I believed that it might, over time, admit the uniqueness of my own life.”[\[34\]](#) And it has, as our first non-white American president. While commenting on his work in Chicago, however, he concludes: “If [black] nationalism could create a strong and effective insularity, deliver on its promise of self-respect, then the hurt it might cause well-meaning whites, or the inner turmoil it caused people like me, would be of little consequence.”[\[35\]](#) In discussing the difficulties facing black businesses, he mentions “the leg up that your [white] competitors possessed after having kept you out of the game for over three hundred years”[\[36\]](#)—again, the issue of black victimization.

What is perhaps most striking is that he never expounds on any religious beliefs or spirituality, much less a belief in God. However, the book spans so much of his life—and his formative years—and deals with almost every other subject imaginable that one could think or write about. Perhaps the closest he comes to dealing with the subject may be reflected in the following comments: “I remained a reluctant skeptic, doubtful of my own motives, wary of expedient conversion, having too many quarrels with God to accept a salvation too easily won.”[\[37\]](#) Also, when he and his Kenyan half-sister Auma are on a safari, he listens to their Kikuyu driver sing a hymn at night while Obama is walking back to his tent, and he writes: “I felt I understood Francis’s plaintive song, imagining it transmitting upward, through the clear black night, directly to God.”[\[38\]](#) One is left to wonder about his beliefs, and whether his attendance at churches in subsequent years may be for political reasons, and calculated, which is true of many politicians.

Other issues raised in the book include:

- What would have become of Obama’s life if he had gotten hooked on the illegal drugs he was taking? For example, he writes: “Junkie. Pothead. That’s where I’d been headed: the final, fatal role of the young would-be black man.”[\[39\]](#)
- To what extent has he been successful at anything other than writing, speaking, campaigning, politics and getting elected—being a professional politician? For example, the book evidences few significant accomplishments as a “community organizer.” Indeed, he writes: “When classmates in college asked me just what it was that a community organizer did, I couldn’t answer them directly. Instead, I’d pronounce on the need for change. Change in the White House, where Reagan and his minions were carrying on their dirty deeds. Change in the Congress, compliant and corrupt.”[\[40\]](#) Also, he accomplished nothing memorable in the U.S. Senate during the short time he was actually there.
- How his socialist and anti-capitalist views are reshaping America, and the damage that may result? His biases are reflected in the book. For example, in New York City before he moved to Chicago for the first time, he went to work as a research assistant at a consulting house to multinational corporations, where he recalled feeling like “a spy behind enemy lines.”[\[41\]](#) That spy effectively “owns” General Motors, Chrysler and major American banks and other business entities; and he has not hesitated to dictate to them—including that GM’s CEO be removed and what cars the company is to make in the future. History is replete with the names of other world leaders who have tried to run areas of economic and societal activity, without having any knowledge[\[42\]](#), and they have failed.
- How to address the sense of black victimization that is reflected in so much of his book? For example, by way of contrasting the attitudes of various American minority groups including Asians, he cites a black man who says: “I guess we worked so long for nothing, we feel like we shouldn’t have to break our backs just to survive. That’s what we tell our children anyway.”[\[43\]](#)
- Whom will Obama blame if his popularity fades (e.g., because of perceived narcissistic arrogance and incompetence) and his presidency fails? Since he and his party control the White House and Congress, the

buck stops with him; and sooner or later, he may come to be viewed by a majority of Americans as the problem, not the solution. Will he handle his descent from “Mount Olympus” gracefully, or will his fall from grace be a tumultuous one?

- What scandals will unfold involving his life and administration, such as the federal funding of organizations like ACORN that have engaged in massive voter fraud or other criminal activities? Ultimately, will Obama be ensnared in a web, politically and legally—a victim of the very need for change that he has preached for so many years? He writes: “*Real* change [is] . . . an extension of my personal will and my mother’s faith. . . .”[\[44\]](#)
- Former Senator Edward W. Brooke, the first black U.S. Senator since Reconstruction, was a trailblazer too; however, he did not try to change America because of any deep-seated hatred of whites or our capitalist system. After reading “*Dreams from My Father*,” most Americans will have few if any doubts why Obama associated with and befriended Weather Underground co-founder Bill Ayers and Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. Their radical views seem consistent with his.
- The messianic adoration of Obama is reminiscent of John F. Kennedy, his presidency and sycophants. What will we learn about Barack Obama in the future? If he has feet of clay too[\[45\]](#), how will that factor alone manifest itself and affect America and its role in the world, and the fates and fortunes of individual Americans? Also, will our adversaries (e.g., North Korea, Al Qaeda, Iran, Russia, China) determine he is weak and naïve, and hurt our great nation deeply, capitalizing on that naïveté?

