

LEVELED Book • O

# Barack Obama



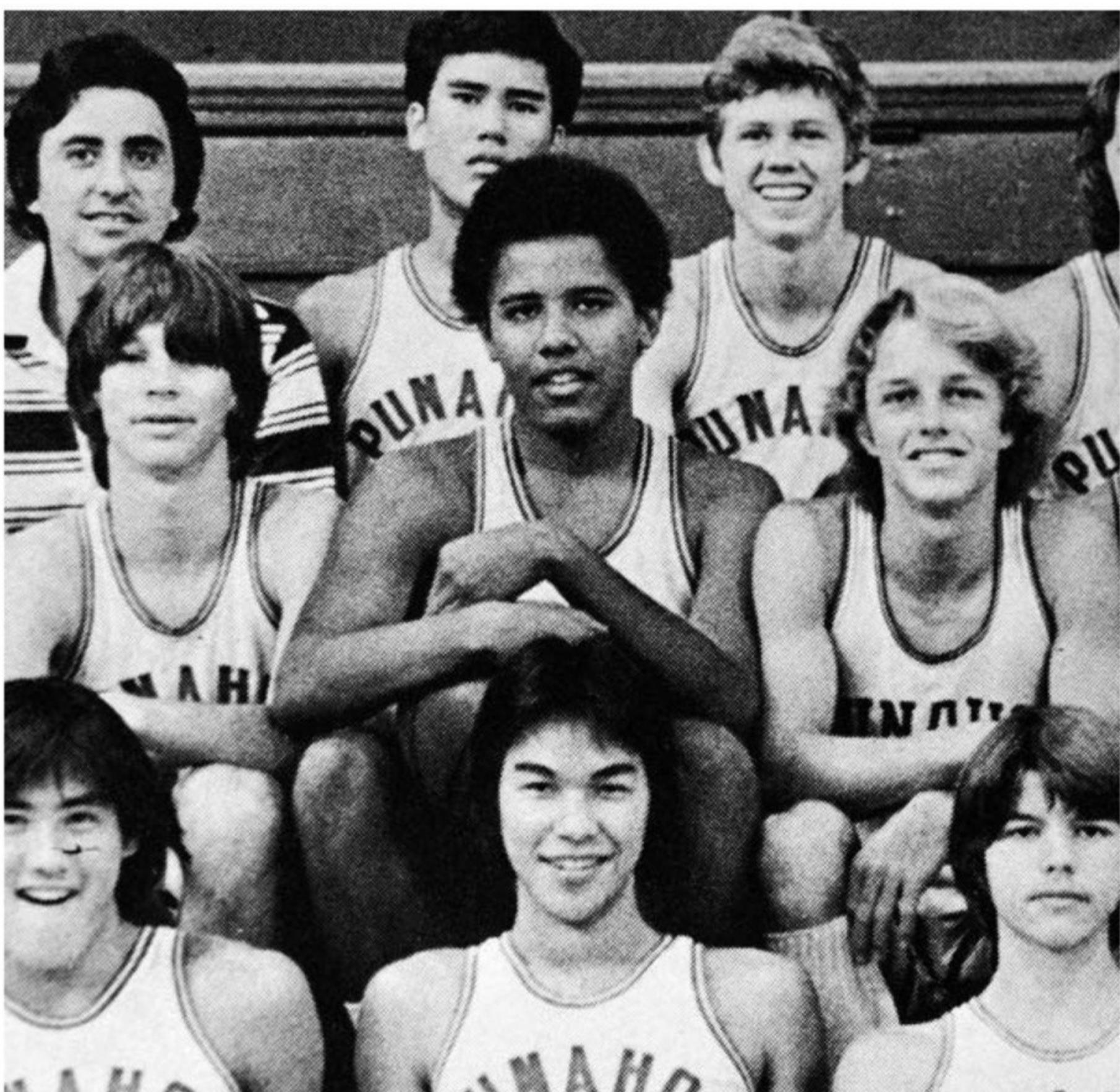
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Written by R. K. Burrice

# Barack Obama



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Young Barry with his high school basketball team

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## Introduction

Every child dreams about growing up. Some children know what they want to be as adults. Others have no idea. Some do not find a direction for their life until they are adults.



Barack Obama, future president

This is the story of just such a child. Things happened in his life that made him feel as though he did not fit in. He was bothered by many things around him. Over time, those things helped him

discover his path in life. He developed a strong desire to improve the world. That desire led him to become president of the United States of America.

