On July 27, 2004, Illinois State Senator Barack Obama delivered the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. He said, “Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely.” When he finished his speech, the audience that listened with rapt attention excitedly waved their arms, hats, and signs, thrilled with what they had just heard. Afterward, those watching on television said that they had stood and cheered, many admitting they danced. Some wondered what had just happened. For many Democrats, the speech was electrifying and inspiring; for them, it was a joyful time. And those from the other side of the political aisle who watched and listened had to agree: this fresh face, this politico, unknown to nearly everyone in the country outside of his home state of Illinois, had just delivered a remarkable speech. Many asked, who is this man and where did he come from? They asked why he was selected to deliver such an important speech at the Democratic National Convention at a time described by many as a very contentious time in U.S. politics. In the speech that evening—a speech that he wrote himself and delivered without the use of a teleprompter—Barack Obama introduced himself by first describing his father, born and raised in a small village in Kenya, and his paternal grandfather, a cook and domestic servant who, he said, had big dreams for his son. He told the immense crowd that his father, through hard work and perseverance, earned a scholarship to study in a magical place called America, which to his Kenyan countrymen was a place of freedom and opportunity. Barack told the excited crowd that July evening that his maternal grandfather worked on oil rigs and farms dur- ing the Depression and, just after Pearl Harbor, joined the army, and that his grandmother, while raising their baby, worked on a bomber assembly line during the war. He described how his grandparents moved west from Kansas, seeking opportunities, ultimately moving to Hawaii. They too, he said, had big dreams for their daughter. He said his parents met while studying at the University of Hawaii and that they shared not only an improbable love, but also an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. Barack said that this country’s pride is based on a simple premise, summed up in the Declaration of Independence, as “the true genius of America, a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles.” The speech that evening undeniably catapulted this state senator from Illinois onto the national political scene. If Americans hadn’t heard of him before, they certainly knew about him now. Barack Obama says that his story could take place only in America. He often adds that, like his parents and grandparents, anyone can achieve success through hard work and scholarship. His story is filled with good fortune, hard work, and a very good education. It is also a story of diversity of heritage that he is proud of—that is, after he came to understand and accept it. In the United States, many political leaders throughout history have come from powerful families. For Barack Obama, this is far from the truth. His upbringing was in humble circumstances, and, while he doesn’t fit any typical political mold, he is already considered by many to be one of the most dynamic figures in U.S. politics. His oratory skills, direct style, and ability to communicate are often compared with those of Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy. Barack Obama is truly a rising political star in the United States. With an African first name that means “blessed,” his name is often mispronounced and sometimes ridiculed. However seemingly blessed, he states that he is meant to serve and to lead, and perhaps someday be president of the United States.

In 1988, before moving to Boston to attend Harvard Law School, Barack made an important trip to Kenya. He felt he needed a break from his two and a half years as a community organizer in Chicago; and, as he later answered his half brother Bernard when asked why he had finally come home, he said that he wasn’t sure why, but something had told him it was time. What he found in Africa was more

than just a simple connection to family. Rather, it was a pilgrimage for this young man who grew up conflicted by his mixed race and by his father's absence that came so early in his life. Barack Obama After traveling through Europe for three weeks, intending to see places he'd always heard about but had never seen, he realized he'd made a mistake in touring there first. Europe wasn't a part of his heritage, and he felt he was living as if he were someone else, lending an incompleteness to his own history. He also thought spending time in Europe before his trip to Africa might be an attempt to delay coming to terms with his father. When Barack was two, his father returned to Africa, leaving him and his mother in Hawaii. He hadn't seen his father since he was 10 years old. With some relief at leaving Europe, and with more than a little nervousness at the prospect of facing a family history he knew very little about, he flew from London to Nairobi, Kenya. Landing at the Kenyatta International Airport, his sister and aunt warmly greeted him and welcomed him home. His Aunt Zeituni told his half sister Auma, "You take good care of Barry now. Make sure he doesn't get lost again." Barack was confused by this greeting, and Auma explained that this was a common expression referring to someone who hasn't been seen for a while or to someone who has left and not been seen again; they've been lost, she said, even if people know where they are.2 For Barack, known as Barry to his family and friends until later in his life, a pilgrimage had begun. While in Kenya, Barack met members of his African family. He met his half sisters, half brothers, aunts, and cousins; he learned about his father and grandfather and what it meant to be an Obama—as many