

“Dream Big Dreams.”

Obama Encourages the New Generation of Asian Americans to Pursue Their Dreams

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[Exclusive Interview with Christine Chiu]

Democratic Party Presidential candidate Barack Obama told this newspaper that Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., but the Asian American community has not yet reached its true political potential. In part, this is because its voter registration rate has lagged behind other groups. Obama answered in writing to each of the 12 questions posed by this newspaper, and said that he especially looked forward to continuing to work with Asian Americans at the community and grassroots level to help empower more and more Asian Americans to enter the political process.

Obama, as the "New Age Man", is a new phenomenon on the American political scene. In the interview, he especially emphasized the importance of Asian American traditional family values. He loves his wife deeply, and is a model father who cherishes his daughters. The profound love that he shows for his wife and children was very much in evidence in the interview. The exclusive interview with Obama follows.

Q: Many Chinese parents will use your success story to inspire their children. If you were to give words of advice for them, what would that be?

A: When I sign photos for children, I write the inscription “Dream Big Dreams.” The fact that the child of a Kenyan father and white mother from Kansas who grew up in Hawaii could be on the verge of winning the Democratic nomination is a testament to the power of the American Dream. If my story means anything, it means that you don’t have to come from privilege or wealth to succeed in this country."

Q: Do you still remember your days growing up in Indonesia? How did you like life in Indonesia? Are you still able to speak the language? How have the cultures and philosophies of Asian countries influenced you?

A: I have very fond memories of the years I spent in Indonesia and wrote about my experiences in my first book, *Dream from My Father*. Fortunately, I can still remember some Indonesian phrases. One of the lessons I learned while living in Indonesia is the importance of maintaining strong family ties, which is a core value in Asian cultures. The commitment that my wife Michelle and I have to our family and to providing positive role models for our daughters reflects the values of many Asian families in the United States.

Q: What do you remember of your days in Hawaii? What kind of impact did the multiracial and multicultural society of Hawaii have on you?

A: I remember my childhood fondly in Hawaii, and I still visit Hawaii every year to spend time with my grandmother, my sister, my brother-in-law, and my niece, all of whom still live there. Growing up in a multicultural society as diverse as Hawaii instilled in me strong beliefs that differences in race, ideology and background do not have to keep us apart, but rather can strengthen our society and all of its members.

Q: On every level of American politics, minority groups, including Asian-Americans, have not been adequately represented for a long time. What is the most effective way to change this?

A: I understand firsthand the importance of seeking out more minority participation in politics, and I am proud of my campaign's efforts to reach out to Asian American communities across the country in our movement to change American politics. I look forward to continuing to work with Asian Americans at the community and grassroots level to help empower more and more Asian Americans to enter the political process. And as president, I am committed to appointing Asian Americans to high-level positions in my administration and the federal judiciary.

Q: How can Asian-Americans more effectively participate in politics and other aspects of American society?

A: Although the Asian American population is the fastest growing minority group in this country, the Asian American community has yet to reach its true political potential. In part, that's because the voter registration rate has lagged behind other groups. That needs to change, and as I travel around the country, I see many Asian Americans in the crowd. I'm also heartened that the number of Asian Americans voting in the early primaries has been high. That's exciting to me.

I'm encouraged by the large number of Asian Americans who are seeking public office, and I'm honored that many of them – such California State Senator Leland Yee and California State Assemblyman Ted Lieu – have decided to endorse my candidacy. I am also proud of the endorsements I have received from Asian American activists who have been trailblazers for the Asian American community in politics, including the first Asian American Cabinet official, Norman Mineta.

Q: How did your mother's teaching influence you? What were the areas of her anthropology research?

A: My mother was the dominant figure in my formative years. Her work as a researcher and teacher were certainly important in not only her values, but the values that she taught my sister and me about the world and how we should conduct our lives.

Q: How did your father influence you?

A: Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to know my father well, but as I have described in my first book, what I learned about him and his desire for not only a better life for himself, but also for his home country of Kenya, certainly has affected the public service decisions that I have made in my life.

Q: What are your favorite books? Who are your most favorite historical figures?

A: Lately, I haven't had much time to read, but one of my favorite books has always been "Where the Wild Things Are," which my daughters also love. In fact, my wife often says I'm like Max, the main character in the book, who's always getting into mischief. As for my favorite historical figure, that's easy – Abraham Lincoln. That's one of the reasons why I began my presidential campaign in Springfield, Illinois, at the site of Lincoln's famous "House Divided" speech against slavery.

Q: Tell us about your wife. Was it a love-at-first-sight when you first met her? What qualities of hers attracted your attention and admiration?

A: I first met her when I spent a summer working at the same Chicago law firm where she worked. I was instantly struck by her intelligence, wit, and charm. My wife is a remarkable woman, and I often say that I'm glad I'm not running against her, because I know I couldn't beat her. And she's a fantastic mother who was been able to balance the demands of her career – and now the campaign – and the demands of raising our two beautiful daughters.

Q: What do you want your children to grow up to be?

A: One of the wonderful things about America is that any child can grow up to be whatever he or she wants to be. So, I simply want my daughters to pursue their dreams – whether it's to be an astronaut, a ballerina, a soccer player, a doctor, or even President of the United States.

Q: What is your favorite Chinese dish?

A: Chinese food is one of my favorite types of cuisine. I grew up in South East Asia and Hawai'i so I had the opportunity to taste a lot of good Chinese food, including steamed 'manapua,' which is Hawaiian for 'bau', and all kinds of rice dishes. These days, I generally prefer lighter Chinese dishes such as steamed fish with soy sauce, green onions and ginger, as well as garlic prawns. I enjoy dim sum and if the occasion is celebratory, I enjoy roast pig. I consider myself lucky to have Chinese Americans as part of my family and to have many fine Chinese restaurants in my hometown of Chicago.

Q: When you go to the White House, how would your education policy differ from that of this Administration?

A: As president, my education policy wouldn't be just the empty rhetoric of the current Administration but would contain real proposals to improve our schools, support our teachers, and prepare America's children for the global economy. At the K-12 level, I have proposed a comprehensive education plan that would: expand early childhood education; reform the flaws in No Child Left Behind; make math and science education a national priority; expand afterschool and summer learning opportunities; and support special programs for non-native English speakers. In the area of higher education, I would make college affordable for all Americans by providing a \$4,000 tax credit towards college costs in exchange for community service. I also support the DREAM Act, which allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates. Finally, I also would increase federal financial aid for low-income students and simplify the application process for applying for financial aid.