

# Frank Marshall Davis And Barack Obama



## Introduction to Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama

Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama are two figures whose lives intersected in significant ways, particularly in the context of American politics and culture. Frank Marshall Davis, a prolific writer and political activist, played a crucial role in the life of a young Barack Obama, influencing his views on race, identity, and politics. This article examines the relationship between Davis and Obama, the historical context of their lives, and the implications of their connection.

## The Life of Frank Marshall Davis

Frank Marshall Davis was born on December 31, 1905, in Arkansas. He was a prominent figure in the African American community, not only for his literary contributions but also for his involvement in civil rights activism. His life can be divided into several key phases:

## **Early Life and Education**

Davis grew up in a middle-class family and displayed a talent for writing from an early age. After attending the University of Arkansas, he moved to Chicago, where he became involved in the vibrant cultural scene of the 1920s. This period was marked by the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that celebrated African American culture and arts.

## **Career and Activism**

Davis worked as a journalist, poet, and editor, contributing to several publications, including the Chicago Defender. He became known for his articulate critiques of racial injustice and his advocacy for civil rights. His writings often highlighted the struggles of African Americans and called for social change. In the 1930s, he became involved with the Communist Party, which further shaped his political ideology.

## **Relocation to Hawaii**

In the late 1940s, Davis moved to Hawaii, where he continued his writing and activism. He became a mentor to many young people in the community, including Barack Obama's father figure, whom he met through his mother. Davis's influence on Obama would prove to be profound, as he instilled in him a sense of identity and purpose.

## **Barack Obama's Early Life**

Barack Obama was born on August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. He had a multicultural background, with a Kenyan father and an American mother. His upbringing was marked by a search for identity, as he navigated different cultures and experiences.

## Influence of Davis on Obama

Obama's relationship with Frank Marshall Davis began when he was a teenager. His mother, Ann Dunham, introduced him to Davis, who became a paternal figure in Obama's life. Their interactions had a lasting impact on Obama's worldview and political beliefs.

- **Mentorship:** Davis provided guidance and support to the young Obama, encouraging him to think critically about race and society.
- **Literary Influence:** Davis's writings inspired Obama to embrace his own voice and narrative, which he later articulated in his own books and speeches.
- **Political Ideology:** Davis's left-leaning views shaped Obama's understanding of social justice and community activism.

## Davis's Legacy in Obama's Political Career

As Obama ascended the political ladder, the impact of Frank Marshall Davis on his life became increasingly evident. Obama often reflected on the lessons learned from Davis in speeches and writings.

## Race and Identity

Obama's experiences as a biracial individual navigating American society echoed the struggles Davis wrote about in his work. Davis's emphasis on the importance of understanding one's racial identity

resonated deeply with Obama as he campaigned for the presidency.

## **Community Organizing**

Obama's work as a community organizer in Chicago was influenced by Davis's advocacy for grassroots movements. Davis's belief in the power of collective action to bring about social change inspired Obama to engage with communities, address their needs, and empower individuals.

## **Controversies and Criticism**

The connection between Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama has not been without controversy. Critics have occasionally pointed to Davis's associations with the Communist Party and his radical views as potential red flags in Obama's political history.

## **Guilt by Association**

Political opponents have sought to use Davis's past to question Obama's character and beliefs. They argue that Obama's relationship with Davis reflects a deeper ideological alignment with leftist politics. However, Obama has consistently emphasized that the mentorship he received from Davis was about understanding race and identity rather than adopting a specific political ideology.

## **Response from Obama**

In his autobiography, "Dreams from My Father," Obama addresses his relationship with Davis candidly. He acknowledges the influence Davis had on his thoughts about race but emphasizes that he ultimately developed his own beliefs through a diverse array of experiences and influences.

# **The Broader Context of Race in America**

Understanding the link between Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama also requires a broader examination of race relations in America. Both figures lived through pivotal moments in American history, and their experiences reflect the changing landscape of racial dynamics.

## **The Civil Rights Movement**

Davis's activism occurred during the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, which sought to dismantle systemic racism and promote equality. Obama, emerging as a leader in the 21st century, faced a different but related set of challenges as he navigated his presidency during a time of heightened racial tensions.

## **Obama's Presidency and Racial Discourse**

As the first African American president, Obama's administration confronted issues of race head-on. He often referenced the historical struggles of figures like Davis in addressing contemporary issues such as police brutality, economic disparities, and systemic inequality.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship between Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama is a fascinating intersection of history, identity, and politics. Davis's mentorship played a crucial role in shaping Obama's worldview and approach to social justice. While their connection has been scrutinized, it ultimately highlights the importance of diverse influences in the formation of political leaders. As America continues to grapple with issues of race and identity, the legacy of both Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama serves as

a reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. Their stories exemplify the power of mentorship, the complexity of identity, and the enduring impact of historical figures on contemporary society.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who was Frank Marshall Davis in relation to Barack Obama?**

Frank Marshall Davis was a mentor and a significant influence in Barack Obama's early life, particularly during his teenage years in Hawaii.

### **How did Barack Obama describe his relationship with Frank Marshall Davis?**

Barack Obama described Frank Marshall Davis as a key figure in his upbringing, who provided guidance and insight into issues of race and identity.

### **What is the significance of Frank Marshall Davis in Obama's memoir 'Dreams from My Father'?**

In 'Dreams from My Father', Obama reflects on his relationship with Davis and discusses the impact of Davis's views on race and politics in shaping his own worldview.

### **Was Frank Marshall Davis involved in politics?**

Yes, Frank Marshall Davis was an outspoken journalist and political activist, known for his leftist views and involvement in the civil rights movement.

### **What themes did Frank Marshall Davis instill in Barack Obama?**

Davis instilled themes of social justice, civil rights, and the complexities of racial identity, which influenced Obama's later political career.

## Did Frank Marshall Davis have any documented political affiliations?

Yes, Frank Marshall Davis was a member of the Communist Party USA and had associations with various leftist movements throughout his life.

## What controversies arose regarding Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama?

Controversies arose regarding Davis's political affiliations and the implications of his influence on Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign, with critics questioning Obama's associations.

## How did Obama's upbringing in Hawaii contribute to his relationship with Davis?

Obama's upbringing in Hawaii, a culturally diverse environment, allowed him to connect with Davis, who shared insights on navigating race and identity in America.

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Explore the intriguing connection between Frank Marshall Davis and Barack Obama. Uncover their shared history and influence. Discover how this relationship shaped Obama’s journey!

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