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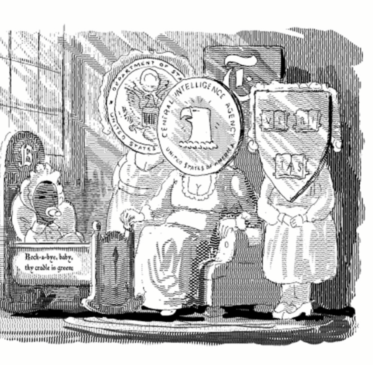
The Chosen One

The rise and rise of Barack Obama.

by Angelo M. Codevilla



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BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ESSAY:

***The Obamas: The Untold Story of an African Family*, by Peter Firstbrook**

***A Singular Woman: The Untold Story of Barack Obama's Mother*, by Janny Scott**

***Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, by Barack Obama**

***The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, by Barack Obama**

***Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition*, by James T. Kloppenberg**

***Radical-In-Chief: Barack Obama and the Untold Story of American Socialism*, by Stanley Kurtz**

"Only [the popes] *have states, and they do not defend them; subjects, and they do not govern them; and the states are not taken from them though undefended, and the subjects though not governed, do not concern themselves about it.... But since they are upheld by superior cause, to which the human mind does not reach, I will leave off speaking of them; since because they are exalted and maintained by God, discussing them would be the doing of a presumptuous and daring man. Nonetheless, if someone were to inquire of me...*"

—Niccolò Machiavelli

The Prince

Presumptuous and daring, flouting politically correct prohibitions against looking too closely at his time's Establishment, Niccolò Machiavelli went on to detail who did what to whom to establish the papacy's temporal power. Cesare Borgia's cruel triangulation between Rome's Orsini and Colonnesi factions, not miracles, had made the papal states into a major power.

In our time, asking how a young man of scarce achievement got into position to win the Democratic Party's nomination for president courts the contemporary synonyms for "impious": "birther," "conspiracy theorist," and, of course, "racist." Granted, to inquire into what formed a president is not as important as to understand what he does. Nevertheless, because fully to know where anyone is going requires grasping whence he comes, let us open ourselves to wonder how, minus miracles, a 10-year-old boy without obvious talent who had lived in Indonesia since age six ends up with an eight-year scholarship to Hawaii's most exclusive school; a scholarship to Occidental College; a transfer into Columbia University; acceptance into Harvard Law School, and editorship of its law review; and how he goes from job to prestigious job without apparently mastering any of the previous ones. No wonder some of Barack Obama's supporters treat him as if he were anointed by an extraterrestrial power.

No less an object of awe and curiosity is the seamlessness of Obama's mentality. Without marbling or inconsistency, it is serviceable as a definition of contemporary American leftism, and leads one to wonder what earthly environment could have produced such a pure specimen.

Intellectually, Obama has always been a consumer, having left no record of formulating new ideas or of penetrating old ones. Politically, he is a follower and figurehead: having grown up in the ever branching stream of socialist voluntary organizations, he surfed its leftward eddies, never forming or leading a faction. He was handed a safe seat in the Illinois state senate, a nearly safe one in the U.S. Senate, and was surprised when Harry Reid informed him that influential Democrats wanted to run him for president. The Democratic campaign of 2008 pushed against an open door. As president, he rides his party's center of gravity.

In short, Barack Obama himself is not that remarkable. He can give a rousing political speech, of course, but that is usually not sufficient to get oneself elected president. So, since he seems to have been reading from a teleprompter all his life, and since words certifiably his own are both few and opaque, it is most fruitful as well as relevant for us to focus on whom and what he has been following.

What accounts for his smooth, unlikely ascent? Both his advancement and his character seem most likely attributable to the network into which he was born, and out of which he never stepped for an instant. That network's privileges, wealth, and intellectual-social proclivities always depended to some extent—and nowadays depend more than ever—on its connection with the U.S. government. Its intellectual and moral character, like that of modern government itself, has always been on the left side of American life and, as such, has undergone splits and transmogrifications surely the most important of which in our time combines upscale social norms with radical disdain for the rest of America. Barack Obama came of age through these.

