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The Myth of Barack Obama's Early Life by Michael Patrick Leahy

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Beginning with the publication of his memoir, **Dreams from My Father**, in 1995, Barack Obama has promoted a myth of his early life, one that is familiar to every American who pays attention to the political process. His African father, Barack Obama Senior, abandoned his white American mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, in 1963 when he was two years old, leaving them in Hawaii while he went off to study for a Phd. in Economics at Harvard. Barack Obama Senior was the recipient of a scholarship that offered enough money to support him, but not his young wife and son. His life story, on which he has so famously expounded, is one of a young man trying to make sense of that abandonment.

The evidence suggests a different and far more complex truth, one that as the writer of his own life story, Barack Obama had a duty to explore more fully. While we can't fault Barack Obama for believing the fictional account his mother told him about his father's role in his early life, we can fault him for failing to undertake even the most rudimentary investigation of the truth behind this fictional account as an adult, and subsequently perpetuating that fiction publicly for over thirteen years

This willing acceptance of a created fictional account of his parents' relationship demonstrates a pattern of behavior that continues to this day. It is echoed in the way he has ignored American History and created his own fictional "nightmare vision" of America, a vision which he wants us to believe that only he has the power to correct.

More ominously, it is echoed in his unique political theology, a blend of myth, fiction, Saul Alinsky inspired social activism, and his own heretical version of Christian faith. We see it in a set of political policies that, if implemented, will be the beginning of a form of government that can best be described as a new age theocracy.

Ronald Reagan knew that America is a shining city on a hill.

Barack Obama has imagined a "nightmare vision" (1) of America in which "the majority of blacks continue to suffer second-class citizenship," (2) and "ignorant bigots" (3) who "cling to their guns and religion" (4) can only be shown the error of their ways by the power of his personality.

It is a highly selective vision, one which emphasizes every historic instance of oppression, and ignores any element of the story that does not support the theme of this narrative. It is a vision based as much on the fictional works of writers like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Frank Marshall Davis, and Ralph Ellison as it is on the facts of American History. It is a

fictional creation of the mind of a man whose entire remembered experience of America until the age of thirty four was limited to Indonesia, Hawaii, the campuses of Occidental College in Los Angeles, Columbia University in New York City, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the South Side of Chicago.

The process by which he arrived at this "nightmare vision" began with the myth he was taught about his early life, a myth he has apparently accepted without undertaking even a minimal level of inquiry.

Based on the evidence, it appears that Barack Obama's statement in his memoir concerning the separation of his parents is not accurate:

At the time of his death, my father remained a myth to me, both more and less than a man. He had left Hawaii back in 1963, when I was only two years old, so that as a child I knew him only through the stories that my mother and grandparents told. (5)

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The facts suggest that Barack Obama Senior did not abandon Stanley Ann Dunham and Barack Obama Junior in 1963 when Barack Obama Junior was two years old, leaving them in Honolulu while he went to Harvard. Instead, they suggest that Stanley Ann Dunham left Barack Obama Senior in March 1962, taking seven month old Barack Obama Junior with her. She left Barack Obama Senior in Honolulu and moved into her own apartment in Seattle, Washington.

Here's what the evidence suggests:

1. Barack Obama Senior and Stanley Ann Dunham lived together under the same roof as man and wife, for not more than a six month period, beginning September 1961 and ending February 1962. During some portion of this six month period, Stanley Ann Dunham and Barack Obama Junior were in Seattle, Washington while Barack Obama Senior was in Honolulu, Hawaii.

2. Stanley Ann Dunham left Barack Obama Senior, in March, 1962, taking seven month old Barack Obama Junior with her. She moved from Honolulu, where Barack Obama Senior continued his studies at the University of Hawaii, to Seattle, Washington where she enrolled as a full time student at the University of Washington and lived with her son Barack Junior in student housing at the Laurelhurst dormitory, and later in her own apartment, on Capitol Hill. (6)

3. Stanley Ann Dunham returned to Hawaii from Seattle, Washington some time between September, 1962 and January, 1964, only after Barack Obama Senior left Honolulu for Harvard.

The true story of Barack Obama's early life begins with his maternal grandparents, Stanley Dunham and Madelyne Payne Dunham. They were natives of Kansas, from small towns in

the vicinity of Wichita. Her parents were Methodists and relatively prosperous for the time, her father was employed as an oil lease manager by Standard Oil. His parents were Baptists, good people, but less prosperous than hers. (7)

They eloped on the evening of her high school graduation in June, 1940. She was seventeen and a half years old, he was twenty-one. Her parents disapproved of the match, and the newlyweds didn't tell them of the marriage until after she had her high school diploma in hand. (8)

Their only child, Stanley Ann Dunham, was born in November, 1942, while he served in the Army during World War II. On his release from the Army, he attended the University of California at Berkeley on the GI Bill for a period of time. That didn't take, and he launched a career that took his family around various small towns in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In 1955, they moved to Seattle, where Stanley worked in a nearby Seattle furniture store and Madelyne got a job in a bank.