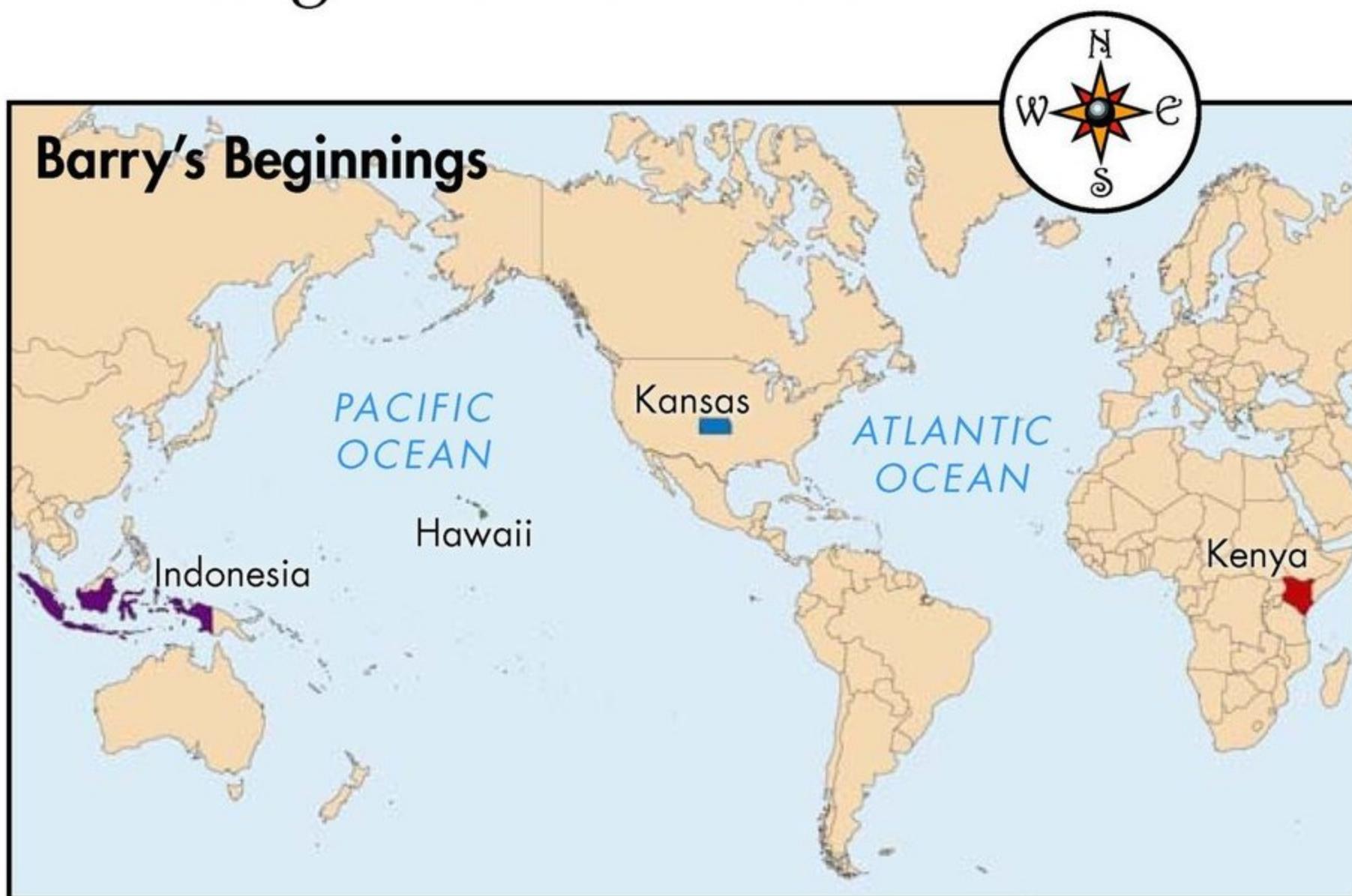


Young Barry with his mother, Ann

## Growing Up

Barack Obama Jr.—called Barry during his childhood—was born in 1961 in Hawaii. His mother was from the state of Kansas. His father was from the country of Kenya, in Africa. His parents met and married while they were students at the University of Hawaii. The marriage did not last. By the time Barry was four, his father had **moved** back to Kenya.

Barry's mother married a man from Indonesia when Barry was six. The family moved from Hawaii to Indonesia. Barry sometimes felt strange being so far from Hawaii. He felt he was not part of the community where he now lived. His parents were of different **races** and from different **continents**. Barry wondered who he was and where he belonged in the world.



### Do You Know?

While Barry lived in Indonesia, he learned what it meant to be very poor. Many Indonesian families struggled each day just to have enough food to eat.



Barry learned black students were not allowed to go to the library with white students in 1961.