Unfortunately, that liberal Establishment has placed key facts about itself beyond public scrutiny—more in the fashion of Chicago Sicilians than of Roman pontiffs. Here we examine some of the books and other research that shed light on Obama's origins, note at least as many questions as answers, and try to distinguish between facts and spin. The results are necessarily conjectural, because of the nature of the available evidence.

To the Manner Born

At the White House, on April 27, 2011, Barack Obama announced the release of a "long form" birth certificate showing that he was born in Hawaii's Kapiolani hospital. There seems to be no reason to question its validity any more than that of any dollar bill—except that Obama has played an as yet unexplained shell game with this bill since 2008. Obama had refused to release not only the birth certificate but his academic and medical records. He indirectly, and his partisans most directly, vilified as "birthers" those who asked for this personal information (a term made-to-order, implying racism, stupidity, and lower-class odors).

Nonetheless, by the spring of 2011, several state legislatures, including Indiana's and Louisiana's, had passed or were about to pass bills requiring any candidate for federal office to show the original or original copy of his birth certificate, and providing for forensic analyses of the documents. Obama's April 27 release amounts to what John Ehrlichman called a "modified limited hang out"—some information let out to relieve pressure for the release of more. Had Obama done nothing he might have been banned from the ballot in any number of states; had he delayed too long, any certificate he produced would have been subject to close scrutiny. After the disclosure, however, Democrats argued that any and all requests for Obama's personal information had now been shown to be, in the president's words, "a silly distraction."

But there was never anything silly, nor light-hearted, nor casual, about Barack Obama's efforts to keep the public's eyes from the basic facts of his life, from birth to his candidacy for president. On the contrary, this opacity is a deliberate policy. Why? The presumptive answer, absent testimony from those involved, is to ensure that real facts interfere as little as possible with the image and narrative that he and his associates have carefully crafted for him. Distinguishing between reality and that narrative would require above all a skeptical attitude, sure to be characterized by Democrats and the media in the most derogatory terms.

According to hagiography, Barack Obama was born to a hippy girl from an insignificant family and raised in poor circumstances, out of which he rose through brilliance. Yet his haughty demeanor, his stilted language when off the teleprompter, his cultural likes and dislikes, bespeak an upbringing in an environment at once so upscale and so leftist that it makes him almost a foreigner to ordinary Americans. No one raised in ordinary American circumstances, much less straitened ones, would cite with a straight face, as Obama did, the price of arugula at Whole Foods, the yuppie boutique, as an example of the cost of living. No one at home in American culture could refer to a U.S. Marine medical corpsman as a "corpse-man." Nor do ordinary folk talk about (or even understand) the need to "change the rules of power" in America. "Rules of power" belongs to the argot of doctrinaire *nouveau* socialists. How many American college kids would describe, as did Obama, his studying with Marxist professors as an attempt not to look like a "sell out"? No. Obama's official story is counterintuitive.

Consistent with the Barack Obama we know, however, are his real family, his real upbringing, and his real choices of profession and associates. His mother's parents, who raised him, seem to have been cogs in the U.S. government's well-heeled, well-connected machine for influencing the world, whether openly ("gray influence") or covertly ("black operations"). His mother spent her life and marriages, and birthed her children, working in that machine. For paradigms of young Barack's demeanor, proclivities, opinions, language, and attitudes one need look no further than the persons who ran the institutions that his mother and grandparents served—e.g., the Ford Foundation, the United States Information Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency—as well as his chosen mentors and colleagues. It is here, with these people and institutions, that one should begin to unravel the unknowns surrounding him.

Connected

Two new books deal with Barack Obama's paternal and maternal families. British journalist Peter Firstbrook's *The Obamas* takes us all the way from the origins of East Africa's Luo tribe to Barack's father's relationship with Barack's mother. Generally fact-filled, it gives vivid portraits especially of Barack, Sr.'s, father, Onyango, who tried to raise a son as upright as he and was deadly disappointed when that son turned out to be a wastrel in the train of Tom Mboya, political leader of Kenya's Luo. The closer the book gets to the present, however, the less trustworthy it becomes. For example, it tells us that Mboya organized the 1959 airlift of 280 Africans to study in America, bypassing the U.S. State Department. Nonsense. This was high U.S. policy and touted as such at the time. The CIA considered Mboya one of its most important covert action agents. The people chosen by him and the CIA to go to America were his flunkies. But the book is irrelevant to understanding the current president of the United States because his African family had only a biological influence on him. Indeed, Barack Obama's African-ness is, as we shall see, strictly the product of his imagination.

