

# Punahou School

## Barack Obama '79

On Nov. 6, 2012, Barack H. Obama II '79 was re-elected as president of the United States. He was sworn into his second term on Jan. 21, 2013.

### Making History

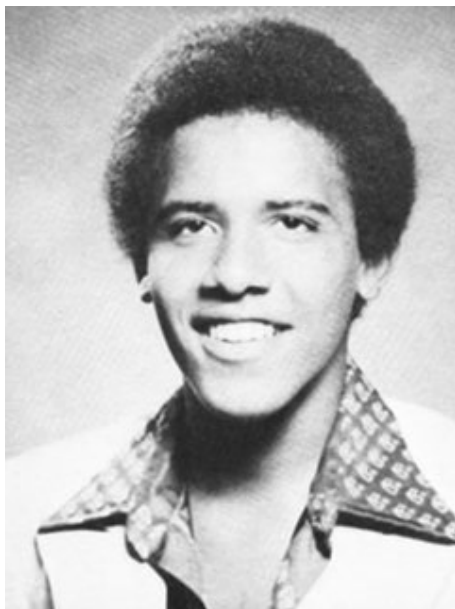
On Jan. 20, 2009, on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C., Obama first took the oath of office to become the 44th President of the United States.

The ceremony, which drew an estimated 1.8 million people, was the focus of a weeklong flurry of activities and events. Alumni, faculty and staff, parents and students attended the swearing-in ceremony, and the Punahou Marching Band, accompanied by JROTC cadets and cheerleaders, held the honor of civilian lead in the Inaugural Parade.



Punahou gatherings in Washington, D.C., included alumni celebrations and a reception at the home of Punahou Trustee Steve Case '76. On the school campus, students watched a live broadcast of President Obama's inaugural speech and took part in a K – 5 parade and pep rally. The celebrations highlighted the journey of a former Punahou student known as Barry.

### Early Years



Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawai'i on August 4, 1961. His father was an economist from Kenya and his mother a Kansas-born university student. At 10, Obama enrolled as a fifth-grade student at Punahou School after living in Indonesia for four years. His mother, Stanley Ann Dunham Soetoro, decided to send her son back to Honolulu so that he could attend Punahou School, known for its rigorous academic curriculum.

Obama participated in a number of co-curricular activities at Punahou, including writing for *Ka Wai Ola*, the high school literary journal, and playing on the junior varsity and varsity basketball teams. He was a member of Punahou's 1979 State Championship varsity basketball team, which included well-known Punahou alumni John Kamana (Atlanta Falcons and Los Angeles Rams) and Mark Tuinei (Dallas Cowboys).

Obama graduated from Punahou School in 1979. While he would establish his career beyond Hawai'i, the President occasionally reflects on his student years at Punahou School.

### **An Influential Teacher**

In May 2011, President Obama hosted the National and State Teachers of the Year Award at the White House, and cited the late Mabel Hefty, his Punahou fifth-grade teacher, as an important influence.

"When I walked into Ms. Hefty's classroom for the first time, I was a new kid who had been living overseas for a few years, had a funny name nobody could pronounce. But she didn't let me withdraw into myself. She helped me believe that I had something special to say. She made me feel special. She reinforced the sense of empathy and thoughtfulness that my mother and my grandparents had tried hard to instill in me – and that's a lesson that I still carry with me as President. Ms. Hefty is no longer with us, but I often think about her and how much of a difference she made in my life."



## A Memorable Ethics Class

In his 2011 Back-to-School Speech to students at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in Washington, D.C., Obama mentions an inspiring eighth-grade ethics class he took, a course that is still an important part of the Punahou curriculum.

"I still remember that ethics class, all these years later. I remember the way it made me think. I remember being asked questions like: What matters in life? Or, what does it mean to treat other people with dignity and respect? What does it mean to live in a diverse nation, where not everybody looks like you do, or thinks like you do, or comes from the same neighborhood as you do? How do we figure out how to get along?"

"Each of these questions led to new questions. And I didn't always know the right answers, but those discussions and that process of discovery – those things have lasted. Those things are still with me today. Every day, I'm thinking about those same issues as I try to lead this nation."