After a year living in an apartment in Seattle, the Dunham family moved to nearby Mercer Island, which had one of the best public high schools in the state. Their only daughter Ann, an intelligent young woman of no particular religious affiliation, with a tendency towards starry eyed liberalism and a vague desire to do good things in the world, was about to start her freshman year in high school, and the Dunhams wanted her to have the best education possible. (9)

Author and Washington Post columnist David Marannis describes their time there:

They arrived in time for her to enter ninth grade at the new high school on Mercer Island, a hilly slab of land in Lake Washington that was popping with tract developments during the western boom of the postwar 1950s. The island is not much more isolated than Staten Island on the other side of the country. Just east of Seattle, it is connected to the city by what was then called the floating bridge.

The population explosion, along with a nomadic propensity, brought the Dunhams to Mercer Island. Stan was in the furniture trade, a salesman always looking for the next best deal, and the middle-class suburbs of Seattle offered fertile territory: All the new houses going up would need new living room and dining room sets. He took a job in a furniture store in Seattle. (10)

Her friend Susan Blake remembers meeting her as a freshman at Mercer Island High School in the fall of 1956.

We were both new to Mercer Island High that year. I remember meeting her at an orientation event. She was very friendly. She stuck out her hand and said "Hi, I'm Stanley."

"Stanley?" I asked.

"Yes Stanley," she replied. "My father wanted a boy, but got a daughter instead and gave me his name anyway. So Stanley it is, and that's that."

We became good friends right then and remained so throughout high school. (11)

Her high school classmates remember her as a great thinker. Barbara Cannon Rusk recalls:

She was a brain. We used to sit around in the library and talk about God. We talked about all sorts of things, and she would say things that were very deep, very insightful. She talked about women's rights. I was surprised that she ever got married. (12)

Her high school friends have uniformly consistent recollections of the personalities and character of her parents.

Madelyne Dunham was the towering hero of her life, of her entire family's life. She propped up her husband throughout his less than successful sales career, made him feel important. She was an elegant and refined woman, always well groomed, her red hair always perfectly coiffed, her nails always lacquered just so. (13)

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Blake recalls that Stanley Ann was always a little afraid of her father, who was an independent spirit.(14)

Because both her parents worked, Stanley Ann would walk home after school with her friend Maxine Box. They would stop at Maxine's house where they would both do their homework, and Maxine's mother, who was a mom who stayed at home, would feed them some of her delicious chocolate cake. (15)

Susan Blake also recalls Stanley Ann's manners and graciousness:

They had a nice house that was well organized with the ultimate in modern Danish furniture. Stanley Ann was their only child. When she came over to my house, where we had all sorts of kids and constant activity, it was like she was walking in a trance, but she was always polite and gracious to my parents. Most kids kind of just looked down at their shoes, but Stanley Ann interacted with my mother in a gracious way. She was almost like Eddie Haskell in her politeness. (16)

Mercer Island was nothing like the Kansas, Oklahoma, or Texas she had known.

At Mercer High School, two teachers -- Val Foubert and Jim Wichterman -- generated regular parental thunderstorms by teaching their students to challenge societal norms and question all manner of authority. Foubert, who died recently, taught English. His texts were cutting edge: "Atlas Shrugged," "The Organization Man," "The Hidden Persuaders," "1984" and the acerbic writings of H. L. Mencken. Wichterman taught philosophy. The hallway

between the two classes was known as "anarchy alley," and students pondered the challenging notions of Wichterman's teachings, including such philosophers as Sartre and Kierkegaard. He also touched the societal third rail of the 1950s: He questioned the existence of God. And he didn't stop there.

"I had them read 'The Communist Manifesto,' and the parents went nuts," said Wichterman, adding that parents also didn't want any discussions about "anything to do with sex," religion and theology. The parental protests were known as "mothers' marches."

"The kids started questioning things that their folks thought shouldn't be questioned -- religion, politics, parental authority," said John Hunt, a classmate. "And a lot of parents didn't like that, and they tried to get them [Wichterman and Foubert] fired."

The Dunhams did not join the uproar. Madelyn and Stanley shed their Methodist and Baptist upbringing and began attending Sunday services at the East Shore Unitarian Church in nearby Bellevue.

