

What a defining moment in History! Who would have ever thought that the great giant, the United States of America would be ready for a female nominee vying for president, none the less, a Black man vying for President of this great nation? I never imagined that in my lifetime I would be able to witness such a historical moment! The pride and joy that overwhelms me is truly leading me to aspire to even greater things.

When the term African-American was formulated, it seems to have been specifically designed for President Barack Hussein Obama. He truly exemplifies the full definition of an African-American, because he is the son of an African Man from a small village in Kenya, Africa and an American Woman of English descent from Wichita, Kansas. In this essay I will attempt to discuss the life of President Barack Obama and how the leadership characteristics he possesses can be used to help me be successful in my academic pursuits and ultimately assist me as a future leader of the Virgin Islands.

Often times, when students do not work to their full potential, certain achievements are not met and are on the road to destruction, single parents in the Virgin Islands would blame the “system” for their child not being successful. However, the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America and the first African-American to be the President of the United States is perhaps a product of the system!

President Obama’s parents were married on February 2, 1961, and he was born later that year on August 4, 1961. His parents separated when he was two years old, and they divorced in 1964. Obama's father then returned to Kenya and saw his son only once more before dying in an automobile accident in 1982. Herein, President Obama’s mother became that single parent! The typical story of a single parents’ challenge began to set in. Shortly after Stanley Ann Dunham’s divorce to Barack Obama Sr., she remarried to an Indonesian student who was studying in Hawaii and they later moved to Indonesia. From ages six to ten, Obama attended local schools in Jakarta, the capital and largest city in Indonesia. By 1971, President Barack Obama finally got some stability in his life, he returned to Honolulu to live with his maternal grandparents, Madelyn and Stanley Armour Dunham. There he attended a private college preparatory school, from the fifth grade until his graduation from high school in 1979. President Obama's mother returned to Hawaii in 1972 and remained there until 1977. Then once again she relocated to Indonesia to work as an anthropological field worker, and finally returned back to Hawaii in 1994 and lived there for one year before dying of ovarian cancer. What an obstacle course and rough childhood that President Barack Obama faced, like so many children coming from single parent homes! Nevertheless, his supportive grandparents saw to it that he was educated and raised in a loving and nurturing environment. Yet as a young adult, President Obama struggled with his multiracial heritage of having a Black father and a White mother. Faced with this identity issue and to push questions of who he was out of his mind, President Barack Obama turned to drug use as a young teenager. This was his greatest failure!

Upon graduation from high school, he attended Occidental College, a small, private, coeducational liberal arts college located in Los Angeles, California. After two years of being

there, he transferred to Columbia University in New York. There he majored in political science with a specialization in international relations and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1983. President Obama later moved to Chicago. I would imagine that it was here that his philanthropist nature began to flow and his leadership style evolved. He was hired as director of the Developing Communities Project, a church-based community organization. He worked there as the director and community organizer for three years wherein he helped set up a job training program, a college preparatory tutoring program, and a tenants' rights organization for the people living there.

Still struggling with his identity and wanting to touch bases with his father's people, President Barack Obama in 1988 went to Kenya to visit his father's relatives for three weeks. Upon his return he later enrolled in Harvard Law School but spent summers in Chicago. There in 1989 he met Michelle Robinson, they became engaged in 1991 and were married in 1992. Together they have two daughters, Malia Ann, born in 1998 and Natasha ("Sasha") born in 2001. By this time in his life, things seemed to be shaping up quite well for Mr. President! In 1991 he graduated magna cum laude with a Juris Doctor degree and gained national media attention as the first black president of the Harvard Law Review which then led to a publishing contract, a personal memoir, a book about race relations, published in 1995, "Dreams from My Father." Later on in 2006, still in search of unanswered questions, he once again visited his father's birthplace, a village in rural western Kenya.