## An Enduring Connection

Over the years, Obama has maintained a connection with his alma mater. In a 1999 article written for the Punahou School alumni magazine, Obama expressed how his formative years in Hawai'i continued to influence his work in the political field.

"I believe that the carefree childhood I experienced in Hawaii, and the wonderful education I received at Punahou, should not be left to the luck of the draw, but should rather be every child's birthright," he wrote. He went on to note that Hawai'i's "spirit of tolerance" helped to inspire his own ambition to help shape a "country in which we can appreciate differences of race and religion and ethnicity, while still insisting on our common humanity."

In December 2004 at Thurston Memorial Chapel, he spoke with students about the value and importance of public service. Then Senator-elect Obama also reflected on his own experiences as a student at Punahou, recalling how "there was something about this school that embraced me, gave me support and encouragement, and allowed me to grow and prosper." He went on to encourage students to "dream big dreams" and make the most of their educational opportunities.

During informal visits to campus in 2008, Obama reconnected with his former teammates on the basketball court, playing at Thurston PE Complex.

## Years Attended Punahou

1971 (5th grade) to 1979 (12th grade)

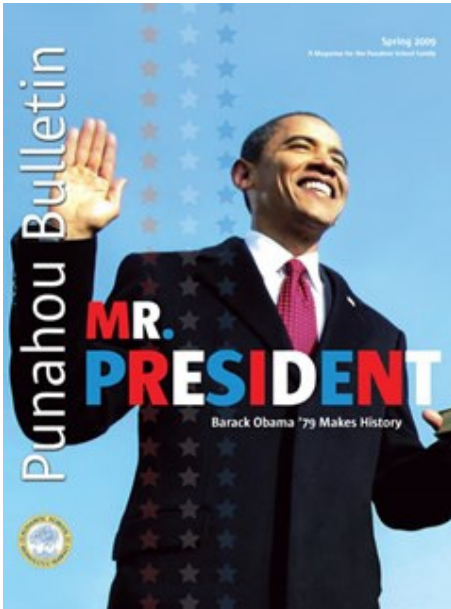
## Co-curricular Activities

1975 Intermediate Football – 8th grade  
 1976 Boys' Chorus One – 9th grade  
 1977 Concert Choir – 10th grade  
 1977 Junior Varsity Basketball – 10th grade  
 1978 Varsity A Basketball  
 1979 Varsity AA Basketball (state champions)  
 1979 Ka Wai Ola (Punahou's high school literary journal)



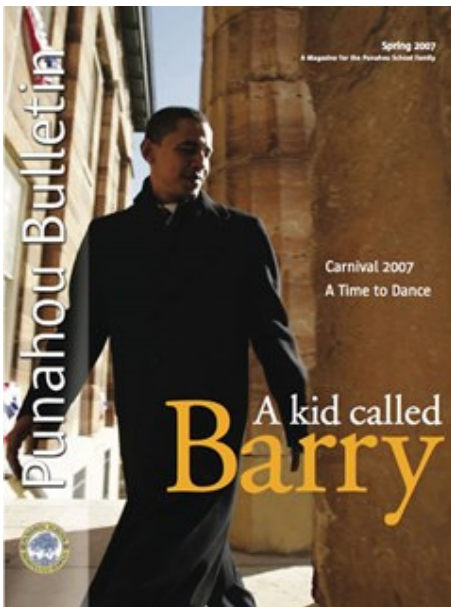
## Punahou Bulletin

Spring 2009



- Performing for the President, and the World (Spring 2013)
- Hana Hou! (Spring 2013)
- President Obama '79 Wins Re-election (Winter 2012)
- The Shaka Heard Round the World (Spring 2009)
- Then President-Elect Barack Obama '79 Returns to Punahou (Spring 2009)
- We Were All There: Election Night (Winter 2008)
- A Kid Called Barry (Spring 2007)
- Obama Encourages Students to "Dream Big" (Spring 2005)
- A Life's Calling to Public Service (Fall 1999)

Spring 2007



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