



American Thinker

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May 15, 2012

Now about Obama's Teenage Years!

By [Jack Cashill](#)

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Now that it has been established that a candidate's teenage years help define the man to come, it might be time to take a new look at the adolescent Obama and his then-mentor, the late Frank Marshall Davis.

I would guess that not one Obama voter out of one hundred could identify Davis by name, and I doubt if one media [person](#) out of a thousand has read his memoir, *Living the Blues*. This is unfortunate on any number of levels. For one, Davis's book captures the ebb and flow of 20th-century black American life as well as any ever written.

For another, no one individual influenced the young Obama more than Davis has. This combination should have made Davis a staple of the multicultural canon and a pin-up in every reporter's cubicle, but it did neither. Like Boo Radley, Davis remains in the shadows for one reason: the media fear what the light would do to him. For all of Davis's gifts, and they are many, his lifelong flirtation with darkness makes him a little too creepy for his own display case in the Barack Obama presidential library.

The light is beginning to shine. David Maraniss is sure to address the Davis legacy in his much-discussed book due out in June, *Barack Obama: The Story*. Davis is the title character of Paul Kengor's new book, due out in July, *The Communist*. And producer Joel Gilbert has made Davis the [centerpiece](#) of his provocative and highly entertaining new [documentary](#), *Dreams from My Real Father: A Story of Reds and Deception*.

Gilbert argues that it is Davis who is the "real" father in question, not Barack Obama, Sr., as

assumed. This argument, which I explore in my 2011 book, *Deconstructing Obama*, is not as far-fetched as it might sound. What drew my interest initially was a poem published under Obama's name when he was an Occidental College sophomore, titled "Pop."

To show how truly blinded by the Obama aura the media were during the 2008 campaign, all critics who reviewed the poem insisted it was about his grandfather, Stanley Dunham. Rebecca Mead, for instance, writing in the *New Yorker*, unhesitatingly describes the poem as a "loving if slightly jaded portrait of Obama's maternal grandfather." Biographer David Remnick makes the same point: "Pop," he says as though a given, "clearly reflects Obama's relationship with his grandfather Stanley Dunham."

At least a few critics have seen in the poem an early flowering -- please! -- of Obama's inherent [progressive](#) decency. Writes poet Ian McMillan in the U.K. *Guardian*, "There's a humanity in the poem, a sense of family values and shared cultural concerns that give us a hint of the Democrat to come."

There may be family values on display in the poem -- after all, the title "Pop" does have implications of paternity -- but those values have nothing to do with "Gramps," Stanley Dunham. As Gilbert argues, and as I do in my book, the poem is inarguably about Obama's relationship with Davis. Davis almost certainly wrote the poem as well, giving Obama a head start on his career as a literary scam artist. Six years later, Davis wrote a poem under his own name eerily similar in both style and subject matter called "To a Young Man." Tellingly, perhaps, the Davis family denied me permission to reprint the poem in my book.

That much said, given the available evidence, I failed to convince myself that Davis was Obama's real father. Through the use of visuals, Gilbert has made me rethink my resistance. He has done an

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excellent job of gathering archival footage on Davis and comparing him physically to Obama -- the same height, the same build, the same smile, the same aging spots on the face, the same addiction to tobacco.

To explain the relationship between Obama and Davis, Gilbert tells a highly involved tale based, as he admits, "on reasoned logic, speculation, and approximated conversations." As a structural device, he has an Obama imitator narrate the documentary as if he were reading from the book, *Dreams from My Real Father*. This device works well in the telling of the story, but it does not help the viewer differentiate between speculation and fact.

Without having to document sources, the faux Obama is able to tell a seamless tale of intrigue and deception. To be sure, the story will test the gag reflex of the people at Media Matters, but it has an internal logic that works and -- who knows? -- may even be accurate. Given the holes in the Obama narrative, I cannot say for sure that Gilbert is wrong. He is certainly very creative.

The most speculative side of the tale involves Stanley Dunham, who emerges in the story as a CIA case agent, assigned first to Seattle and then to Hawaii to welcome incoming African students. The CIA's intent at the time, and this is legit, was to woo educated Africans away from the Soviet sphere.

Dunham met Davis in Hawaii, so Gilbert speculates, in order to keep an eye on local communists, which Davis surely was. In 1948, two years after his marriage to Helen Canfield, a white socialite eighteen years his junior, Davis had left his job and growing reputation behind and headed for Hawaii. In *Living the Blues*, he credits an article in a women's magazine for the inspiration to leave. Helen read it wistfully, shared her thoughts with Davis, and he promptly "suggested we investigate."

This is all nonsense. As Gilbert details, the CPUSA sent Davis to Hawaii to help orchestrate a crippling strike by the communist-led longshoreman's union.

Into this unholy scenario entered rebellious teenager Stanley Ann Dunham, stage left. A pornographer and photographer of nudes, Davis must have felt like he won the Lotto. I will not spoil the ending here for the potential viewer, nor can I guarantee its validity of the narrative, but this is the most fascinating video treatment of the Obama story that I have yet to see.

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