
The Editorial

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Born in the U.S.A.

By the Editors

Pres. Barack Obama has a birthday coming up, a week from Tuesday. We hope he takes the day off—or even the whole week, the briefest of respites from his busy schedule of truncating our liberties while exhausting both the public coffers and our patience. The president’s birthday comes to mind because we recently spent some time looking at a photograph of his birth certificate, being held by Joe Miller of Factcheck.org, who took the time to examine it. President Obama was born on August 4, 1961, at 7:24 p.m. in Honolulu County, Hawaii, on the island of Oahu. The serial number on his birth certificate is 010641. Baby Barack’s birth was not heralded, as some of his partisans have suggested, by a star in the east, but it was heralded by the *Honolulu Star*, as well as the *Honolulu Advertiser*, each of which published birth announcements for young Mr. Obama.

Much foolishness has become attached to the question of President Obama’s place of birth, and a few misguided souls among the Right have indulged it. The myth that Barack Obama is ineligible to be president represents the hunt for a magic bullet that will make all the unpleasant complications of his election and presidency disappear. We are used to seeing conspiracy theories from the Left, for instance among the one in three Democrats who believe that 9/11 was an inside job conducted with the foreknowledge of the Bush administration. We’ve seen everything under the sun blamed on Dick Cheney and Halliburton, and Rosie O’Donnell has given us much mirth with her metallurgical expertise, while Andrew Sullivan has beclowned himself and tarnished the good name of *The Atlantic* with his investigation into the “real” parentage of Trig Palin. Most notable, the Iraq War summoned the craziness in a big way, and there are those who still shudder over their espressos at the mention of the Carlyle Group. And there is a fair amount of crossover between those fixated on Obama’s birth certificate and the 9/11 “truthers” — lawyer Phil Berg, for instance, is a player in both worlds. There is nothing that President Obama’s coterie would enjoy more than to see the responsible Right become a mirror image of the loopy Left circa 2003.

The birth-certificate business is not a uniquely conservative phenomenon; the allegation that Obama was born in Kenya seems to have originated with a Hillary Clinton supporter at a blog called The Blue State. Either way, this fantasy is not particularly widespread within the conservative movement, but it has attracted enough interest that it needs to be addressed.

The fundamental fiction is that Obama has refused to release his “real” birth certificate. This is untrue. The document that Obama has made available is the document that Hawaiian authorities issue when they are asked for a birth certificate. There is no secondary document cloaked in darkness, only the state records that are used to generate birth certificates when they are requested.

If one applies for a United States passport, the passport office will demand a birth certificate. It defines this as an official document bearing “your full name, the full name of your parent(s), date

and place of birth, sex, date the birth record was filed, and the seal or other certification of the official custodian of such records.” The Hawaiian birth certificate President Obama has produced—the document is formally known as a “certificate of live birth”—bears that information. It has been inspected by reporters, and several state officials have confirmed that the information in permanent state records is identical to that on the president’s birth certificate—which is precisely what one expects, of course, since the state records are used to generate those documents when they are requested. In other words, what President Obama has produced is the “real” birth certificate of myth and lore. The director of Hawaii’s health department and the registrar of records each has personally verified that the information on Obama’s birth certificate is identical to that in the state’s records, the so-called vault copy. Given that fact, we are loath even to engage the fanciful notion that President Obama was born elsewhere, contrary to the information on his birth certificate, but we note for the record that his mother was a native of Kansas, whose residents have been citizens of the United States for a very long time, and whose children are citizens of the United States as well.

The attention paid to President Obama’s place of birth is not unprecedented. In fact, it may be the only thing President Obama has in common with Pres. Chester Arthur, whose opponents whispered that he had been born in Canada. A number of unsuccessful presidential candidates—George Romney, Barry Goldwater, and Lowell Weicker among them—actually were born outside of the United States (in Mexico, the Arizona Territory, and Paris, respectively) to American parents and thereby into American citizenship. If the conspiracy theorists have evidence that President Obama went through the naturalization process, let them show it. But there is no such evidence, because this theory is based on unreality, as two minutes’ examining the claims of its proponents reveals. The hallmark of a conspiracy theory is that a lack of evidence for the theory is taken as yet more evidence for the theory. Indeed, the maddening thing about dealing with conspiracy hobbyists of this or any sort is the ever-shifting nature of their argument and their alleged evidence: *Never mind the birth certificate, his step-grandmother said he was born in Kenya!* (No, she didn’t.)

One of the unfortunate consequences of this red-herring discussion is that there are plenty of questions about Obama’s background and history that we would like to have answered. In spite of two books of memoirs, there remain murky areas in his biography. And when it comes to those college transcripts, count us among those who’d love to know whether Dr. Bailout ever took an advanced economics class and how he performed in it.

Barack Obama may prefer European-style socialized health care. He may consider himself a citizen of the Earth and sometimes address his audiences as “people of the world,” as though he were born not in another country but on another planet. Like Bruce Springsteen, he has a lot of bad political ideas; but he was born in the U.S.A.

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