"In the 1950s, this was sometimes known as 'the little Red church on the hill,' " said Peter Luton, the church's senior minister, referring to the effects of McCarthyism. Skepticism, the kind that Stanley embraced and passed on to his daughter, was welcomed here. For Stanley Ann, the teachings of Foubert and Wichterman provided an intellectual stimulant and an affirmation that there indeed was an interesting life beyond high school dances, football games and all-night slumber party chatter. (17)

The Dunhams surprised their neighbors in June 1960. One week after Stanley Ann's graduation from high school, Madelyn and Stanley Ann left their Mercer Island apartment, got on a plane, and moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, where Stanley had gone before, securing a job with a furniture store and a place for the family to live.

Stanley Ann was not happy with the move. She had been accepted to both the University of Chicago and the University of Washington, and wanted to attend the University of Chicago. Stanley would not allow her to go, insisted that she move to Hawaii with the family. Shortly after their arrival, Madelyne got a job with a bank as a teller.

In September 1960, Stanley Ann enrolled as a freshman at the University of Hawaii. She was still only seventeen years old. While it's a fine university, the University of Hawaii is primarily a commuter school, and certainly young Ann must have thought it a bit of a come down, a waste of her own intellectual capabilities to sacrifice the hallowed halls of the University of Chicago for the parking lots of the University of Hawaii. In a somewhat unusual move, she added Basic Russian to the schedule of her first semester of classes.

In a letter that fall to her friend Susan Blake, she told that she had met an interesting African exchange student in her Russian Class.

I remember being more impressed that she was taking Russian than the fact she had met an African exchange student. We didn't have Russian at the University of Washington where

I was attending at the time, and it seemed interesting and exotic. She wrote that she found the classes intellectually stimulating, and that it had the added benefit that she could attend classes wearing shorts and muu muus. I remember being envious of this. (18)

The successful Russian launch of the Sputnik satellite had created concern in the United States that we were falling behind our Cold War enemy, and Congress had passed the National Defense Education Act, which liberally provided funding for University level courses in math and science, but also supported courses in the Russian Language.

By 1960, thirty thousand college students were enrolled in Russian Language courses across the United States. (19) The University of Hawaii had started to offer instruction in that course by then, and the adventurous and precocious seventeen year old freshman decided to sign up for it.

One of the other students at the University of Hawaii who signed up for the same course that semester was Barack Obama Senior, a black twenty-four year old Kenyan who already had a wife, a two year old son, and an infant daughter in Africa. He had arrived at the University of Hawaii a year earlier, on what was called a Tom Mboya scholarship to study for a Bachelors degree in mathematics and economics. (20)

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His Kenyan wife, Kezia, bade him good bye at the Nairobi airport in the summer of 1959. They had been married in a tribal ceremony in January, 1957, an agreement that had been sealed when his father gave her father a dowry of fourteen cattle. She was three months pregnant with their first daughter Auma, and was responsible alone now for the care of their year and a half old son, Roy. (21)

Tom Mboya was a Luo tribesman like Barack Obama Senior, and a player in the national politics of Kenya. He had traveled to the United States in early 1959 to persuade Americans to contribute to this fund, and he had been remarkably successful in that effort. Kenya, he said, needed Kenyans to be trained in America, so that when independence came they would be capable of replacing the British bureaucrats and administrators who ran the country. Eight thousand Americans contributed to the fund, among them leaders of the black community including Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, and Jackie Robinson, the famous baseball player.

Barack Obama Senior was one of eighty one Tom Mboya scholars that year, along with his friend Phil Obeigwe. They had met for a send off party in Nairobi in Mboya's offices, and flew to America together. (22)

Their native land was still in the midst of political turmoil, the Mau Mau Rebellion in its last throes, but not sufficiently ended for the ruling British to end the state of emergency that had been going on for eight years. Still a British colony, plans for independence were already underway. In 1957, the British had allowed the election of native representatives to

the legislature, and Jomo Kenyatta's Kenyan African Congress party, the radicals just shy of Communism, had won. Everyone knew that when independence won Jomo Kenyatta's party would be in control.

Barack Obama Senior dreamed of earning a Phd. in the United States and returning to his native Kenya, there to be part of the new ruling elite of an independent country, governed by intelligent men like himself.

He was already vain, arrogant, self assured, capable of irritating his friends and fellow workers, and equally ready to drain a bottle of Scotch or finish off yet another pack of cigarettes. And he was ambitious for himself, ambitious to make money, and ambitious to secure glory and power. Perhaps he considered himself a future President of Kenya, a man around whom his own Luo tribe would rally, over the Kikuyu leader Jomo Kenyatta. Certainly his ego gave every indication that he thought himself capable of handling the job.

The two of them sat there in the Basic Russian class taught that year by one of the two Russian Language instructors on staff that semester, Ella Wiswell or Isabelle Tripianky, who were similar in both background and teaching style. Wiswell was a Russian emigre and talented linguist who for a while had been the only University of Hawaii Russian Language faculty member. Tripianky was also a Russian emigre, who like Wiswell had studied at the Sorbonne in Paris.