The maternal family that raised Barack Obama, which is highly relevant to our understanding, is the subject of *New York Times* reporter Janny Scott's *A Singular Woman: The Untold Story of Barack Obama's Mother*. But though this book tells us that grandmother Madelyn Dunham's favorite color was beige, that Stanley Dunham and daughter Ann (Barack, Jr.'s, mother) shared a certain impulsiveness, and contains interviews with and personal information on countless of Ann's high school friends, it sheds no light on what the Dunhams were doing with their lives that led their daughter to take a practical interest in international affairs. Magically, Ann Dunham goes from peeking her shy 17-year-old head out of Mercer Island, Washington ("a young virgin," writes Janny Scott), to intimacy with a very foreign person, and a few years later with another, and then to work in one of the Cold War's key battlegrounds. Meanwhile her mother, about whose professional activities the book says nothing, becomes a bank executive. Did Ann speak any foreign language? Had the Dunhams ever taken any trips abroad? The book does not say. *A Singular Woman* gives the impression that Ann's Indonesian husband, Lolo Soetoro, was just a geographer drafted into the army, a minor, unwitting part of the bloody campaign that wrested Indonesia from the Communists; and that Ann's work in that country was anthropological-humanitarian, as if for her U.S. policy were irrelevant. It certainly was not for her employers—the U.S. government and contractors thereof.

Self-styled investigative journalist Wayne Madsen reports that Madelyn Dunham, the mother of Barack's mother, Ann Dunham, who became vice president of the Bank of Hawaii soon after her arrival there, was in charge of escrow accounts. Madsen's credibility is certainly checkered. But if he is correct about which department she headed, Madelyn Dunham must have supervised the accounts that the U.S. government used to funnel money to its "gray" and "black" activities throughout Asia. Among the conduits of the CIA money through these accounts to secret CIA proprietaries was a company—Bishop, Baldwin, Rewald, Dillingham & Wong—some of whose officers were serving CIA officers. This is a company whose 1983 IRS audit the CIA stopped. Vice President Madelyn Dunham, in charge of these very matters and hence necessarily "witting" (as they say at Langley), would have had to be more than a small cog in the machine. People do not rise to such stations from one day to the next.

Again, if Madsen is correct, two photos belie the portrait of her husband Stanley Dunham, Barack's grandfather, whom young Barry called father, as an insignificant furniture salesman. One, in the early 1950s, shows Stanley with his daughter, Ann, wearing the insignia of Beirut's elite French language school, Notre Dame de Jamhour. Was the family ever in Lebanon? How did Dad get the sweater? U.S. government influence operations are a likelier explanation than the furniture business for any Lebanese connection in the 1950s. Another photo, published in a Honolulu newspaper in 1959, shows Stanley Dunham escorted by uniformed U.S. Navy officers, greeting Barack Obama, Sr., as he arrived in Hawaii from Kenya. Because Obama was among 80 other Kenyans whom CIA had chosen for sojourns in the U.S. to influence them, it is logical that he and others like him would have been placed around the country in the hands of trusted handlers. The greeting photo suggests that Dunham may well have been one of these, and hence that the Kenyan did not meet Dunham's daughter, Ann, in a classroom. This would fit the chronology: Classes started on September 26. Ann was pregnant by early November. Obama was housed at the University of Hawaii's East-West Center facility funded by the Asia Foundation, itself funded by CIA.