Barry's mother taught him about races and cultural groups. She told him about **slavery** and **civil rights** in the United States. Barry also learned about important African Americans who helped to improve the world. Barry's mother wanted him to be proud of his background.

But Barry also learned that some people were **ashamed** of the color of their skin. And he learned about people who thought others were bad just because of their skin color or religion. Barry was confused. It was a lot for a young boy to think about.

Barry lived in Indonesia for four years. Then, his mother thought he could get a better education in the United States. So in 1971, when he was ten, she sent Barry back to Hawaii. He lived with his grandparents while he went to school.

In Hawaii, Barry again felt like an **outsider**. He was one of only two African American students in his class. Some of his classmates made fun of his unusual name.



U.S. civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. inspired Barry.

### Do You Know?

In high school, Barry read books to help him work through his difficult feelings. He learned about important African Americans who felt like outsiders but who had successfully found their way in the world. He was inspired by leaders who believed in peaceful social change.

Barry's grandparents were proud when he graduated from high school.



## Finding His Way

Barry graduated from high school in Hawaii. Then he went to college in Los Angeles. Barry started using his Kenyan name, Barack, which means “blessed.” He learned that he didn’t have to choose between his white and black backgrounds. He was both.

Barack wanted to learn how laws and government worked. He wanted to help change some of the unfair things he saw. Starting in 1981, he studied politics at a university in New York City. In 1983, he graduated from the university.

Barack wanted to help people in communities. He wanted to involve people in creating better lives for themselves. He also wanted **local** laws changed so people would be treated fairly. Barack found a job and moved to Chicago in 1985. He led an organization that helped people in poor neighborhoods improve their lives.

## Do You Know?

While Barack worked in Chicago, he helped many people.

- He set up a job-training program for African Americans who had lost their jobs when factories closed.
- He helped call attention to asbestos, a dangerous material in the walls of buildings where many poor people lived.
- His organization started a tutoring program to help young people who wanted to go to college.
- He managed a program to sign up new voters. He encouraged people to get involved in politics and work for fairer laws.

Barack's work in Chicago made him happy because he was helping poor people. But he saw that to make lasting changes, he would need to learn how to change laws. By changing unfair laws, communities could improve the lives of their people.



Barack with Mama Sara Obama, his Kenyan grandmother

### Do You Know?

Before entering law school in 1988, Barack traveled to Kenya for the first time. His father had died six years earlier. But Barack met many relatives, including his grandmother.

Barack entered a very good law school near Boston in 1988. He earned a law degree in 1991.

After finishing law school, Barack moved back to Chicago. He worked for a law company. He met a lawyer named Michelle, and they became friends. Barack invited her along when he visited some of the people he had helped in the 1980s. Michelle was **moved** by Barack's desire to help people and improve the world.

Barack and Michelle married in 1992.



Barack and Michelle Obama with their daughters, Malia (mah-LEE-uh), 6, right, and Sasha, 3, in 2004



Barack and Michelle Obama with daughters Sasha and Malia campaigned for Barack to be U.S. senator in 2004.

## Getting into Politics

Barack had become a lawyer to help people. But he soon saw that helping people as a lawyer was slow. He decided that entering politics and changing laws would be a faster way to help.

In 1996, he won a seat in his state's senate. In 2004, he won a seat in the U.S. Senate.



Barack spoke during the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

Barack gave a hopeful speech at a meeting of the Democratic Party in 2004. He asked all Americans to work together to help the United States become an even greater country. Barack's words **inspired** many people. Some of them wanted Barack to run for president in 2008. They were inspired by Barack's clear thinking and his respect for all people. They wanted a president who believed in peaceful ways to solve problems.

## Conclusion

Barack began his job as president on January 20, 2009. He, his wife, and their two daughters moved into the White House. In October 2009, President Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize for helping to make the world a better place.

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

—Barack Obama



Barack Obama spoke to a huge crowd after being elected president on November 4, 2008.

## Glossary

<b>ashamed</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	embarrassed (p. 7)
<b>civil rights</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	legal, social, and economic rights that guarantee freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 7)
<b>continents</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the main landmasses on Earth, including Africa, South America, Asia, Europe, North America, Australia, and Antarctica (p. 6)
<b>inspired</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	prompted to be brave or creative (p. 14)
<b>local</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	limited to a city, or other specific place (p. 10)
<b>moved</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	caused to have strong feelings (p. 12)
<b>outsider</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who does not belong to a group or who feels as though he or she does not belong (p. 8)
<b>races</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	populations of humans as defined by skin color and features or by genetics (p. 6)
<b>slavery</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the state or condition of being a slave, or the property of another person (p. 7)

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