throughout Kenya remembered Barack Sr. and Hussein Obama, Barack's grandfather. To know more about his grandfather Hussein, Barack and his aunts, sister, and brothers boarded a train to visit Granny, the third wife of Hussein Obama. The train, originally built by the British beginning in 1895, was part of a 600-mile rail line from the city of Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. This trip was an important part of Barack's pilgrimage in Africa, because it would take him to what is known as "Home Squared," the ancestral family home. Barack's half sister Auma and her brother Roy, Barack's half brother, had visited there many times. Auma told Barack that he would love Granny, adding that she had a wonderful sense of humor, something she said Granny needed after living with "The Terror," her name for their grandfather. She said they called their grandfather that because he was so mean. Roy added that their grandfather would make them sit at the table for dinner, serve the food on china, like an Englishman, and if someone said the wrong thing or used the wrong fork, he would hit them on the head with his stick. Barack's Aunt Zeituni assured Barack that she had many good memories about her father; he was strict, yes, but he was well respected. Family History Barack's grandfather's compound, in the village of Alego, was one of the largest in the area. He was known to be an excellent farmer, and it was said he could make anything grow. Aunt Zeituni said that Hussein Obama had worked for the British during World War II, serving a captain in the British army. After working as a cook for many years, he learned their farming techniques and applied them to his own land. Auma suggested that if there were difficulties within the Obama family, they all seemed to stem from Grandfather Hussein, saying he was the only person their father, Barack Sr., feared. To Barack, this seemed right somehow, and if he could learn more, fit the pieces of the story together, he thought everything might fall into place.3 Arriving at the village where Granny lived, Barack first met his father's two brothers, Yusuf and Sayid. Sayid, his father's youngest brother, said he had heard many great things about his nephew and warmly welcomed him. There, in a compound with a low, rectangular house with a corrugated-iron roof and concrete walls and bougainvillea with red, pink, and yellow flowers, a few chickens, and two cows beneath a mango tree, was what he came to know as "Home Squared." A large woman with a scarf on her head and wearing a flowered skirt came out of the main house. She had sparkling eyes and a face like his Uncle Sayid's. "Halo!" she said. Speaking in Luo,

her African language, she said she had dreamed about the day when she would finally meet the son of her son and that his coming had brought her great happiness. Welcoming him home, she gave Barack a hug and led him into the house, where there were pictures of Barack's father, his Harvard diploma, a picture of his grandfather, and a picture of another grandmother, Akuma, his father's mother. After enjoying tea, Barack visited two graves at the edge of a cornfield. One had a plaque for his grandfather; the other was covered with tiles, but there was no plaque. Roy, Barack's half brother, explained that for six years, there had been nothing to note who was buried there. For the rest of the day, Barack was immersed in the daily life of Granny's compound and the nearby village. Remembering each part of the day, he said, "It wasn't simply joy that I felt in each of these moments. Rather, it was a sense that everything I was doing, every touch and breath and word, carried the full weight of my life; that a circle was beginning to close, so that I might finally recognize myself as I was, here, now, in one place."4 It was in Granny's compound—where his grandfather had farmed and where members of his family still worked the land—where he heard the stories. One day, in the shade of a mango tree, Barack asked Granny to start at the beginning and tell him about his family. He said that, as Granny began to speak, he heard all his family's voices run together, the Barack Obama sounds of three generations were like a stream and his questions like rocks in the water.5 Granny told Barack that his great-great grandfather cleared his own land and became prosperous, with many cattle and goats. She said he had four wives and many children, one of which was Barack's grandfather. Although the children didn't attend school, they learned from their parents and elders of the tribe; the men learned how to herd and hunt, and the women learned how to farm and cook. The legend of his grandfather, Granny said, was that he was restless and would wander off for days; he was an herbalist, learning about plants that could cure and heal. When he was still a boy, white men came to the area for the first time, and Onyango was curious about them. He left the farm for a few months, and when he returned he was wearing clothes like the white men—pants, shirts, and shoes on his feet, which made his family suspicious of him. He was banished by his own father and soon left, returning to the town of Kisumu, where he had lived and worked for the white people who had settled there. He learned to read and write and learned about land titles and accounting. His skills made him valuable to the British. Because Africans in those days couldn't ride the train, he walked to Nairobi, a twoweek trip on foot, and began to work in a British household. He prospered in his job, which included preparing food and organizing the household. He became popular among his employers and was able to save his wages to buy land and cattle in Kendu, not far from Granny's land. On his land, Onyango built a hut, but it wasn't like the traditional huts nearby. Instead, it was kept spotlessly clean, and he insisted that people entering remove their shoes. As well, he