Anyone and everyone knew that Barack Obama, Sr., and others like him had been brought to America to be influenced. How big a part of his attractiveness to her, and hence how big a reason for the pregnancy that produced Barack, Jr., was the foreign affairs angle? The hagiographies, including *A Singular Woman*, suggest that foreign affairs were the farthest thing from her mind. Yet Ann's second child was born in a marriage to another such person at the East-West Center. The Indonesian government had sent Lolo Soetoro to the East-West Center as a "civilian employee of the Army." But when the shooting started, Soetoro went on active duty, it seems as a colonel. This was arguably the CIA's most significant covert operation, the replacement (between 1965 and 1967) of Indonesia's dictator Sukarno with the Suharto regime that lasted until 1999. Few people on the face of the earth did not realize how important a struggle this was. Suggesting as does *A Singular Woman* that a very intelligent, very married Ann Soetoro was innocent of and indifferent to the political implications of the struggle she was involved in is incredible.

After the overthrow, Ann ran a "micro-financing" project, financed by the Ford Foundation, in Indonesia's most vulnerable areas. Supervising the funding at Ford in the late '60s was Peter Geithner, whose son would eventually serve hers as U.S. secretary of the treasury. In addition to the Ford Foundation, the list of her employers is a directory of America's official, semi-official, and clandestine organs of influence: the United States Information Agency, the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank. While running a project for five years in Pakistan, she lived in Lahore's Hilton International. Nothing small time, never mind hippyish.

In sum, though the only evidence available is circumstantial, Barack Obama, Jr.'s mother, father, stepfather, grandmother, and grandfather seem to have been well connected, body and soul, with the U.S. government's then extensive and well-financed trans-public-private influence operations.

All in the Family

In the 1950s and '60s few cared where, say, the State Department or foundations such as Ford ended and the CIA began. The leading members of the U.S. government's influence network moved easily from public to private stations and vice versa. Here are a few examples. Howard P. Jones, U.S. ambassador to Indonesia between 1958 and 1965—arguably the chief planner of the coup that removed the Sukarno regime—became chancellor of the University of Hawaii's East-West Center. Ann Dunham's second husband, Lolo Soetoro, returned from the East-West Center to Jakarta to help in the struggle that the coup had begun. Another of Ann's employers, the Ford Foundation's international affairs division, was led by Stephen Cohen, who had come to Ford from the directorship of the International Association of Cultural Freedom, previously known as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which organized countless left-leaning American academics into a corps (lavishly financed by the CIA) to promote social democracy around the world, and to staff many of the councils on foreign relations that spread around America in the 1950s. Among the participants were countless actual and future college presidents, including Richard C. Gilman, who ran Occidental when young Barack Obama enrolled there in 1979. In those years, any number of companies were CIA fronts, including Business International Corporation, which gave young Obama his first job after graduation from college. Perhaps these are only coincidences. More importantly, U.S. international corporations in general had countless officers who were proud cooperators with U.S. covert activities abroad. Any serious attempt to sketch this network would result in something like an x-ray of the American ruling class's skeleton.

The point here is that this network was formed precisely to help the careers of kindred folk, while ruining those of others, and to move the requisite money and influence unaccountably, erasing evidence that it had done so. Exercising influence abroad on America's behalf—the network's founding purpose—never got in the way of playing a partisan role in American life and, of course, of taking care of its own.

As I pointed out in my book *Informing Statecraft* (1992), when Congress first authorized the U.S. government's various influence activities abroad it worried loudly and mostly sincerely that these activities might "blow back" onto American political life: The U.S. government, so went the widely accepted argument, might have to say and do all sorts of things abroad, train and deploy any number of operatives in black arts on the whole country's behalf, knowing that these activities and operatives might well be distasteful to any number of Americans at home. Because the U.S. government must not take a partisan part in U.S. domestic life—so went the argument of an era more honest than our own—it must somehow isolate its foreign influence network from domestic life. But preventing blowback was destined to be a pious, futile wish, especially since many of those in the influence network were at least as interested in pressing their vision of social democracy on America as they were in doing it to other countries. Foremost among these was Cord Meyer, who ran CIA's covert activities in "international organizations" beginning in 1954. Between 1962 and 1975 he directed or supervised all CIA covert action. Meyer explained what he was about in his book *Facing Reality* (1980).