The class was held in old Hawaii Hall, and numbered about two dozen students in all, many filled with the dewy eyed idealism of American Cold Warriors who hoped to work as intelligence analysts for the CIA. Young Ann Dunham might have had such aspirations, or she might have been drawn to the class for other reasons. All undergraduates had a two year foreign language requirement, and Russian was the third most popular language to study, right behind French and Spanish, due to the political interest of the day.

Patricia Polansky, who is still at the University of Hawaii where she is employed as the Bibliographer for the Russian Language Department, took the same Basic Russian course at the University of Hawaii three years later in 1963, and remembers the course well.

Ella Wiswell was considered a very tough teacher....but, I found the classes good--no nonsense. I don't think the teaching was considered innovative. It was pretty routine; I You had a chapter to study to prepare for the next class, and then we went over it in class. We were also required to attend a language lab three times a week where we listened to the lessons spoken in Russian and could practice speaking. In 1963 I don't remember that we had any foreign exchange students in the class. I don't think it was so common. Definitely, if there were Africans, Europeans., or even "haoles" from the mainland, they stood out from the local kids. The problem here is that we probably had then and still do...lots of foreign students from Asian countries (China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia).... but they blend right in with the local kids....hard to tell them apart. I'm not sure what students were going to do with Russian.....The problem was fulfilling the undergraduate requirement of two years of a foreign language. At the time Spanish and French were the most popular, but I think Russian might have been next due to the political interest. (23)

Barack Obama Senior's interest in the class seemed to make far more sense. As a future member of the Kenyan government's technocratic elite, the ability to speak both English and Russian, the languages of the two countries vying for influence and control over his native land would certainly give him a leg up in the competition among returning scholars for plum jobs back home.

He was as pitch black as she was lilly white.

His presence must have stuck out in the class from the first day, and Dunham could not have helped but notice the charismatic and self confident Kenyan.

Neil Abercrombie, who today is a Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives representing Hawaii, was a graduate student at the University of Hawaii at the time, and knew them both.

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"I think she was attracted to his powerful personality," Abercrombie said, "and he was attracted to her beauty and her calmness." ... The self-assured and opinionated Obama spoke with a voice so deep that "he made James Earl Jones seem like a tenor," said Neil Abercrombie (24)

Barack Obama Senior apparently did not tell the pretty seventeen year old American girl that he was already married and had a child in Kenya. It's uncertain if that would made a difference to her, because shortly after they met in class, they began to date. Years later, her son would notice an embarassing element of raw sexual attraction on her part to dark men, one that manifested itself when he, his mother, and half sister took in the art house film Black Orpheus years later when he was a student at Columbia. (25)

Withholding such vital information from a young girl under the age of eighteen was apparently not the only character flaw of Obama Senior. Even his friends found him to be a troublesome personality.

Philip Ochieng, his fellow Tom Mboya scholar, who also spent time with him when they both returned to Kenya said Obama Senior was "extraordinary clever, but also cruel and given to boasting about his brain and wealth." (26)

His third wife, Ruth Nidersand, to whom he was married from 1965 to 1972, later described him as a "very difficult man", who "wasn't an easy person to be around." (27)

Young Ann could foresee none of this at the time, for she was smitten by clever and intelligent Obama. They conceived Barack Junior two months later, during the first week of November. Given his future Presidential aspirations, it was perhaps a harbinger of things to come that the conception could have possibly occurred in celebration John F. Kennedy's election to the Presidency on November 8, 1960.

Obama's sexual relationship with the under age Dunham placed him in no apparent legal

jeopardy, because Hawaii, then as now, recognized fourteen years of age as the legal age of consent. Even if her parents had the legal right to pursue charges against him, they were not the kind of people who would have been likely to do so.

Obama Senior might also have run the risk of violating Hawaii's laws against bigamy, though any charges against him would have been difficult to prove. The tribal ceremony in which he wed the eighteen year old Keiza in Kenya in 1957 was not likely to provide the same kind of legal evidence in a Hawaii court as a marriage certificate to another woman in another state of the United States would have.

Susan Blake remembers receiving a postcard from Stanley Ann over Christmas, 1960.

