

# Barack Hussein Obama II

Honolulu · Jakarta · Los Angeles · New York · Chicago · Washington, D.C.

## In Sixty Seconds

**Origins.** Barack Hussein Obama II was born August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Ann Dunham of Kansas and Barack Obama Sr. of Kenya. His parents separated when he was two. He was raised between Honolulu and Jakarta, by his mother, his Indonesian stepfather, and his grandparents Stanley and Madelyn Dunham. He graduated from Punahou School, Occidental College, and Columbia College before his work as a community organizer in Chicago.

**Work.** Harvard Law School, 1988 to 1991, where he became the first Black president of the Harvard Law Review. Civil rights attorney and lecturer at the University of Chicago Law School through the 1990s. Illinois State Senate, 1997 to 2004. U.S. Senate from Illinois, 2005 to 2008. President of the United States, January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017. Two terms, one peaceful transition, two Supreme Court appointments, one signature health care law.

**Impact.** The Affordable Care Act reduced the uninsured rate from sixteen percent in 2010 to under nine percent by 2016. The auto industry rescue preserved roughly 1.5 million jobs through the 2009 bankruptcies of General Motors and Chrysler. Dodd-Frank restructured financial regulation. The Paris Agreement was signed on his watch. Osama bin Laden was killed on his order. More than twenty million Americans gained health insurance.

**Legacy.** The Obama Foundation operates out of Chicago, running civic leadership programs on five continents. The Obama Presidential Center is under construction in Jackson Park on the South Side. My Brother's Keeper Alliance, launched in 2014, mentors boys and young men. Higher Ground Productions, the Netflix partnership, won an Oscar for American Factory in 2020. His memoirs have sold tens of millions of copies worldwide. The image of a Black family in the White House is now part of the American archive.

## The Network

### Michelle Obama

Wife and partner. Princeton 1985, Harvard Law 1988. Former hospital executive and author of *Becoming* (2018), which sold more than seventeen million copies and is the best-selling memoir in U.S. history. Founded the Let's Move initiative and the Reach Higher education campaign as First Lady.

### Eric Holder

Attorney General. 82nd U.S. Attorney General, 2009 to 2015. First Black person to hold the office. Led the Justice Department's civil rights enforcement through Ferguson, Baltimore, and the *Shelby County v. Holder* aftermath.

### Valerie Jarrett

Senior advisor. Longtime family friend and political mentor from Chicago, where she first hired Michelle Robinson in 1991. Served as Senior Advisor to the President for all eight years, one of the few staff members to hold that title from first day to last.

### Loretta Lynch

Attorney General. 83rd U.S. Attorney General, 2015 to 2017. First Black woman to hold the office. Former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York. Oversaw the federal investigation into police practices in multiple cities.

## For Discussion

1. Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize less than nine months into his first term. What does the award's timing reveal about the gap between the symbolism of his election and the policy record the committee was actually reading, and how have other firsts navigated the same gap between symbol and record?
2. The Affordable Care Act expanded coverage to more than twenty million Americans; the political cost of passage was severe. When a signature accomplishment produces both durable benefit and durable backlash, how should the public record weigh the two, and what decides which side of the ledger dominates over time?
3. Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act as the first bill of his presidency on January 29, 2009. The sequence of first bills a president signs tells you what the administration wants the record to say about its opening posture. What does Lilly Ledbetter signal, and how did that signal interact with the legislative history that followed?
4. In 2008, Obama carried Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia, none of which a Democratic nominee had won in decades. What coalition held those states in 2008, which parts of it persisted through 2012, and what fractured in the years after?
5. The Obama Foundation and the Obama Presidential Center sit on the South Side of Chicago rather than in Washington. What does a post-presidential center anchored in the president's home community, rather than in the capital, signal about the shape of the legacy, and what obligations does that location create for the center's programming?

## Primary Sources

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