Meyer and his upscale CIA colleagues considered themselves family members of the domestic and international Left. They believed that America's competition with Soviet Communism was to be waged by, for, and among the Left. Their strategy was to fight the Soviet fire by lighting and feeding socio-political counter-fires as close to it as possible. This meant clandestinely giving money and every imaginable form of U.S. government support to persons as far to the political and cultural left as possible, so long as they were outside Soviet operational control. American leftists were best fit to influence their

foreign counterparts this way. Paradigmatic was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which spawned and fed many "voluntary" organizations at home and abroad with U.S. influence and money. Its director, Michael Josselson, was so little distinguishable from the Communists, his leftism so anti-American, that the U.S. chapter of CCF disaffiliated in protest. Alas, CIA's fires eventually went out of control and singed American life.

Among the many U.S. organizations founded and fed by Meyer's Covert Action staff were the National Students' Association (NSA) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In the late 1950s the CIA and foundation executives like Meyer (and below them operatives like the Dunham family) were surprised when these groups were taken over by the radical elements within them and became the so-called New Left. By 1961, when Barack Obama, Jr., was born, these organizations' connections or lack thereof with Communist parties had already become irrelevant. That is because whereas old-line liberals like Meyer felt only mild disdain for what they supposed to be the American people's ignorance, whereas their vision for America was only a more complete Rooseveltian New Deal, these New Leftists had adopted, more virulently than the Communists, the Marxist analysis that American society as it exists is based on "power relationships" (economic, racial, and sexual) that they believe must be overturned entirely. In short, the New Left saw America as a cancer upon the globe and themselves as the surgeons. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this attitude.

Not all government-sponsored leftists adopted this attitude about America. Already in 1962, before the Vietnam War, Michael Harrington felt conscience—bound to lead people who called themselves "Democratic Socialists of America" out of SDS, NSA, and other organizations that had become thoroughly anti-American. By the mid-1960s these organizations, into which CIA had poured so much money, which it had sustained so energetically with its network of influence, had come entirely into the hands of upscale activists like William Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, who called themselves "Weathermen." These children of Meyer's rich, well-connected friends worked to defeat America in the Vietnam War, planted terrorist bombs, and murdered police. Other CIA-funded organizations underwent similar radicalization and internecine splits. In 1967, *Ramparts* magazine's revelation of many leftist groups' dependence on CIA caused the U.S. government to shift its funding of such organizations or their leaders to other agencies—primarily those waging the so-called "war on poverty." By the 1970s, the people whom CIA had endowed with money and prominence in American domestic life as part of its covert action abroad were grinding their ideological distinctions against one another while engaging in "community organizing" here in America.

These factions and organizations, personifying leftisms of varying virulence, bid for recruits. Young Barry Obama was one of those who affiliated pretty much with the leftward-most among them.

Racial Identity

Obama writes in *Dreams from my Father* (2005) that when his mother and half sister (Maya Soetoro) visited him at Columbia in 1982, "I instructed my mother on the various ways that foreign donors and international development organizations like the one she was working for bred dependence in the Third World." Thus by age 21 he had already chosen (emphatically enough to *instruct* his own mother) against the image of America and the world personified by the Dunham family and Cord Meyer, never mind by moderate socialist Michael Harrington, in favor of a complex of radical ideas of which "dependency theory" was probably the mildest.

The lack of first-hand material for a proper intellectual portrait of Barack Obama forces any who approach the subject to note, first, what information we do *not* have: not even a senior thesis (or any other paper) from his college days, nor even a single signed article in the law review which he formally edited. He simply never produced stuff that qualified for that academic level. All we have is a signed screed in the Columbia student paper *Sundial* imputing America's refusal to embrace nuclear disarmament to structural social flaws, and a six-page fragment in the *Harvard Law Review* attributed to him by researchers but unsigned and unacknowledged by him, which asserts an absolute right to abortion. Neither bespeaks a serious mind. We have no academic records. His "autobiographies" are of uncertain parentage.