She said that she was dating the African exchange student, and that while her parents weren't happy with it, they were dealing and adjusting. (28)

Ann Dunham and Barack Obama Senior were said to have married before a justice of the peace on the island of Maui on February 2, 1961, by which time the now eighteen year old Ann's pregnancy was known to both of them. The wedding had no witnesses, not even her parents, and no record of the event has yet been found. The only evidence that suggests a February, 1961 date for the wedding was a document included in Ann Dunham's 1964 divorce proceedings against Obama Senior. (29)

Obama himself has been uncertain as to the details of the wedding, assigning 1960 as the year of the event, but having no documentation to support that claim. In his memoirs, he elaborates:

How and when the marriage occurred remains a bit murky, a bill of particulars that I've never quite had the courage to explore. There's no record of a real wedding, a cake, a ring, a giving away of the bride. No families were in attendance; . . . (30)

From a distance of almost fifty years the question of the actual occurrence of a marriage ceremony is largely irrelevant, but the stories that Barack Obama has told about the event are quite relevant, as they give great insight into the process by which he determines what is true and what is not true.

Madelyne Dunham remains absolute in her contention that a marriage did, in fact occur, though perhaps that is exactly the type of response that might be expected from a loving grandmother concerned with the possibility that her grandson might be harmed psychologically if he were considered to be illegitimate. (31)

Stanley Ann's high school classmates Maxine Box, Susan Blake, and Barbara Cannon Rusk were shocked at the turn of events. They are unanimous on two points, however:

Stanley Ann Dunham would have legally married Barack Obama Senior. "Her father would have made sure of it," Maxine Box said years later. (32)

They are also unanimous that Stanley Ann would definitely not have married Barack Obama Senior had she known of his 1957 tribal marriage to Kezia and his two young children from that earlier marriage.

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Despite these assertions by friends and family, the lack of any documentary evidence, when such evidence for legal marriages that took place in Hawaii during 1961 is readily available today to any inquiring family member, strongly suggests that Stanley Ann Dunham and Barack Obama Senior were not ever legally married.

The State of Hawaii maintains all marriage records in its Department of Vital Records, a part of the Department of Health. Its website states that any family member can request copies of valid marriage certificates by simply paying a small fee. If Stanley Ann Dunham and Barack Obama were legally married on February 2, 1961, the marriage certificate is maintained by the Hawaii Department of Vital Records, and a copy of it can be made available to any blood relative easily. (33)

Since the publication of Barack Obama's memoir in 1995, he has not produced such evidence, nor has he apparently made an inquiry of the Department of Vital Records to secure such a record.

There is no possible explanation for the failure to secure such a record other than a certain knowledge that the document does not exist, or a fear that such an inquiry will reveal that the document does not exist.

If Obama had been borne out of wedlock, it would not disqualify him in any way from seeking the Presidency, though it does suggest that his legal name at birth should have been Barack Hussein Dunham rather than Barack Hussein Obama II. Certainly the names "Barack Dunham" or "Barry Dunham" lack the mystery and exotic attractiveness of the name "Barack Obama", and it's the exotic name that succinctly captures the unusual life narrative Obama has been publicly promoting for over thirteen years.

It's not known exactly when the new couple revealed the double dose of news to her parents that they were married and that she was expecting. Their initial reaction was one of anger. Madelyn in particular, foresaw quickly the chasm the different cultures would present to the success of the marriage. She didn't like her new African son-in-law in particular, considered him "strange", though reluctantly described him as "brilliant." (34)

Perhaps she had the clarity to see that the financial burden of supporting the child would quickly fall to her and her husband. That this turned out to be the case was not something that caused joy for them, but it was something they handled.

Despite the secretiveness of the marriage, the age difference between their daughter and his new husband, as well as the racial and cultural differences, Ann's parents soon rose to

the occasion as the supporting parents of the new couple. By now, Stanley Dunham and Madelyne Payne Dunham lived in an apartment building in a Honolulu high rise, and there they provided a stable fall back for their pregnant young daughter and her ambitious Kenyan husband. The living arrangements between the announcement of the wedding and the birth of the child were uncertain. Most likely, Obama Senior remained in his dorm room while Ann lived with her parents.

Barack Hussein Obama II was born on August 4, 1961 at 7:52 PM in Honolulu, Hawaii. Stanley Ann Dunham was listed as the maiden name of the mother and Barack Obama was listed as the name of the father in the document put forward that appears to be a State of Hawaii Certificate of Live Birth. The document was filed on August 8, 1961.

There is no indication that Barack Obama Senior was present at the birth of his third child. Stanley Ann's high school classmate Susan Blake had the impression that he was not there, and may not even have been on the island of Hawaii at the time, but no other contemporary has any recollections on this issue one way or the other. (35)

In August or September of 1961, Barack Obama Senior enrolled and attended classes in his final undergraduate year from the University of Hawaii, from which he would graduate with a Bachelors Degree in economics and mathematics in June, 1962.

Obama biographer David Mendell reports that Barack Obama Senior rented a small one floor house near the campus of the University of Hawaii around this time, ostensibly as a home for his young wife and their new son. It's not clear how much time the Barack Obama Senior family spent there together living under the same roof. (36)

On at least one occasion, very shortly after the birth of Barack Obama Junior, friends of Stanley Ann Dunham recall her visiting them in Seattle with her new born baby, Barack Obama Junior.

