

**MENU**

U.S. PRESIDENTS

Barack Obama

44th president of the United States

FAST FACTS

NAME: Barack Hussein Obama

NICKNAME: Barry

BORN: August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii

TIME IN OFFICE: January 20, 2009, to January 20, 2017

VICE PRESIDENT: Joseph R. Biden

POLITICAL PARTY: Democrat

EARLY LIFE



PHOTOGRAPH BY RON SACHS / CNP
/ CORBIS

Barack Obama was born on August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he was raised by his mother and her parents. He was the first president born there and the first to be born after the country had 50 states.

Obama attended Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, before transferring to New York's Columbia University. He took a break from school to volunteer in Chicago, Illinois, before earning a law degree from Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After winning

election to the Illinois State Senate in 1996, Obama won a seat in the U.S. Senate in 2004 and then the presidency in 2008.

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MAKING HISTORY

A Democrat, Obama became the first African American to run for

president on a major political party's ticket. He then went on to become the first African American to be elected president of the United States. (His white mother was from Kansas; his black father from Kenya, a country in Africa.) He took office during the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression during the 1930s, when one-fourth of all workers were unemployed and people traveled the country looking for food and work. Many called the new crisis the Great Recession.





Barack Obama is sworn in as the 44th president of the United States.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAE C HONG, AP, SHUTTERSTOCK

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With help from the Democrat-controlled Congress, Obama worked to improve the economy and ultimately added jobs for 75 straight months, the longest streak in American history. But some parts of the country still struggled with poverty, and the number of people who didn't make enough money to live comfortably reached an all-time high in 2010. Anger spread when people felt left behind. The

Democrats soon lost control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and Obama struggled to pass legislation.

PRIORITIZING HEALTH CARE

Obama's biggest goal as president was to help all citizens afford health care. At the time, almost 50 million Americans didn't have health insurance, which meant that some families didn't have the money to go to the doctor. Obama wanted to change that.

Obama called his health care plan the Affordable Care Act (ACA); it later became nicknamed Obamacare. Although Republicans opposed the plan, saying it was too expensive for the government to fund, it was signed into law in 2010. But within seven minutes of the act's passage, 13 states sued the federal government for forcing individuals to buy insurance. (Under the ACA, most people were required to have health insurance or they'd have to pay a penalty.) The states claimed the new act was unconstitutional, meaning Obama couldn't make the states put it into action.

The ACA took effect in 2014 after the Supreme Court had eventually declared it constitutional. The act guaranteed access to health care options for all Americans who didn't get it through their jobs. But Republicans, who wanted less government involvement in people's lives, still didn't agree with the act. And some people who had the insurance said it was just as expensive, or more expensive, than their previous plans which were no longer available to them. The Affordable Care Act remains controversial today, with many people fighting

against it.

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FIGHTING TERRORISM

Although the economy continued to improve in the United States, Obama faced challenges in other countries. The United States was fighting two wars in the Middle Eastern countries of Afghanistan and Iraq. President George W. Bush had sent troops to Afghanistan after the terror attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001. Bush hoped to capture those responsible for the 9/11 attacks, including al Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. Bush also sent troops to Iraq in 2003, after rumors that the country was hiding dangerous weapons that the president wanted to find and destroy.

Bush's decision to attack these countries was met with general support at first, but by the time Obama became president, public opinion had changed. Some 7,000 American soldiers had died at this point, with an additional 50,000 more wounded. Many Americans wanted these wars to be over. Obama's administration experienced a victory on May 1, 2011, when a group of Navy SEALs (a special military group) acted on Obama's command to strike at a house where bin Laden was hiding. His death during the raid was a blow to al Qaeda and gave some U.S. citizens hope that progress was being made in the fight against

terrorism.

By the end of 2011, Obama had withdrawn all combat troops from Iraq. But U.S. troops were still fighting in Afghanistan by the end of his two terms, something many people disagreed with. The rise of another terrorist group in the region, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), continued the war against terrorism throughout Obama's presidency.

OPENING DOORS

Despite wars overseas, Obama reached out to other nations in hopes of maintaining peace. In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower cut ties with the island nation of Cuba because of its support for the communist Soviet Union (now Russia). Obama tried to ease those tensions by re-opening an embassy there in 2015. He also went to Hiroshima, Japan, where the United States dropped a nuclear bomb in 1945 during World War II. He was the first sitting president to visit the city since that event. For his peace efforts, in 2009 he became the fourth president to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

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SUPREME COURT SHAKE-UP

During the first two years of Obama's presidency, he appointed two new justices to the Supreme Court, the highest court in the United States. Obama replaced the retiring male justices with women: Elena

Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, the first person of Latino heritage on the high court. For the first time, the court had three female justices. Obama's new additions to the Court were part of several historic decisions, including its marriage equality ruling on June 26, 2015. The decision legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

The death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, Obama's final year of office, gave him another opportunity to add a new justice. But his Republican opponents worried that he would appoint someone who would change how the court made decisions. They declined to consider Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, saying that it was an election year. (No Supreme Court nominee had been denied a hearing during an election year before this.) The seat remained empty through the end of Obama's presidency, the longest in Supreme Court history. The remaining eight justices continued to work, but important matters were left unresolved when they deadlocked with 4-4 votes.

LASTING LEGACY

Obama left office after two terms in January 2017 with a 60 percent approval rating, higher than most presidents at the end of their presidency. He remained in Washington, D.C., where he and his wife, Michelle, started the Obama Foundation to provide mentoring and education to kids, and to award scholarships to college students.

Obama made history by being the first African American to win the presidency. As a recent president, however, his legacy is still being determined. What future presidents do with Obama's policies and how involved Obama gets in world politics will help shape how his

presidency is perceived in the future.

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FUN FACTS

- Obama was sworn into office with the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln used 148 years earlier. No other president had used it since Lincoln.
- Obama doesn't like ice cream. He blames it on a job he had at an ice-cream shop as a teenager.
- A comic book collector, Obama's favorite comic character is Spider-Man.

From the Nat Geo Kids books Our Country's Presidents by Ann Bausum and Weird But True Know-It-All: U.S. Presidents by Brianna Dumont, revised for digital by Avery Hurt

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