

[Click here to print](#)

MailOnline

Meet the 'chubby boy with the curly hair': New photographs of Barack Obama's childhood in Indonesia emerge

By [Mail Foreign Service](#)

Last updated at 9:29 AM on 18th March 2010

Grinning happily at the camera, this is Barry Soetoro, the cherubic little boy who went on to become America's first black president.

The charming images taken at a child's birthday party in Jakarta 40 years ago were released as Indonesia prepares to welcome Barack Obama back to the country for the first time since he became president.

The Asia-Pacific tour will also take in Australia and Guam and has been described as an 'extremely important trip' involving 'important partners', a White House spokesman said.



Chubby: Barack Obama, then known as Barry Soetoro, centre, is pictured at a classmate's birthday party in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1971

Regional security is expected to be a major focus of the visit.

Ahead of the visit, Mr Obama's former teacher Israella Pareira, described the neighbourhood's reaction to the youngster's arrival.

She said: 'His mother was white, his father was Indonesian, and here was a black, chubby boy with curly hair. It was a big question mark for us.'

But if the neighbours were initially curious, it didn't take long for them to accept Mr Obama, his American mother and Indonesian stepfather.

They now speak with pride and affection about the child who stayed for just four years but who left a big impression, before going on to make an even bigger mark in history.

The forthcoming visit will also highlight Mr Obama's multicultural upbringing, his early exposure to Islam and his lasting family connections to Indonesia, a mostly Muslim, Southeast Asian nation of some 230 million people.

Mr Obama's childhood and family history would be an interesting start in life for anyone, but are all the more striking in an American president.

The first black American head of state, he is also the first to spend a significant part of his childhood abroad since Theodore Roosevelt, who travelled widely in Europe and the Middle East with his family.

'He was exposed to American black culture, American white culture and Indonesian culture,' said Kay Ikranagara, who worked with Mr Obama's mother in Jakarta and knew the family well. 'He learned that people in all groups should be listened to.'



Popular: The man who would become president of the USA was well-liked in his neighbourhood of Menteng Dalam

No schedule has been released of his trip, which was delayed a few days so as not to clash with a crucial moment in the US health care debate. As a result, his wife and children, who were originally going to join him during their spring break, will not be accompanying him.

Born to a black Kenyan father, Obama moved to Indonesia when he was seven after his mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, married her second husband, Lolo Soetoro, whom she met when they were studying at the University of Hawaii.

His half-sister, Maya, was born in Indonesia, but after four years Dunham - her marriage slowly breaking up - sent him back to Hawaii, where he lived with his maternal grandparents and attended school.

His mother had 'learned the chasm that separated the life chances of an American from those of an Indonesian. She knew which side of the divide she wanted her child to be on,' he wrote in his autobiography 'Dreams from My Father.' 'I was an American, she decided, and my true life lay elsewhere.'

Dunham became fluent in the Indonesian language and her career as an anthropologist and development worker would often take her back to the country for long periods until her death in 1995. Last year, a book based on her dissertation on blacksmiths in Indonesian villages was published.

Mr Obama and his mother first set up home in the Menteng Dalam neighbourhood. Now a jumble of houses and narrow streets in the shadow of tower blocks, at the time it was on the edge of the city and fruit trees were landmarks.

Many families still live there, and they shared memories of the boy they knew as Barry. Slipping his way to school along muddy lanes, holding onto his mother's hand; trying salted fish from a neighbourhood shop and mistaking it for cheese; playing with the pet crocodiles that were kept in the back garden.





Just look at him now: Mr Obama delivers remarks on health insurance reform in Ohio earlier this week. First Lady Michelle Obama was pictured during her campaign to improve fitness and combat obesity in children in Washington, yesterday

'He went to everyone's house, played kites with local kids, got stuck in swamps,' said Coenraad Satja Koesoemah, who allowed Dunham to use his front room to teach English - for free - to locals. 'He was a Menteng Dalam kid, what more can I say?'

The family's life in Indonesia came less than a year after one of the most traumatic and bloody periods in the country's history - the massacre of up to 500,000 alleged communists by forces loyal to the American-backed Gen. Suharto, who took over the country on the back of the purge.

During the presidential campaign, Mr Obama's team had to fight back against false reports that he attended a hard-line Muslim boarding school while in Jakarta.

His father was raised a Muslim, but abandoned his faith before he met Dunham. His stepfather was a secular Muslim who was rarely, if ever, seen in the neighbourhood prayer house, according to locals.

Mr Obama's first school in Jakarta was a Catholic one a short walk from his home that had been built just two years earlier by a priest from the Netherlands, the country's former colonial rulers.

For the first five months, Mr Obama struggled with the Indonesian language but soon became proficient. By all accounts, he quickly became a favourite of the teachers and the pupils there, but endured some teasing on account of his looks.

Those early experiences have been cited as key moments that shaped his view on life.