Susan Blake, another high school classmate, said that during a brief visit in 1961, Dunham was excited about her husband's plans to return to Kenya "We all had June Cleaver as our role models, and she was blazing new trails for herself," said Blake, a former Mercer Island city councilwoman. (37)

Blake recalls that Dunham, who was calling herself Ann Obama at the time, visited her at her house in Mercer Island during the last week of August, 1961.

She left Honolulu just as soon she had clearance from her doctor to travel with her new baby. He was just 3 weeks old. She had sent a postcard that she would be in town, and was staying with a friend of her mother's. She drove out to my house in her mother's friend's car, and we spent the entire day together. She was very excited about her new life, and her husband. She was nuts about him, crazy in love. I was under the impression that he had left Honolulu before Barack's birth, that he had gone to Harvard already for his studies, and that Ann was on her way to join him there. She planned on raising her son, getting a job, and attending school, she told me. Her husband would head back to Kenya after graduating

from Harvard to join the newly formed government, and she would take her place beside him. It was all very exciting, a dramatic change in her life in the one year since she had graduated from high school. (38)

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Blake never saw her high school friend again. When she herself married in 1964, she sent Dunham a wedding invitation to her last known address in Hawaii, but it was returned with no known forwarding address.

Blake's recollections of Stanley Ann's ultimate destination on this trip seem to be inconsistent with the evidence. In late August 1961, Barack Obama Senior still had a year left of undergraduate studies at the University of Hawaii, though he clearly had aspirations to do his graduate work in economics at Harvard.

But it does raise an interesting question.

Why would an eighteen year old mother take her three week old baby on a plane trip from Honolulu to Seattle if her parents and husband were still in Honolulu? What would be sufficient motivation for such action?

Perhaps her husband had taken an advance trip to Harvard to personally apply for acceptance into the graduate economics program the following year, and had asked his wife to join him there to scout the area out before they had to return to the University of Hawaii to finish up his senior year.

On that same trip, probably a week or two later, in early September, another high school classmate, Maxine Box, recalls visiting with Stanley Ann Dunham and her new born baby.

I remember it was a sunny day, and I visited Stanley at the house of the friend she was staying with on Mercer Island. We talked for about an hour, mostly about her new baby, Barack Obama Junior. I recall that she said she was on her way to join her husband, but I don't recall where that was. We didn't talk much about her husband or her plans, we talked mostly about the baby. Like most of my friends, I was shocked at the turn of events. Stanley Ann was only a year out of high school and was already married with a child. I never thought that she was someone who wanted to get married. She was always someone who seemed focus on getting an education. (39)

As with Blake, this visit would be the last time that Box ever saw her high school friend.

The real purpose of this trip, however, may have been different than Stanley Ann Dunham described to her friends. In August, 1961, she enrolled in a University of Washington extension course. Between August, 1961 and March 1962, she enrolled in a total of four extension courses at the University of Washington, earning a total of 20 credits for her work

in those courses, no small feat, considering that graduation required 180 credits, and the typical full time student earned 45 credits a year. Neither Box nor Blake has any recollection of Stanley Ann telling them she was enrolling on that same trip in extension courses at the University of Washington. (40)

It was a curious visit, and a curious academic choice. Why would she enroll in extension courses at the University of Washington when she had found herself intellectually stimulated during her previous year of studies at the University of Hawaii?

Despite these questions, the recollections of her friend Susan Blake suggest that in late August, 1961 she was wildly enthusiastic about her future life with her Kenyan husband and she was very much in love with him.

By March, 1962, a mere seven months later, her feelings for her new husband were apparently quite different. Something transpired during this interim period that permanently changed their relationship. Future Congressman Neil Abercrombie had a feeling that the relationship wouldn't last.

Although he didn't say it at the time, Abercrombie privately feared that the relationship would be short-lived. Obama was one of the most ambitious, self-focused men he had ever met. After Obama was accepted to study at Harvard, Stanley Ann disappeared from the University of Hawaii student gatherings, but she did not accompany her husband to Harvard. (41)

Some time between August 1961 and March 1962, Barack Obama Senior was accepted into Harvard's Phd. program in economics. Perhaps this acceptance forced him to discuss their future together. Perhaps they concocted a plan that would keep them together as a family, with her move to Seattle and enrollment at the University of Washington in the spring of 1962 was one part of that plan.

While it is purely speculation to ponder what that might have been, looking back more than four decades later, some theories come to mind.