ate his meals at a table, using a knife and fork. He insisted that the food he ate be washed, and he bathed and washed his clothes every night. He was very strict about his property, but if asked, he would gladly give someone food, clothing, or money. If someone took something without asking, however, he became very angry. His manners were considered strange by his neighbors. By this time, he hadn't married, and this too was unusual. At one point, he decided he needed to marry; however, because of his high housekeeping standards, no woman could maintain his home as he demanded. After several attempts at marriage, and after losing the precious dowries paid for women to be his wife, he found a woman who could live with him. After a few years, it was discovered that she could not bear children, and even though this was typically grounds for divorce among the Luo tribe, she was allowed to remain in the compound, living in a hut that was built for her. Barack's grandfather was still living and working in Nairobi at this time, but he often returned to Kendu to visit his land. He decided he needed a second wife and returned to Kendu to inquire about the women in the village. He chose a young girl

named Akumu, who was known for her great beauty. They had three children; the second child was Barack's father. Later, he married again; his third wife was Granny, who, at 16, married Onyango and lived in Nairobi with him. Akumu, living with her children in Kendu, was very unhappy, and her spirit, according to Granny, was rebellious. She found her husband too demanding. He was strict with the housekeeping and with child rearing. Life became easier for his second wife when, at the start of World War II, Onyango went overseas with the British captain, as his cook. He traveled with the British forces for three years and, upon his return, brought home a gramophone and a picture of a woman he said he had married in Burma. By the age of 50, Onyango decided to leave the employ of the British and moved to Alego, the land of his grandfather, leaving his farm in the village of Kendu. Because he had studied British techniques and learned modern farming while in Nairobi, he put these methods to work on land that was mostly African bush. In less than a year, Onyango had enough crops to market. His grandfather planted the trees that Barack saw on Granny's land. He built huts for his wives and children and built an oven for baking bread and cakes. He played music at night and provided beds and mosquito nets for the children. He taught his neighbors about farming and medicines and was well respected by them. When Barack Sr. was eight, his mother decided to leave her husband, leaving the children in Granny's care. She had tried to leave several times before, always returning to her family home; always Onyango had demanded that she return. This time, Onyango at first decided to let her go. However, because Granny had two children of her own, he went to Akumu's family and demanded that his second wife be returned to care for their children. This time, the family refused because they had already accepted a dowry from another man whom Akumu had married; the two had left for Tanganyika. There was nothing Onyango could do, and he told his third wife she was now the mother of all of his children. Sarah, Barack Sr.'s older sister, resented her father and remained loyal to her mother. Barack Sr. had a different view and told everyone Granny was his mother. Granny told Barack that his grandfather continued to be very strict with his children. He did not allow them to play outside the compound, mostly because he felt the other children were dirty and ill mannered. She added that when her husband was away, she would let them play as they wished, believing they needed to be children. By the time Barack Sr. was in his teens, life in Kenya was rapidly changing. Many Africans had fought in the war, and when they returned to their homeland, they were eager to use what they learned as fighters; Barack Obama they were no longer satisfied with white rule. Many young Africans were influenced by discussions about independence. Barack's grandfather was skeptical that talk about independence would lead to anything, and he thought Africans could never win against a white man's army. He told his son, "How can the African defeat the white man when he cannot even make his own bicycle?" He said that the African could never win against the white man because the black man wanted to work only with his own family or clan, while all white men worked to increase their power. He said that white men worked together and nation and business were important to them. He said that white men follow their leaders and do not question orders, but black men think they know what is better for them. That is why, he said, the black man will always lose.6 Despite these opinions, government authorities detained Onyango, declaring him a subversive and a supporter of those demanding independence. He was placed in a detention camp and was later found innocent. When he returned home, after being in the camp for six months, he was very thin and had difficulty walking. He was ashamed of his appearance and his diminished capacity, and, from that time on, he appeared to be an old man, far from the vital man he had been prior to the false accusation. Granny told Barack that what his grandfather respected was strength and discipline. And, despite learning many of the white man's ways, he remained strict about his Luo traditions, which included respect for elders and for authority and order and custom in all his