As he continued on pondering about his life, he continued to work hard and pushed on to achieve great milestones. In 1996 he was elected to the Illinois Senate. In his concern for the less fortunate, he sponsored a law increasing tax credits for low-income workers, negotiated welfare reform, and promoted increased subsidies for childcare. His constituents saw the need for him to serve and they reelected him in 1998 and again in 2002. By 2004 he resigned his seat in the Illinois Senate to campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Quite a scholar indeed, and feeling more comfortable with himself, in July 2004, he wrote and delivered the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts. Did the nation see this young African-American for who he was? Did his leadership role run its course? Of course, he was the highlight of the convention and this opportunity to speak elevated his status as a star in the Democratic Party. By 2005 he was sworn in as the fifth African American Senator in U.S. history and the third to have been popularly elected. He was the only Senate member of the Congressional Black Caucus. What an outstanding honor and he surely was an individual who was worth keeping your eyes on, for that prize!

The moment of that defining historical moment finally came! On February 10, 2007, Obama announced his candidacy for President of the United States in front of the Old State Capitol building in Springfield, Illinois. A large number of candidates entered the Democratic Party presidential primaries. The field narrowed between Obama and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Obama gained a steady lead and became the presidential nominee for the Democrat party. President Obama then focused on the general election against the Republican nominee, Senator

John McCain. Three Presidential debates later, and in November of 2008, President Obama won the presidency with 52.9% of the popular vote to McCain's 45.7% and 365 electoral votes to 173. We now had our victory, the first African American president, as well as the first born in Hawaii. As I stayed up late that evening, watching television and anticipating his speech, the President of the United States of America delivered his victory speech before thousands of supporters in Grant Park in Chicago and he proclaimed that "change has come to America!" This defining moment once again, surely sent shivers up and down my spine.

The inauguration of Barack Obama with his wife, Michelle, and daughters, Malia Ann and Natasha, by his side, and Joe Biden as Vice President, took place on January 20, 2009. Of course, all eyes and ears were on President Barack Obama now, because "Corporate America" wanted to scrutinize someone who in no shape, form or fashion looked anything like them as a nation or as a people. This made his job relatively harder, but he knew what he was up against, because he faced that road once before as a struggling teenager. The first 100 days of Barack Obama's presidency included his signing into law a \$787 billion economic stimulus package on February 17, 2009. The bill included increased federal spending, aid to states, and tax reductions.

Is he being successful? In my opinion, and at my age, I have never seen a more active President of the United States. Is he willing to make that change and do away with the status quo of helping the wealthy, white Americans? Why, of course! Is America pleased with some of his actions so far? I would have to say, perhaps the middle class of America are. This is why on his 100<sup>th</sup> day of office, he was rated as a B+ by the political strategists as opposed to an A+ which he rightfully deserves. Maybe now the middle class society of America would not have to be the "ham" between the two slices of bread, being the rich and wealthy on the top and the less fortunate or poor on the bottom.

The leadership characteristics that I have seen President Barack Obama possess thus far that can be used to help me be successful in my academic pursuits and ultimately assist me as a future leader of the Virgin Islands would be that his style of leadership draws on humans best resources, being thoughtful, well informed, active, creative, and respectful to others in helping to deal with problems. As a young Virgin Islander, the opportunity to attend an institution of higher learning is fast approaching. As I think about where I plan to be within the next couple of years, I think about what fascinates me most and I think about how I would be able to invest or contribute to the community I live in. Knowing that there are a multitude of opportunities available for me, I think that leaving my family and my paradise island home to attend college on the mainland, will foster my ongoing quest for new and inspiring knowledge and help me explore a future I can be passionate about.

Through my personal experiences and my academic interests I have gained confidence and leadership skills and a passion for my environment, my community and my studies in math and science. It is in my opinion, that one of the most exciting fields of study that encompasses science and art, mathematics and creativity, models and approximations, is the field of Engineering. In engineering you have to be able to think critically, using creativity to solve problems that will literally change life for the betterment of mankind. Therefore, my future

aspiration is to become one of the best Chemical or Biomedical/Biomolecular Engineers in anticipation of eventually pursuing a degree in medicine.