Given Barack Obama Senior's subsequent history of womanizing, one possibility is that he treated his second wife in much the same way he treated both his first and third wives. In other words, he saw other women while he was with them. Another possibility is that Stanley Ann discovered the existence of his wife and two children in Kenya. Barack Obama himself recalls the bitter letter his white grandparents received from Barack Obama Seniors father in Kenya after he learned of the marriage. (42) Perhaps in another letter he revealed his sons first wife and two other children.

Or perhaps after he was accepted at Harvard he told his young wife that her presence with him at Harvard would be far too much trouble for him, that he needed all his energies to focus on his studies. Given his arrogance and oversized ego, it is easy to accept this theory.

Whatever the nature of the event, it was of sufficient significance to cause Stanley Ann Dunham to leave Barack Obama Senior and move thousands of miles from Honolulu to Seattle. In March, 1962, Stanley Ann Dunham moved from Honolulu to Seattle, Washington, where she enrolled as a full time student at the University of Washington for the spring quarter, which continued until June, 1962, and got her own apartment. She enrolled in classes and earned 10 credit hours that quarter.

Seattle Times journalist Jonathan Martin reports that some high school classmates recall visiting her and her young son alternately at the Laurelhurst student housing, then at a Capitol Hill apartment during the period that stretched from March 1962 to at least September 1962. (43)

It appears that Stanley Ann Dunham intended this move to be a permanent one, away from the painful memories of Hawaii, her estranged husband, and her parents. Though she had found the courses she had taken at the University of Hawaii surprisingly stimulating, she had never wanted to go there in the first place.

The University of Chicago was no longer an option for financial reasons, but as a graduate of a high school in the state of Washington, she could still claim the lower tuition rate of a Washington resident there. It had been her second choice initially, after all, one that was superior to the University of Hawaii in her mind.

During these months though she was visited by some classmates, she did not actively seek to re-connect with many of her Mercer High School friends, suggesting that perhaps she was not interesting in letting them know the painful details of her personal story. Good friend Maxine Box, whose mother fed her chocolate cake after school while the two girls did their home work, attended the University of Washington during this time, and was not even aware that Dunham was living in Seattle and also attending the University of Washington at this time.

High school friend John W. Hunt apparently visited her at her Laurelhurst student apartment or her Capitol Hill apartment, as did another class mate, Barbara Cannon Rusk. Rusk recalls visiting Stanley Ann Dunham and her baby son Barack at her apartment on Capitol Hill in Seattle shortly after the end of these spring quarter classes.

I had moved to Utah for a while after high school, and I came back to Seattle in the summer of 1962. I remember visiting the World's Fair, and then stopping by Stanley Ann's apartment on Capitol Hill. It was a small apartment, upstairs. It was after June, and could have been as late as September, 1962. I visited her for half a day or so. It was after the end of the spring quarter classes, and she wasn't in classes, and didn't have a job. I recall her being melancholy at the time. I had a sense that something wasn't right in her marriage. It was all very mysterious. First, her husband wasn't there, he was already off in Harvard. I didn't ask her about the relationship, feeling it was a private matter. My daughter Michelle was just a few weeks younger than Stanley's son, who she called Barry, and they played together on the floor. (44)

As with Susan Blake and Maxine Box, Barbara Cannon Rusk never saw her friend Stanley Ann Dunham again.

While Stanley Ann Dunham was living in Seattle, Barack Obama Senior finished his senior year at the University of Hawaii. The Kenyan sponsor who had covered most of Barack Obama Senior's expenses while he studied at the University of Hawaii, Ella Kirk, wrote to Tom Mboya asking him to fund Obama Senior's graduate studies, preferably at Harvard, in May of 1962. No mention was made in the request of the need to fund the living expenses for his wife and son. (45)

He graduated from the University of Hawaii in June of 1962 with a degree in mathematics and economics, and a Phi Beta Kappa key in recognition of his academic excellence.

In his memoirs, Barack Obama describes a short Honolulu Star-Bulletin article about his father at the time, in which he criticized some of the University's policies concerning the treatment of foreign exchange students. Obama notes that the article made no mention of either his mother or him. This comment would make sense, as it is likely that Stanley Ann Dunham did not attend her husband's graduation ceremony, as she was in Seattle.

Author and Washington Post writer David Marannis confirms this story:

A story in the Star-Bulletin on the day he left, June 22, said Obama planned a several-weeks grand tour of mainland universities before he arrived at Harvard to study economics on a graduate faculty fellowship. The story did not mention that he had a wife and an infant son.

Many years later, Barack Jr., then in high school, found a clipping of the article in a family stash of birth certificates and old vaccination forms. Why wasn't his name there, or his mother's? He wondered, he later wrote, "whether the omission caused a fight between my parents."