'One of the reasons that he is so cool and non-combative is that he learned to deal with this teasing culture,'

said Ikranagara. 'It is a game here, and the trick is not to show you are bothered.'

Soetoro got a job working for an American oil company. Dunham found work teaching English at the American Embassy and shared company with a mixed Indonesian, expatriate academic and artsy crowd.

'After these years I can still see her clearly among the people at the party,' said John McGlynn, a long time Jakarta resident. 'More than anything she was a person who stuck out from the crowd.'

After three years, the family moved to a better neighbourhood on the other side of railroad tracks that divide that part of Jakarta. There, they rented a colonial-era house in the garden of a large villa.

When Mr Obama returns next week, he will find that this part of his past has remained much as he left it, right down to the 'Beware of the dog sign' on the fence, the bench where he used to do his homework and the art deco stained-glass windows on his old house.

Comments (19)

- [Newest](#)
- [Oldest](#)
- [Best rated](#)
- [Worst rated](#)

[View all](#)

He is not America's first black president, he is of mixed-race. America has not yet had a black president, they have a mixed-race president.

- STEVE, ESSEX, 17/3/2010 14:24

Steve, he self identifies as black. Who are you to tell him he isn't black?

- Lisa, Jacksonville, Florida, USA, 17/3/2010 16:06

Click to rate Rating 1074

[Report abuse](#)

Ted, Fort Wayne - if you don't like Barack Obama, I suggest you leave the country because he will be president for the next 8 years. He's a whole lot better than your cowboy Bush who destroyed the whole world and Mr. Obama is now fixing that mess! He's the best president America has ever had! Bring on the red arrows and I will respond!

- IRA, NY USA, 17/3/2010 14:55

Ira, can you not count? He has already been in office for a year; even if he gets re-elected in 3 years he could only serve a total of 7 more years. Thank God most Americans aren't as thick as you-- he won't get re-elected!

- Lisa, Jacksonville, Florida, USA, 17/3/2010 16:04

Click to rate Rating 1466

[Report abuse](#)

Obama WILL be a one-term President.

He's an American Blair: all sound bites and shallow promises in a good suit.

The Obamas - and those pulling the strings - are trying to bring Socialism to the US. But guess what? The US voters are finally waking up to this and Socialism ain't something we want. We only have to look over the pond to see what it, Blair and Brown have done to your once great country.

Obama? NObama!

- Lou, Iowa, USA, 17/3/2010 15:59

Click to rate Rating 2998

[Report abuse](#)

Nobama is killing us right now....concentrating on massive social welfare instead of jobs.....

- Old Gringo Stan, Texas, 17/3/2010 15:43

Click to rate Rating 2742

[Report abuse](#)

Ted, Fort Wayne - if you don't like Barack Obama, I suggest you leave the country because he will be president for the next 8 years. He's a whole lot better than your cowboy Bush who destroyed the whole world and Mr. Obama is now fixing that mess! He's the best president America has ever had! Bring on the red arrows and I will respond!

- IRA, NY USA, 17/3/2010 14:55

I can't tell if you're trying to be funny, or seriously delusional.

Obama has plunged the US into the worst debt in it's history. He's added more to the deficit than every president since Jimmy Carter COMBINED. He's done nothing to improve the economy, nothing to create jobs, and is only interested in getting his disfunctional socialist healthcare plan passed. He's paid off banks, bought car companies, and cozied up to the most anti-American dictators in the world.

If he was anyone but the president he would be facing charges of treason.

- John, Dallas, Texas, 17/3/2010 15:25

Click to rate Rating 2614

[Report abuse](#)

"He is not America's first black president, he is of mixed-race. America has not yet had a black president, they have a mixed-race president."

Oh, come on, you are nit-picking here. Obama is the first African American president, period. It does not matter what his race or background is as long as he does the job well. And, if Americans think he is a good President, they would re-elect him for another 4 years' term otherwise it would only be a one-term presidency.

- Yang, China, 17/3/2010 15:19

Click to rate Rating 1471

[Report abuse](#)

The views expressed in the contents above are those of our users and do not necessarily reflect the views of MailOnline.

- [Today's headlines](#)
- [Most Read](#)

