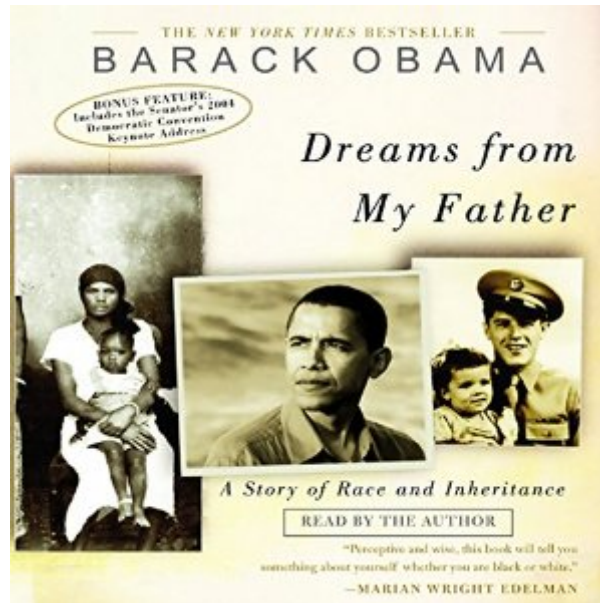


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Dreams From My Father: A Story Of Race And Inheritance



Synopsis

In this lyrical, unsentimental, and compelling memoir, the son of a black African father and a white American mother searches for a workable meaning to his life as a black American. It begins in New York, where Barack Obama learns that his father—a figure he knows more as a myth than as a man—has been killed in a car accident. This sudden death inspires an emotional odyssey—first to a small town in Kansas, from which he retraces the migration of his mother's family to Hawaii, and then to Kenya, where he meets the African side of his family, confronts the bitter truth of his father's life, and at last reconciles his divided inheritance. Pictured in lefthand photograph on cover: Habiba Akumu Hussein and Barack Obama, Sr. (President Obama's paternal grandmother and his father as a young boy). Pictured in righthand photograph on cover: Stanley Dunham and Ann Dunham (President Obama's maternal grandfather and his mother as a young girl). --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

U.S. Senate hopeful Barack Obama has an inspiring story to share, and yet he doesn't simply rest on his laurels in this critical evaluation of his life and in his continuing search for himself as a black American. He wrote "Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance" almost ten years ago, but his stock has obviously surged since his star-making speech at the Democratic National Convention last month, perhaps to the chagrin of Hillary Clinton...unless she is dreaming of a Clinton-Obama ticket in 2008! Growing up mulatto in Hawaii and Indonesia, Obama discusses trying

to come to grips with his racial identity through a period of rebellion that included drug use, becoming a community activist in Chicago and traveling to Kenya to understand his father's past. It is in Kenya where he discovers a nation with forty different tribes, each of them saddled with stereotypes of the others. It is also in Kenya where he recognizes the dichotomy that has been his lifelong existence between the graves of his father and his grandfather. His description of this defining moment is worthy of a passage in Alex Haley's "Roots". Obama is also candid about racism, poverty and corruption in Chicago, and he pulls no punches in his account of this period. Because the book stops in 1995, it does not get into much detail on his learning experiences, culminating in both missteps and triumphs, as a state legislator. For all the value the book provides on Obama's history, I would have appreciated a more substantive update than the preface on the last decade, as he gained political prominence in Illinois, so that we understand more why his time in the spotlight has come at this moment. Perhaps that will be Volume 2. I was also disappointed he spent so little time writing about his mother and the influence her side of the family has had on him, a narrative gap Obama acknowledges and over which he expresses regret in the preface. Perhaps inclusion of such details would have made for a less compelling story from his originally intended Afro-centric perspective; but at the same time, I think a more balanced look at his own racial dichotomy would have made his story resonate all the more given where he is now. Obama is open in the preface about using changed names and composite characters to expedite the flow and ensure privacy of those around him, but it does somewhat lessen the impact of his story when one starts to wonder who was real and who was a fictionalized character. Regardless of these literary devices, this book is still a very worthwhile look into the background of someone who is on a major upward trajectory in the current national political scene.

Barack Obama is obviously an articulate, intelligent man; but his "story of race and inheritance" may leave readers scratching their heads at times. The story of his life, the son of a Kenyan man and a white woman who divorced when he was a young child, is atypical. His father, an extremely book smart man, polygamist, big talker and eventually sometimes embarrassment to the family who was known as the Old Man to his many children, seems an unlikely source of the "dreams" of which the title speaks. The author met his father but once, when he was ten years old. Dr. Barack Obama was already married (p 422) when he met his namesake's mother while studying in the States. He returned to Africa alone, married again (and again) and had more children. His mother then married (and later divorced) an Indonesian man and they moved to Djakarta, where he spent his early years until moving in with his maternal grandparents in Hawaii. He ended up in Chicago, where he signed

on to help organize African-Americans to work together to gain funding for projects to improve the quality of their lives and those of their children. Three years and much success (after a bumpy start) later, he headed off to graduate school, but not before finally attending services at a large, popular, local church. Readers may wonder if, during the several page section rounding out Part 2 (Chicago), he may have experienced some sort of spiritual awakening: the signs pointing ambiguously to "maybe," making one wonder why the event was included at all. The latter thirty percent of the book covers his first trip to Kenya (his father having already passed away) and his interactions with a convoluted web of relatives: aunts, uncles, cousins, and half and step siblings: the details of which, although unusual, will probably be of no more interest to readers than the tales of their own genealogical connections (a family tree would have been clarifying). Although *Dreams From My Father* is a good story about a smart, well-intentioned, accomplished man (with complicated family connections) who has lived an interesting life, its hard not to question his focus on his (absent) father in lieu of his mother.

I first heard Barack Obama's command of the English language in his address before the Democratic National Convention. His speech brought to mind leaders of the past who had the eloquence and passion to light a fire in people with words alone. When I saw his book, I bought it to read more of his fiery, inspirational leadership. What I got instead is an insightful, sometimes painfully honest appraisal of the beginnings of that leader's life, and it surprised me. This book was written when Sen. Obama was just out of Law School. He was offered a publishing deal after being elected the first black President of the Harvard Law Review. What he wrote is a memoir that is very obviously written by a brilliant young man. I say brilliant because his observations and examinations on racial constructs and communications in America is astute and deeply personal. As a bi-racial man growing up in both white and black America, his viewpoint is unique and his eyes were wide open. I say young because unlike most memoirs written after great accomplishments and long careers, the voice of this story is at the beginning of what may be greatness, not the end. Obama gets a chance to look back and examine his formation, and in doing so gives a beautiful and wonderfully full 'state-of-the-union' as regarding race. It's not the same old stuff, and it is. It felt like my favorite college professors who could make you stop in the middle of a class and realize that you just saw something you thought you knew in a whole new light, and you could never see it the old way again.

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