affairs. She thought that was why he had rejected the Christian religion, saying that, for a brief time, he had converted to Christianity and even changed his name to Johnson. He couldn't understand the ideas of mercy toward enemies, she said, and then had converted to Islam, thinking its practices conformed more closely to his beliefs.7 After several years, Barack Sr. moved away from his father's home to work in Mombassa. He later applied to universities in the United States. Onyango supported his son's desire to study abroad but had little money to support his efforts. Barack Sr. was accepted at the University of Hawaii, and, through a scholarship and monies he received from benefactors, the funds were raised for him to leave Africa. When he met Ann Dunham, Barack's mother, he proposed marriage. Onyango disapproved of the marriage, feeling his son was not acting responsibly. He wrote to Barack Sr., "How can you marry this white woman when you have responsibilities at home? Will this woman return with you and live as a Luo woman? . . . Let the girl's father come to my hut and discuss the situation properly. For this is the affairs of elders, not children." He also wrote to Barack's grandfather, Stanley Dunham, and said the same things.8 Onyango threatened to have Family History his son's visa revoked. Despite his father's opinions, the marriage took place. When Barack Sr. returned to Kenya without his wife and young son, Onyango wasn't surprised and knew his predictions had come true. When Onyango died, Barack Sr. returned to his father's home to make arrangements for his burial. At the end of Granny's story, told in the shade of the mango tree, Barack asked her if there was anything left of his grandfather's belongings. Sorting through the contents of an old trunk, he found a rust-colored book about the size of a passport. The cover of the small book said: Domestic Servant's Pocket Register, Issued under the Authority of the Registration of Domestic Servant's Ordinance, 1928, Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. Inside were his grandfather's left and right thumbprints. A preamble inside the book explained that the object of the book was to present a record of employment and to protect employers against the employment of those who were deemed unsuitable for work. The little book defined the term servant and stated that the book was to be carried by servants or they would be subject to fines or imprisonment if they were found without the document. Barack's grandfather's name, Hussein II Onyango, his ordinance number, race, place of residence, sex, age, height, and physical attributes were all listed. His employment history was listed as well as a review of his performance in each capacity. Along with the little book was a stack of application-for-admission letters from Barack's father, all addressed to universities in the United States. To Barack, this was his inheritance, the documents about his grandfather, some letters describing his father, and all the stories he heard on his pilgrimage to Kenya. Stanley Dunham, Known as Gramps, and Madelyn "Toots" Dunham—Barack Obama's Maternal Grandparents Barack Obama writes affectionately about his maternal grandparents throughout his book Dreams from My Father. From the time he was born until he left for college in California, Barack frequently lived with his mother's parents, and they had an immeasurable influence on him. Madelyn, or Toots, a derivation of Tutu, the Hawaiian name for grandparent, grew up in Kansas. Her heritage included Cherokee and Scottish and English ancestors who homesteaded on the Kansas prairie. Stanley also grew up in Kansas, in a town less than 20 miles from Madelyn. In his book, Barack writes that they recalled their childhoods in small-town Depression-era America, complete with Fourth of July parades, fireflies, dust storms, hailstorms, and classrooms filled with farm boys.9 They frequently spoke about Barack Obama respectability, saying that you didn't have to be rich to be respectable. Madelyn's family, he wrote, were hardworking, decent people. Her father had a job throughout the Depression. Her mother, a teacher prior to having a family, kept the home spotless and ordered books through the mail. Stanley's parents were Baptists, and his mother committed suicide when Stanley was eight years old. Known to be a bit wild in his youth, Stanley was thrown out of high school for punching

the principal in the nose. For the next three years, he did odd jobs and often rode the rail lines around the country. Winding up in Wichita, Kansas, he met Madelyn, after she moved there with her family. Her parents didn't approve of their courtship. Barack describes his grandfather in the days before World War II as cutting a dashing figure, wearing baggy pants and a starched undershirt and a brimmed hat cocked back on his head. He describes his grandmother as a smart-talking girl with too much red lipstick, dyed blond hair, and legs that could model hosiery for the department store.10 Madelyn and Stanley eloped just prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor. Stanley enlisted in the army and, while he was posted at an army base, Barack's mother Ann was born. Madelyn went to work on a bomber plane assembly line. After the war, the family moved to California, where Stanley enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, using the benefits of the GI bill. After a time, Stanley realized that being in a classroom wasn't right for him, and the family moved back to Kansas, then to Texas, and finally to Seattle, where Stanley worked as a furniture salesman and where Ann finished high school. Ann was offered early admission to the University of Chicago; however, Stanley forbade her to go, believing she was too young to live on her own. At about this same time, the manager of the furniture company mentioned that a new store was about to open in Honolulu, Hawaii. He said that the opportunities seemed endless there, because statehood was imminent. The Dunhams sold their home in Seattle and moved again. Stanley worked as a furniture salesman, and Madelyn began working as a secretary at a local bank. Eventually, she became the first woman vice president at the bank