Biography:
President Barack Obama

Born in Hawaii on August 4, 1961, Barack Hussein Obama didn’t have a perfect or traditional childhood. He was raised by his mother, grandmother, and grandfather; his parents divorced before he was born, and his Kenyan father only visited him one time. Barack Obama also lived and attended school in Indonesia for a short time when his mother remarried an Indonesian man. Obama ultimately graduated from the prestigious Ponahou School, a college preparatory program, in 1979 in Hawaii.

Although Obama’s family was not affluent, they valued education and this attitude motivated a young Barack Obama to attend prestigious universities in the continental United States. After a brief stint at Occidental College in California, Obama transferred to Columbia University and majored in Political Science with a specialization in International Relations. He graduated from Columbia in 1983 and later attended Harvard Law School, where he was elected the first African-American President of the Harvard Law Review. His education would continue to influence Obama in his early career both as a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago and as a law instructor at the University of Chicago. Barack Obama also worked at a Chicago law firm specializing in civil rights litigation and neighborhood economic development from 1993 - 2004. During this time, he also ran for, and was elected, to the State Senate of Illinois.

In addition to education, Barack Obama also values family. Although both his mother and father died at a relatively early age (his mother of ovarian cancer and his father in a car accident), Obama kept a close connection with his American grandparents and often credits them for nurturing him. In his early adulthood, Obama visited Kenya to gain a deeper perspective of his father and his Kenyan heritage. He later went on to write and publish Dreams From My Father, a personal memoir that openly portrays his childhood (including drug use as a teenager) and the challenge of being bi-racial. The book became a huge national best seller. Further, Barack Obama’s own family grew with the marriage in 1992 to Michelle Robinson, an attorney and native of Chicago. They later would have two daughters, Malia and Sasha. Family continues to be a centerpiece of the Obama household as his mother-in-law, Marian Robinson lives with the Obamas in the White House.
Politically, Barack Obama first served as a Senator in the Illinois State Senate for three terms from 1997 - 2004. Obama gained national attention (and considerable stature in the Democratic party) when he gave the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Although John Kerry was defeated by George W. Bush in that election, Barack Obama’s political career advanced when he was elected to the United States Senate in 2004 and many had said his was the most impressive speech of the convention. As a United States Senator, Barack Obama was rated with a liberal voting record but was relatively unheard from in Senate until his campaign for President. The legislative record he would boast of included bi-partisan efforts at lobbying reform and seeking more transparency in federal spending.

In 2007, he announced his presidential candidacy in Illinois in the same place as Abraham Lincoln, one of his heroes, gave the famous “A House Divided” speech. The primary season was extremely competitive with seasoned politicians such as Senator John Edwards and Senator Hillary Clinton, who would run neck and neck with Barack Obama, practically right up until the convention. His ultimate Democratic victory over her candidacy was a very big deal—a relatively unknown, first-term Senator had beaten one of the most famous names in the Democratic party. As the primary was shaking out, it became very clear it was going to be a race between Obama and Clinton—the first African American to head a major party for president, or the first woman. After securing the nomination in a tough and close race, Senator Obama and Senator Joe Biden, as his running mate, ran against the Republican candidates Senator John McCain and Governor Sarah Palin. Many domestic and foreign policy issues dominated the campaign; Obama ran on a platform of health care reform, tax reductions for the middle class, and changing direction in Iraq and Afghanistan. On November 4, 2009, Obama was elected president with 53 percent of the vote—the largest majority for a Democrat in over 40 years; the country clearly voted for his call of “change.” Obama was sworn in as the 44th President on January 20, 2009.

President Obama’s time in the presidency has been met with both praise and criticism. Key and controversial legislation include the Economic Stimulus Package and Health Care Reform. President Obama garnered some praise from the international community for his interest in reaching out to the Muslim World, while others said he was too critical of his own country—America—when speaking abroad. Setting expectations for President Obama even higher than normal in a first year
of a first term, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. Still, while popular abroad, many Americans began to have second thoughts by the end of his first year in office as his approval ratings in America dipped over such issues as national security, transparency, government intrusion in issues such as health care, and record deficit spending. While many had thought the Republican party, which lost in 2008, would be a minority party for many years to come, the 2010 mid-term elections had many Republicans buoyant about a comeback and many Democrats worried. There are no permanent majorities in America, but, still, both time and the perspective of history will reveal President Obama’s ultimate popularity.

Sources Used:
- [http://www.whitehouse.gov/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/)
- [http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/home.html](http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/home.html)