

A New Dawn

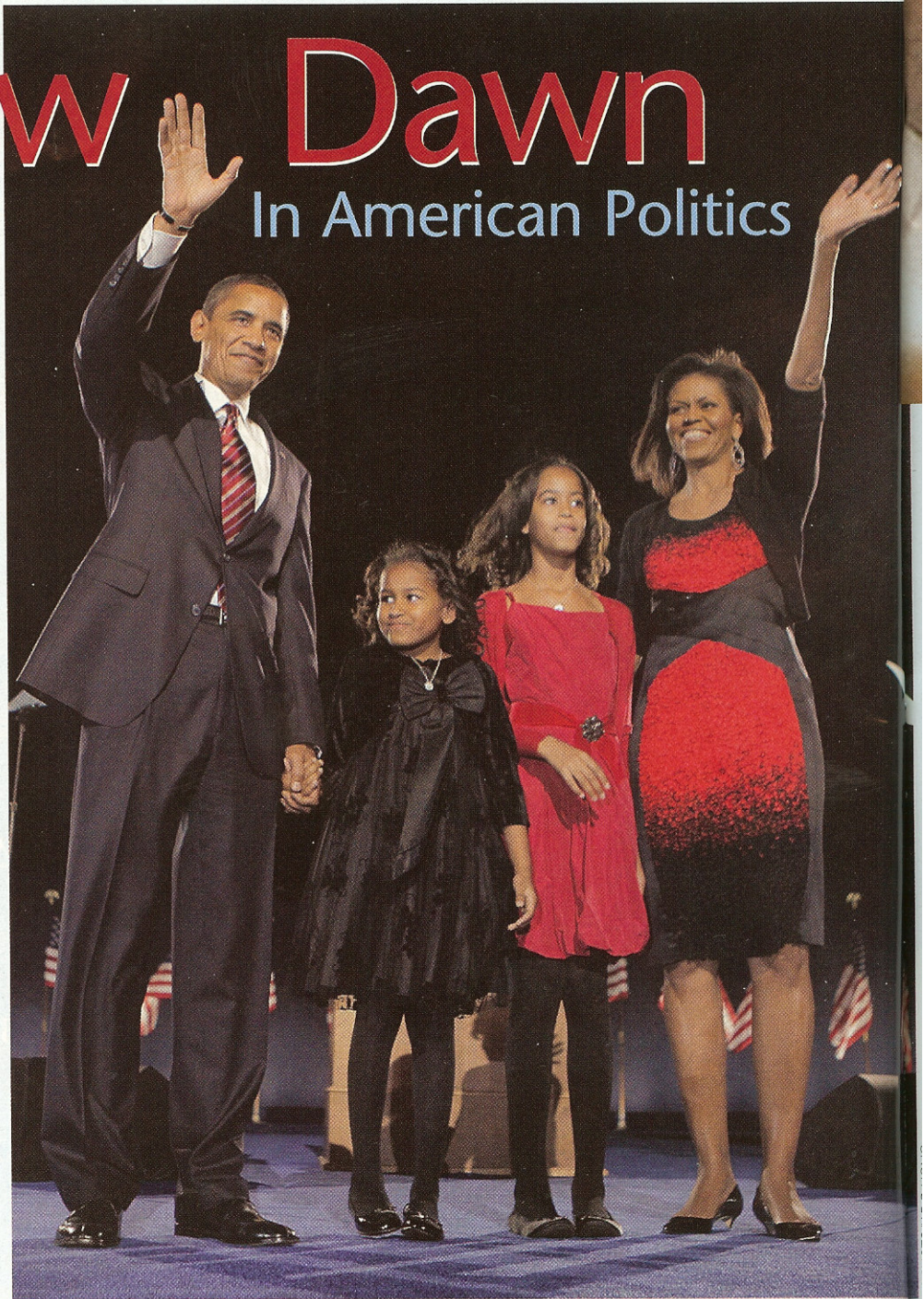
In American Politics

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer."

The opening remarks from President-Elect Barack Obama's victory speech in Grant Park in Chicago on November 4, 2008.

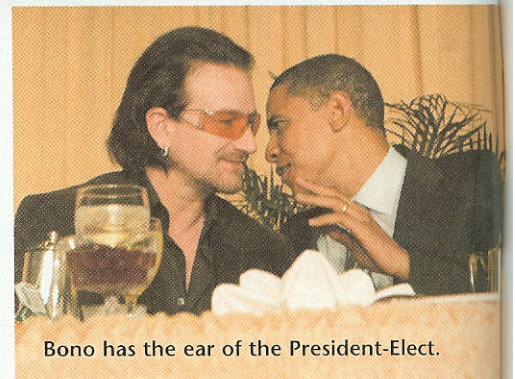
Barack Hussein Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States on Tuesday, November 4, after he defeated Republican candidate John McCain. On a night of high emotion across the country and around the world, Obama became the first African-American to attain to the office of President. He also joins a long list of commanders-in-chief who claim Irish heritage.