The point here is that literally nothing we know to have been written by Barack Obama, or anything imputed to him, makes plausible the argument of James T. Kloppenberg's pretend intellectual biography, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (2010), according to which Obama is a follower of William James's and John Dewey's philosophy of "pragmatism." Whatever private thoughts Obama might have on either philosopher's arguments, neither Kloppenberg nor anyone else can cite any Obamian exegesis of them. Moreover, Kloppenberg takes Obama's statement in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) that the U.S. Constitution is merely "the way by which we argue about our future," as sufficient basis for asserting that the president is a disciple of the American Founders who, says Kloppenberg, valued liberty less than the unfettered power to do good. Of course, neither Kloppenberg nor Obama has cited, or can cite, any founder to that effect. In short, only frivolous or insincere people can take this sort of thing seriously.

What Barack Obama, mature as well as young, does give us is a set of attitudes, statements, and actions by which he identifies with some people and ideas with which he came in contact, rather than others. By default, he leaves us no choice but to understand him through these, and to treat his partial/limited/stilted/first-or-second-hand disclosures about himself as points of departure toward understandings he does not want us fully to have.

That is why Stanley Kurtz's *Radical-In-Chief* (2010, reviewed in the Winter 2010—Spring 2011 *CRB*) is so valuable. Careful to distinguish between the little we know for sure about Obama and the considerably greater amount we know about his chosen mentors and associates, the book is primarily a social-intellectual history of the left wing of the New Left, born out of old-line (poor Cord Meyer) liberalism's crack-up in the 1960s.

Young Obama identified with the extreme Left under his very first mentor, to whom he refers in *Dreams* merely as "Frank," to avoid dealing with the fact that Frank Marshall Davis was an unrepentant Communist. Davis led the young Barry, privileged from birth by American power and raised in a white/Asian/liberal environment, to identify with his father, Barack, an anti-American, corrupt, minor African intriguer of whom his own father, Onyango, was deeply ashamed. That identification was not with a real person, nor with any African family as it really was, but rather with a combination of anti-Westernism and his own ideas about African-ness. In *Dreams* he writes: "It was into my father's image, the black man, son of Africa, that I'd packed all the attributes I sought in myself." By the time Barry got to Occidental College in 1979, he had taken to calling himself Barack, and was working hard to adopt a "black" identity, but one very different from that of Africans. He was trying to make himself into an American black. But that identity was no more real than the African one.

Obama's identity as a "black" American is artificial. Neither genes nor experience equips him for the role. Yet he practiced the speech cadence, the walk, and the aggrieved-but-proudly-restrained attitude well enough to pass for one if you don't look too closely. (He described the process in *Dreams from my Father*.) Above all, he adopted the Marxist understanding of American black resentments. In short, young Barack Obama manufactured himself into a facsimile of a very peculiar black American, whose racial identity is at the service of an essentially trans-racial, anti-American ideology.

Years later, as a presidential candidate, he shielded his extensive involvement with Marxist ideas and organizations by saying: "By the end of the week [my opponent] will be accusing me of being a secret communist because I shared my toys in kindergarten. I shared my peanut butter and jelly sandwich." None of 2008's wise men had the wit to note that neither the toys nor sandwiches were being shared any more than Communist Party cards, but rather self-understandings defined by hopes and dreams both Marxist and anti-American.

In the same way, he shielded his multi-year collaboration with radical trust-fund baby Bill Ayers on the boards of the Chicago money organizations on which Ayers worked and by which he lived quite well, by stating the true but irrelevant fact that the former terrorist had committed his terrorist acts when Barack Obama was a child in Indonesia. But the Ayers with whom the adult Obama worked, of whose upscale social circle he was part, never ceased being proud of those bombings, and the adult Obama never minded that. That is because Ayers and the like-minded people with whom Obama chose to work had become a family for him, and participation in their struggles as they understood them was, he wrote, "a form of prayer for me." Prayer to what, and for what, one wonders.