On his way east, Obama stopped in San Francisco and went to dinner at the Blue Fox in the financial district with Hal Abercrombie, who had moved to the city with his wife, Shirley. Abercrombie would never forget that dinner; he thought it showed the worst side of his old friend, a combination of anger and arrogance that frightened him. Shirley was a blonde with a high bouffant hairdo, and when she showed up at the side of Hal and Barack, the maitre d' took them to the most obscure table in the restaurant. Obama interpreted this as a racial slight. When the waiter arrived, Obama tore into him, shouting that he was an important person on his way to Harvard and would not tolerate such treatment, Abercrombie recalled. "He was berating the guy and condescending every time the waiter came to our table. There was a superiority and an arrogance about it that I didn't like."

In the family lore, Obama was accepted into graduate school at the New School in New York and at Harvard, and if he had chosen the New School there would have been enough scholarship money for his wife and son to come along. However, the story goes, he opted for Harvard because of the world-class academic credentials a Crimson degree would bring.

But there is an unresolved part of the story: Did Ann try to follow him to Cambridge? Her friends from Mercer Island were left with that impression. (46)

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He wouldn't see his son again for nine years, and then only for a month, never to be seen again after that short interlude. It would be this abandonment, rather than his mixed race heritage, that would drive Barack Obama Junior's inner turmoil for the next three decades.

At Harvard, Barack Obama Senior soon took up with another American woman, Ruth Nidesand.

Some time between her late summer 1962 visit with Barbara Cannon Rusk at her Seattle apartment and January, 1964, when she filed for divorce against Barack Obama Senior, Stanley Ann Dunham moved back to Honolulu from Seattle. But she was returning to live with her parents, apparently having felt overwhelmed raising Barack in Seattle as a single mother while trying to attend college.

She was twenty-two years old, had a three year old baby, and no source of income. She and Barack Junior lived with her parents, who supported them both financially. She attended the University of Hawaii on an irregular part time basis. As best can be determined, Barack Senior provided not one bit of financial support to his son or ex-wife from March 1962 on, and there's no indication that he provided for them financially from the period August 1961 to March 1962 either. That task apparently fell to Stanley Ann's parents.

Barack Senior finished his studies at Harvard in the spring of 1964. (47) Though he was not awarded his Master's Degree in Economics until 1965, he appears to have left for Kenya in 1964, abandoning his plans to obtain a Phd. Perhaps the lure the high paying job he secured shortly thereafter with Shell Oil was too much to resist, or perhaps he was caught up in the excitement of returning to his newly independent homeland. Whatever the reason, a July 1965 article written by him and published in the East Africa Journal described him as residing in Nairobi where he was working on his doctorate after studying at Harvard. (48) He spirited Ruth, who was now his wife, back to Kenya with him. It was a heady time for him, and he felt ready to participate at the top level of leadership in his country.

When Barack Obama Senior returned to Kenya from Harvard in 1964, he didn't bother to stop off in Honolulu to visit his toddler son, Barack Junior. He had more important things to do.

Perhaps it was a good thing that he didn't, because Barack Junior's mother was now dating an Indonesian foreign exchange student, Lolo Sotero. They married in 1967, and towing her six year old Barack Junior along, she left the safety of Honolulu to live with her new husband, who now lived in Jakarta.

The myth about his father that Obama heard from his, which he retells in his memoir, is that he wanted to pursue graduate studies in economics, and to do that he needed a scholarship. He had two offers, one from the New School in New York that offered enough scholarship money to support both himself and his wife and child in New York. The other offer, from Harvard, only provided enough money for himself, he said. He chose Harvard.

No one knew if this story was true, or merely a convenient lie to allow him to escape the obligations of his young wife and son. In any event, it's the story that his son accepted and retold.

This myth has many problems of factual accuracy associated with it.

Consider the facts we know to be true. Stanley Ann Dunham had enough money to fly from Honolulu to Seattle round trip in August 1961, from Honolulu to Seattle in March, 1962, and back to Honolulu in the fall of 1962 or some time in 1963, and to rent an apartment in Seattle. She was a fearless adventurer, and must surely have had enough money to fly to Boston. Getting a part time job and raising her son in Boston while living with her husband would have been a far less significant challenge than striking out on her own in Seattle with a young child would have been.

So why did she not accompany her husband to Harvard?

The most likely conclusion is that she chose not to, a consequence of her disillusionment with him as both a husband and a father. Barack Obama Senior did not abandon Stanley Ann Dunham. Demonstrating her independence and personal strength of character, she left him, and for good reason.

Barack Obama chose the wrong parent on whom to focus his memoirs. He should have written about his mother. Perhaps if he had taken the time to explore the facts of the myth she created about his father, a myth most certainly created to protect him from the awful truth of his father's character, he might have done just that. And if he had, we might all have been spared the possibility of the "neoliberal theocracy" (49) that's in store for us if he's elected to the Presidency.