Because Obama does not appear to be religious, one wonders whether he has the courage, depth and capacity to provide the moral authority and spiritual vision and leadership to guide America and its culturally rich and diverse people through truly perilous times? Jimmy Carter was a man of God, yet he failed. Carter did not have feet of clay though. If Obama’s goal is to grow government, his naïveté knows no bounds. Having worked in and with the federal government for 21 years nonstop, I believe the only agency of government that is remotely efficient and effective is the Pentagon and our military, which have been performing magnificently.

In writing about a young black organizer named Rafiq aka Wally Thompson, Obama says: “[H]e was less interested in changing the rules of power than in the color of those who had it and who therefore enjoyed its spoils.”[\[46\]](#) Is that what Obama is all about too? Before he left Chicago for Kenya, he observed: “[N]otions of purity—of race or of culture—could no more serve as the basis for the typical black American’s self-esteem than it could for mine.”[\[47\]](#) That seems to have been an awakening for him. Also, he came face to face with the realities of his father as a man: “It was into my father’s image, the black man, son of Africa, that I’d packed all the attributes I sought in myself. . . . Now, . . . that image had suddenly vanished. Replaced by . . . what? A bitter drunk? An abusive husband? A defeated, lonely bureaucrat? To think that all my life I had been wrestling with nothing more than a ghost! . . . Whatever I do, it seems, I won’t do much worse than he did.”[\[48\]](#)

En route to Kenya, he referred to himself as “a Westerner not entirely at home in the West, an African on his way to a land full of strangers.”[\[49\]](#) He grew up in Hawaii, Indonesia and then Hawaii again, which are hardly the “heartland” of America, so his experiences were different than those of most Americans. It is arguable that he had not assimilated fully into the American “culture,” and that his father’s absence from his life—as well as his mother’s absences—contributed to his sense of abandonment and anger. In trying to find his “identity,” he had immersed himself in the writings of people who were “alienated” as well, and he embraced those lessons. He adds: “Stripped of . . . the racial obsessions to which I’d become so accustomed and which I had taken (perversely) as a sign of my own maturation[,] I had been forced to look inside myself and had found only a great emptiness there. . . . What if . . . [my father’s] leaving me behind meant nothing, and the only tie that bound me to him, or to Africa, was a name, a blood type, or white people’s scorn?”[\[50\]](#)

In Kenya, his alienation is reflected once again when he characterizes other tourists as expressing “a confidence reserved for those born into imperial cultures.”[\[51\]](#) Also, throughout the book, he expresses his intense dislike for “colonialism,” which is perhaps summarized by his thoughts as he rides a train and imagines how a British officer might have felt on its maiden voyage: “Would he have felt a sense of triumph, a confidence that the guiding light of Western civilization had finally penetrated the African darkness? Or did he feel a sense of foreboding, a sudden realization that the entire enterprise was an act of folly, that this land and its people would outlast imperial

dreams?”^[52] Yet, he tells his Kenyan aunts: “We’re all part of one tribe. The black tribe. The human tribe.”^[53]

In terms of his presidency, his comments about the late black Chicago Mayor Harold Washington’s last campaign are interesting and instructive: “The business community sent him their checks, resigned to his presence. So secure was his power that rumblings of discontent had finally surfaced within his own base, among black nationalists upset with his willingness to cut whites and Hispanics into the action, among activists disappointed with his failure to tackle poverty head-on, and among people who preferred the dream to the reality, impotence to compromise.”^[54] Will Obama’s presidency and legacy follow a similar pattern: doing enough to mollify his base, while reaching out to others in an effort to broaden that base and seek his reelection and the election of a Democrat majority in Congress during the years ahead?