- [Is Britain heading for a Greek tragedy? £15bn wiped off UK shares as party leaders refuse to come clean over spending blackhole](#)
- [FTSE dives after Greece's debt rating is reduced to 'junk' status](#)
- [Parents of Madeleine McCann finally tell five-year-old twins how their older sister was 'taken'](#)
- [300 urns containing 'human remains from Dignitas' are found at bottom of Lake Zurich'](#)
- [Nowhere to run: Teenage criminal caught on foot by marathon-running policewoman](#)
- [Ross Kemp captured the moment 'friendly fire' bomb killed three British soldiers](#)
- [High-ranking churchman investigated for 'having affair with farmer's wife'](#)
- [In the dock, shopkeeper who refused to put up a non-smoking warning](#)
- [Girl, 10, is 'first person' to survive sting from lethal box jellyfish](#)
- [Motorist walks into police station to report vandalism... but is told to PHONE call centre](#)
- [Boys denied school places for 'living too far away' - after council refuses to accept park short-cut](#)
- [School governor died of head injuries after 'spooked' cattle knocked him down](#)
- [Noah's Ark 'discovered' 4,000m up a mountain](#)
- [Bungling sailor used road map to navigate waters around UK... but spent a day and night sailing round Isle of Sheppey](#)
- [China executes man who stabbed eight children to death in front of their parents](#)
- [Visible from space, the giant oil slick oozing towards America's Gulf Coast](#)
- [Facebook expansion is putting users' privacy at risk, warn U.S legislators](#)
- [£5bn victory for women in low-paid council jobs](#)
- [Police chief who arrested Tory MP in bungled leaks probe claims he was forced to act after theft from Home Secretary's safe](#)
- [Malcolm X killer Thomas Hagan freed on parole](#)
- [Beekeeper dies of heart failure after his own bees attack him](#)
- [Houses will need FOUR wheelie bins under Labour recycling plans](#)
- [Alexander McQueen 'was under huge pressure at work' before being found dead in wardrobe](#)
- [Are you ready for the hottest day of the year?](#)
- [Five-minute test to halt bowel cancer](#)
- [Shell profits soar by 49%](#)
- [Australian millionairess leaves 30 pieces of silver worth just 90p to her three daughters](#)
- [MORE HEADLINES](#)
- [In the dock, shopkeeper who refused to put up a non-smoking warning](#)
- [Girl, 10, is 'first person' to survive sting from the world's most venomous creature... the lethal box jellyfish](#)
- [Motorist walks into police station to report vandalism... but is told to PHONE call centre](#)
- [Is Britain heading for a Greek tragedy? £15bn wiped off UK shares as party leaders refuse to come clean over spending blackhole](#)
- [Is this Britain's canniest woman? After eight years together couple get married and, oh yes, he's just won £56m on the lottery](#)
- ['Inhumane' betrayal of former Land Girl honoured by Brown but left to die in squalor on 'filthy' NHS ward](#)
- [Fury as '300 urns containing human remains from Dignitas suicide clinic are found at bottom of Lake Zurich'](#)
- [Today set to be HOTTEST day of the year so far, as warm spring brings colour to the countryside](#)
- ['We've found Noah's Ark!'... claim evangelical explorers on mission to snow-capped Ararat](#)
- [All at sea: Family struggle in vain to rescue car they parked on the beach... forgetting about the tide](#)
- [Parents of Madeleine McCann finally tell five-year-old twins how their older sister was 'taken'](#)
- [Global stock markets tumble amid fears Europe is failing to take control of Greece 'contagion'](#)
- [The mother with a million things to do: Teacher saves up for her dream home... by doing odd jobs for just a £1](#)
- [Bungling sailor used a road map to circumnavigate the UK... and ended up sailing round Isle of Sheppey for 36 hours](#)
- [The Swan Show fakes: BBC's One Show 'provoked Mr Asbo and pretended his mate was him'](#)
- [Asda's hi-tech price promise that guarantees the supermarket will always be cheaper than its rivals](#)
- [Teacher 'was like a man possessed as he battered swearing pupil around the head with a dumbbell'](#)
- [Ross Kemp captured the moment 'friendly fire' bomb killed three British soldiers](#)
- [The millionaire, his stable girl mistress and her £3m property battle with the betrayed wife](#)
- [Australian millionaire leaves 30 pieces of silver worth just 90p to her three daughters](#)
- [Nick Clegg made £300,000 from house in Brussels after getting £140,000 from taxpayers](#)
- [China executes man who stabbed eight children to death in front of their parents in school bloodbath](#)
- [Soldier clocked doing 143mph avoids ban 'so he can save lives in Afghanistan'](#)
- [Thousands of women win 'payout of up to £30m' in landmark case on pay inequality](#)
- [MOST READ IN DETAIL](#)

```
<!-- Begin: AdBrite, Generated: 2010-04-12 7:28:05 -->
<script type="text/javascript">
var AdBrite_Title_Color = '0000FF';
var AdBrite_Text_Color = '000000';
var AdBrite_Background_Color =
'FFFFFF';
var AdBrite_Border_Color = 'CCCCCC';
var AdBrite_URL_Color = '008000';
try{var
AdBrite_Iframe=window.top!=window.self?2:1;var
AdBrite_Referrer=document.referrer=='?'
document.location:document.referrer;AdBrite_Referrer=encodeURIComponent(Ad
```

Find this story at www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1258543/Meet-chubby-boy-curly-hair-New-photographs-Barack-Obamas-childhood-Indonesia-emerge.html

Published by Associated Newspapers Ltd
Part of the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday & Metro Media Group

[© Associated Newspapers Ltd](#)