"Community organizing" was the immediate family in which Obama practiced his faith. Obama tells us that he came into contact with it at the Socialist Scholars' Conference of 1983 at New York's Cooper Union, during the second semester of his senior year at Columbia. We know that afterwards he wanted nothing more than to be a community organizer. What did that mean? Stanley Kurtz details for us, panel by panel, the presenters at the conference that turned out to be Obama's life-defining experience. He also gives the full names and describes the ideas and activities of the organizers under whom Obama learned to practice his faith. Harry Boyte, who organized the New American Movement (NAM), and authored *The Backyard Revolution* (1980) and *Community is Possible* (1984), ended up as an adviser to Obama's presidential campaign. The argument between Boyte's books and Robert Fisher's *Let The People Decide* (1984) was the degree to which community organizers should conceal their commitment to transcend America's capitalist system, with Boyte arguing for greater concealment. Presenters also included James Cone, the fountainhead of black liberation theology and teacher of Jeremiah Wright, Obama's pastor for 20 years. Cone and Wright agreed that American society as constituted is inherently fascist, oppressive of black people, and argued that Martin Luther King had come around to that point of view by the end of his life.

Obama's *Dreams* mentions a "Marty Kaufman" as his principal mentor in community organizing. This, Kurtz shows, is a composite of two real people: Greg Galluzzo, an ex-priest who ran Chicago's violent United Neighborhood Organization as well as the Gamaliel Foundation, and his subordinate Jerry Kellman, who hired Obama in 1985. Both of these proud socialists were stalwarts in the Midwest Academy network that trained probably a majority of America's "community organizers." Together with Bill Ayers, Obama funded many of the network's activities through the Woods and Annenberg foundations on whose boards they served. This is also the network that produced State Senator Alice Palmer, who later gave her safe seat in the Illinois Senate to Barack Obama.

Contempt for the Common Man

In sum, Barack Obama grew intertwined with the narrow, self-referential left side of the American Left. They helped one another believe they had come up the hard way, as underprivileged but brilliant, square-jawed tribunes of the common man. Their common problem, however, is that their agendas are antagonistic to people unlike themselves, and that they cannot keep from showing their contempt for the common folk in whose name they would ride to power.

Since the days of Karl Marx's First International a century and a half ago, this very human opposition between socialist theory (egalitarianism) and socialist reality (oligarchic oppression) has bedeviled the Left. Marx laid the problem bare in his "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875). Lenin dealt with it honestly and brutally in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902)—the foundational document of Communism. By acknowledging that the Communist Party is not the common people's representative, but rather its "vanguard," Leninists were comfortable with a party responsible only to itself and to history, a party that openly demanded deference from the humans whose habits it forcibly reshaped. Communism's undeniable horrors forced the New Left to disassociate itself from *What Is to Be Done?* and once again to pretend that its socialism was neither oligarchic nor coercive, that somehow it was on the side of ordinary folks. This is a much tougher sell in the 21st century than it was in the 19th. Contemporary socialists try to explain away the common man's suspicion of them as harbingers of oligarchy, corruption, and coercion by resorting to jargon (e.g., "false consciousness" and "socio-economic anxiety"). But that is ever less convincing. This is why the movement argues so strenuously with itself about whether and how much it should dissimulate its agenda.

Which is one reason why it plays the "race card" and seizes on recruits like Barack Obama: because many black Americans' ancestors were slaves, must not any black American be, *ipso facto*, unquestionably, a member and true representative of the downtrodden? And if a skeptic should argue that this or that black man is really a representative of old, white, nasty socialism, of the Corporate State, of upscale parasites who prey on working people, it is easy enough to re-focus the argument on the skeptic's "racism." If blacks inclined to play this role did not exist, the Socialist movement would have every incentive to invent them. And in a sense it tries to invent them, through the "black studies" programs that now divert so many young Americans from useful lives into partisan service.

Obama is as close as one could imagine to a made-to-order front man for contemporary, upscale, shy-about-itself,*nouveau* socialism. From his earliest age, he shaped his dreams about himself to act out a character wholly fictitious, namely a black American from a humble background who rose up out of brilliance and merit, and who yearns to draw all of America's low-born (plus the rest of mankind) up through the same paths. But he is none of that. Equally imaginary is his vaunted understanding of and sympathy for foreign cultures. A typical multiculturalist, Obama speaks no language other than a peculiar version of English. His native language, loves, and hates are common to some of the most leftist elements of the current American ruling class.

That class knows about America only that it must be changed, and looks at the vast majority of Americans the way carpenters look at warped pieces of lumber. Barack Obama is neither more nor less than its product and agent.

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