Early in the book, he is careful to point out: “I wouldn’t do anything stupid. It was usually an effective tactic, another one of those tricks I had learned: People were satisfied so long as you were courteous and smiled and made no sudden moves.”^[55] Perhaps those words encapsulate his political life, his campaign for the presidency, and how he is governing and hopes to survive the global economic meltdown, national security challenges and growing constituent anger, while trying to change the essence of America.

In the final analysis, will he be viewed as a fad and a feckless naïf, and a tragic Shakespearean figure who is forgotten and consigned to the dustheap of history? Will his naïveté have been matched by his overarching narcissism, and will he be considered more starry-eyed and “dangerous” than Jimmy Carter? Will his presidency be considered a sad watershed in history? Or will he succeed and prove his detractors wrong, and be viewed as the “anointed one” and a true political “messiah”? Even Abraham Lincoln was never accorded such accolades, much less during his lifetime. And Barack Obama’s core beliefs are light years away from those of Ronald Reagan.

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^[1] Mr. Naegele was counsel to the U.S. Senate Banking Committee; and chief of staff to Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and former U.S. Senator Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass), the first black senator since Reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War. He practices law in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles with his firm, Timothy D. Naegele & Associates (www.naegele.com). He has an undergraduate degree in economics from UCLA, as well as two law degrees from the School of Law (Boalt Hall), University of California, Berkeley, and from Georgetown University. He is a member of the District of Columbia and California bars. He served as a Captain in the U.S. Army, assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency at the Pentagon, where he received the Joint Service Commendation Medal. Mr. Naegele is an Independent politically; and he is listed in *Who’s Who in America*, *Who’s Who in American Law*, and *Who’s Who in Finance and Business*. He has written extensively over the years. See, e.g., www.naegele.com/whats_new.html#articles

^[2] Obama, “Dreams from My Father” (paperback “Revised Edition,” published by Three Rivers Press, 2004), pp. *xi-xii*.

^[3] *Id.* at *xii*.

^[4] *Id.* at 100.

^[5] *Id.* at 89.

^[6] *Id.* at 343.

^[7] *Id.* at 193.

^[8] *Id.* at 59-60.

^[9] *Id.* at 80.

^[10] *Id.* at 341.

[11] *Id.* at 430.

[12] *Id.* at 76.

[13] *Id.* at 79.

[14] *Id.* at 80.

[15] *Id.* at 82.

[16] *Id.* at 85.

[17] *Id.* at 125, 342.

[18] *Id.* at 68.

[19] *Id.* at 115, 270.

[20] *Id.* at 342-343.

[21] *Id.* at 129, 220.

[22] *Id.* at 220, 336-337.

[23] *Id.* at 127.

[24] *Id.* at 98.

[25] *Id.* at 98.

[26] *Id.* at 99 (emphasis in original).

[27] *Id.* at 101.

[28] *Id.* at 111.

[29] *Id.* at 118.

[30] *Id.* at 115; *see also* p. 199.

[31] *Id.* at 118.

[32] *Id.* at 124.

[33] *Id.* at 195.

[34] *Id.* at 135.

[35] *Id.* at 200.

[36] *Id.* at 201.

[37] *Id.* at 286-287; *see also* p. 295.

[38] *Id.* at 358.

[39] *Id.* at 93; *see also* pp. 120, 270.

[40] *Id.* at 133.

[41] *Id.* at 135.

[42] For example, Adolf Hitler tried to run his country's military and other activities; and ultimately, he destroyed everything within his control—including Germany, at least a generation of Germans, and millions of innocent people.

[43] *Id.* at 182.

[44] *Id.* at 229.

[45] *See, e.g.*, Thomas C. Reeves' "A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy," and Seymour M. Hersh's "The Dark Side of Camelot."

[46] *Id.* at 202.

[47] *Id.* at 204.

[48] *Id.* at 220-221.

[49] *Id.* at 301.

[50] *Id.* at 301-302.

[51] *Id.* at 312.

[52] *Id.* at 368.

[53] *Id.* at 348.

[54] *Id.* at 287.

[55] *Id.* at 94.

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