As a Math & Science Magnet Honors student, with a rigorous course load of classes, I entered into High School in 2005 with the hopes and aspirations of taken on a leadership role and beginning a community-oriented service project. With this perspective in mind I decided to organize a community service group entitled, “Trashbusters.” I quickly realized that a significant part of effective leadership is the close connection between the leader and the follower, which often determines the success of the leader's mission. My mission with the “Trashbusters” group is “In our quest for a cleaner St. Croix, remember, not because you live on an island, means that it should look like a jungle.” The “Trashbusters” group is comprised of forty high school committed and dedicated students who would faithfully attend clean up sessions at the Altona Lagoon Site in Christiansted, St. Croix. Most recently I received the Kaleidoscope of “Youth Service” Award for initiating this outstanding project.

As I reflect on the opportunity to be the Founder/President and Group Leader of this project for the past four years, I realized that despite different opinions, a leader and followers can work together to complement each other as we move toward the mission of the group.

Throughout my high school years, I have served in various leadership roles to include: Vice – President of my Senior class, President of the Close-Up Club, Lead Stilt Walker of the “Guardians of Culture” Moko Jumbies and Head Altar Server of the Holy Cross Catholic Church. I have learned over the years that ideas are what basically mobilize people! Every leader must explain the concept behind a decision or act, and that idea may well take on a life of its own. Identifying a situation, organizing, and leading like-minded friends and allies in the service of shared interests is how leaders are born! The idea of “Trashbusters” mobilized many of my classmates and galvanized them to join in an action for shared benefit, a cleaner St. Croix and community service hours to gain before graduation.

The essence of leadership shares a reflection of communicating with many types of people and developing an appreciation of human diversity. It does not mean doing everything by ourselves, any more than it means acting only when it serves our immediate, narrowly defined self-interest. A true sign of leadership is a commitment and an engagement of joining with others rather than going our own way. Leadership draws on humans best resources, being thoughtful, well informed, active, creative, and respectful to others in helping to deal with problems.

I truly hope that as an up and coming young leader, I can open myself to the world's changes allowing me to compare and contrast my cultural heritage, language, beliefs, customs, philosophies, and ways of living of other people. A leader's challenge of globalization is to reach out to as many people as possible therefore the changing world calls for leaders who will react openly to the introduction of new cultural identities and diversities and who will face ethical issues responsibly. Developing a leadership style in response to global awareness, diversity, and ethics will give young leaders like President Barack Obama and myself, an up and coming young leader, an edge as we build relationships with people from all over the world.

I can now ask the question, is the Virgin Islands truly ready for up and coming young, intellectual leaders like myself, or are we willing to accept the status quo that we have witnessed time, and time again? Am I going to be able to return back to my island home that has nurtured and educated me, to be able to serve my community with all of my qualifications or would I have to seek a political position to serve at the mercy of a Governor who perhaps does not share the same philosophy or ideology as myself? In order to make the Virgin Islands a better place, we need to stop the brain drain and return our brightest minds to solve the problems we have here, not educate them and kiss them good-bye to solve other nations' issues!

I truly hope this essay justifies important and relevant information which explores and discusses the life of President Barack Obama and how the leadership characteristics he possesses can be used to help me be successful in my academic pursuits and ultimately assist me as a future leader of the Virgin Islands.

Given my excellent capabilities, organizational skills and servant leadership for school and community efforts and other important components that illustrate who I am as a high school student, my passion for learning and the path that I will take to ensure my future as an outstanding Virgin Islander, I anticipate graduating from College in May of 2013 and I plan to continue to serve in my community because it is only with everyone contributing to worthy causes, will our community achieve the best of all given situations. As long as I am able to assist, I will serve and I will lead!