So where exactly are Obama's roots in the old country, and how can we claim him as one of the 40 million Americans with Irish ancestry? He may not spell his name O'Bama, or have red hair and a ruddy complexion, but there is an Irish strain in the new President's DNA. The woman who unearthed the green branch in Obama's family tree was Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak (born a Smolenyak and married a Smolenyak!), a genealogist and author of four books on family history research. "I was interested in Obama's roots on his mother's side. It started with the inscriptions on tombstones in Ohio with the last name Kearney. Being Irish-American myself, I was eager to see if

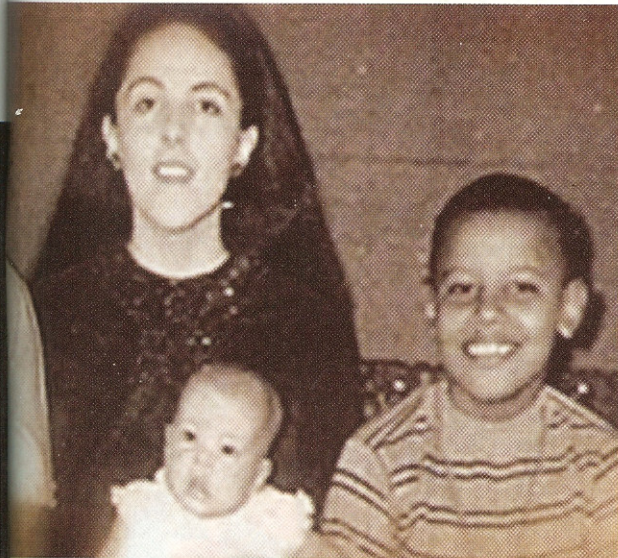


there was any connection. The Kearney side has deep American roots; they stopped coming to America about the time Hillary [Clinton's] family arrived," Smolenyak Smolenyak told *Irish America* recently. "Eventually I was able to trace it back to Fulmoth Kearney, Obama's third great-grandfather who came from a tiny town called Moneygall in Co. Offaly, Ireland."

Smolenyak Smolenyak, who also dis-



Bono has the ear of the President-Elect.



OPPOSITE PG TOP: President-elect Barack Obama with wife Michelle and daughters, Malia, 7, and Sasha, 10, at the election night rally in Chicago. **Left:** A young Barack with his mother and sister Moya.

BELOW: Roger Kearney, cousin of Barack Obama at Compton Cemetery in Fayette County Ohio, location of the tombstone of Obama's Kearney ancestor.



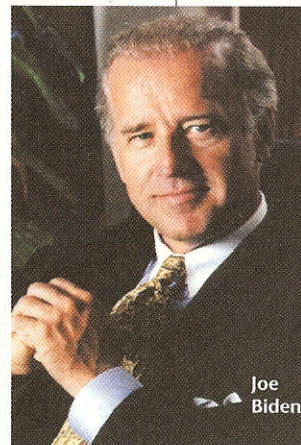
covered the true fate of Annie Moore, received a congratulatory letter from Obama before the Annie Moore commemoration ceremony (see page 23). In it he wrote: "The idea of honoring those who came before you by sacrificing on behalf of those who follow is at the heart of the American experience. Irish Americans like your ancestors, and mine from County Offaly, understood this well. And because of that understanding and that spirit, America has led the world through great challenges over the last century. Now is our time to lead again. Together, we can overcome the challenges of our time with the same spirit and resoluteness that carried Annie Moore to our shores."

Reaction from Irish-Americans since the election has been effusive. In an op-ed in *The New York Times* just after the election, Maureen Dowd wrote about the feeling on the ground in Washington: "Americans all over the place were jumping for joy, including the block I had been on in front of the White House, where they were singing: 'Na, na, na, na. Hey, hey, hey. Goodbye.'"

Senator Ted Kennedy released a statement heralding Obama's win as a changing of the guard. "They understood his vision of a fairer and more just America and embraced it. They heard his call for a new generation of Americans to participate in government and were inspired. They believed that change is possible and voted to be part of America's future," said Kennedy.

In Ireland Taoiseach Brian Cowen sent his good wishes to Obama saying, "Barack Obama's remarkable personal story – allied to his eloquence and his huge political talents – sends a powerful message of hope to America's friends across the world."

An historic night in America, and one that will never be forgotten. **IA**



Joe Biden

—By Bridget English and Declan O'Kelly

A Lot Less Commuting for Joe

The bad news for Joe Biden is that he won't see his friends on the train commute from Washington to Delaware as often as he used to. The good news is that he will stand by Barack Obama's side as Vice President while the new commander-in-chief embarks on the process of implementing the changes his campaign promised.

For the Scranton, PA native, it is a fairytale end to a long and distinguished political career: Now 66, the Irish-Catholic brought up in a blue-collar town was first elected to the Senate when he was 29 years of age. With his boss only in the Senate for four years as a junior senator from Illinois, Biden's 35 years of Washington experience will help Obama immeasurably.

Biden, as many readers already know, is a proud Irish-American whose mother's family, the Finnigans, emigrated from Mayo during the Irish Famine. His father's family is of French Huguenot stock, and many of them lived in Ireland. In an *Irish America* interview in April 1987, Biden explained the extent to which he felt his heritage: "My interest in Ireland was first of all a cultural one, not

political. I always thought of myself as Irish. I never called myself anything else. I was Irish to the point that my dad used to get angry at times. He'd say, 'Your mother's Robinette, you're part French.' I always used to say, 'No, I'm Irish.'"

Biden, whose strong foreign affairs experience and ability to get the working class vote made him a solid candidate, will be a shrewd

counsel for the President-Elect, who is inheriting a country involved in two wars and the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.