

Title: MN Exclusive: *President Obama's Brother; Mark Obama Ndesandjo, Talks Domestic Violence Endured By Their Father*

Author: Lauren R.D. Fox

Published Link: <https://madamenoire.com/337972/mark-obama-ndesandjo/>

President Obama's half-brother Mark Obama Ndesandjo is a skillful pianist, author and businessman. Educated at Brown, Stanford and Emory Universities, he uses his skills to create art, pen memoirs, and teach the arts to orphans in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China. After living there for 12 years, Ndesandjo says living in China helped find himself, whereas growing up in Kenya taught him survival skills and America overwhelmed him as he attempted to navigate the academic and dating scene. In 2009, Ndesandjo published his semi-autobiographical novel, *Nairobi to Shenzhen*. Currently, he is preparing for his new memoir *Cultures :My Odyssey of Self-Discovery* to be published worldwide February 2014. On the heels of that release, we spoke with Ndesandjo about the book's intimate details of the domestic violence he and his mother endured from Barack Obama, Sr. — the father he shares with President Obama.

MadameNoire (MN): What purpose will your memoir serve to you and the general public?

Mark Obama Ndesandjo (MON): Michelle Obama, my sister-in-law called me the “wayward one.” She was joking gently but I think she was curious about my background. Although I am of mixed race, I zig-zaged from Kenya to America and now I am living in China. Because I was able to move across cultures, I have observed how people tend to find themselves. In doing so, I wanted to tell my story instead of other people telling it for me. Gandhi once said “To find yourself, you have to lose yourself at the service of others.” It is a really interesting point because my book brings out some real issues that can hopefully help other families to resolve their own challenges. I want my book to showcase the importance of helping others and combating domestic violence.

MN: Does your brother (President Obama) approve of you writing it?

MON: Before Barack became President he told me “go live your life.” My writing has been a tool for me to express how I feel about my family. We all often grow up with our own ideas of how our family is.

MN: What were your thoughts on President Obama's memoir “Dreams From My Father?”

MON: I actually read his memoir a few years ago. To read a memoir about someone very close to you or a family member takes courage. It will take courage from him to read my book because we both have touched upon things that hit close to home. Barack and I disagree on things when it comes to our personal history. For example, at the time of Barack's memoir he was trying to develop his political identity. He wanted to reconcile different cultures, to find the best of both cultures that were a part of him. Using our father's identity, Barack then created his own. When I read the book, I found out there were a lot of things (at least regarding me and my family) that were not accurate. That said, we all have ways of looking at things. It is very natural. I see him as my brother, I don't always see him as the President. There is always that difference and it is hard to grasp at times.

MN: How do you portray your father in your book versus President Obama's portrayal?

MON: My book will show the reality of living in Kenya because I grew up there with my father. The portrait that is presented by Barack in his memoir of our father is a huge difference in how I portray our father. Our father is a man of great disillusion. In other words, I am referring to drinking and domestic violence. In my book, chapters two and three are titled: “My Parents: A Failed Elopement” and “Dissolution: Johnnie Walker Black Label”. Johnnie Walker, Black Label is the whiskey he drank very

often, almost daily. I remember him being around more through his scent of the whiskey than his actual face or presence. These are details that I do not think Barack has come to terms with.

MN: What are the similarities and differences between you and President Obama

MON: The story of Barack and I begins about fifty years ago. Our father went to Hawaii and met Ann Dunham. Shortly after Barack was conceived. Two years later, our father went to Harvard University and met my mother. Shortly after that I was conceived. We are both mixed race. We are both American and have white American mothers. We have the same father. We both went to really good schools and both of us have a real desire to make a difference in other people's lives. Even though we have a lot in common, there are things that have pulled us apart. This goes back to my book, the things that make Barack and I similar are connected through the history of the Obama family. To a certain extent, even though we have our differences, Barack and I are the only mixed race kids in the Obama family as siblings. In many ways we are like Siamese twins. We look at things differently but we are very much attached. The book also discusses this because people are not clear about the structure of our family history. I included a family tree at the end of my book.

MN: How do you think a "mixed-race" identity is developed?

MON: When you are of mixed race, I believe you tend to identify with one or the other parent. I think that happened with Barack and I. We, or at least I, identify with my mother. She was a source of safety for me. I was not able to protect her growing up from my father and I think for a long time he showed me how to relate to Kenyan and African culture. That is why I really took to Western culture. When we met in 1988, I saw Barack searching for his African roots. Not that black is bad and white is good, but I was trying to find my white roots since I lived in Kenya. I believe the people who are strongest in supporting us and achieving some level of success in our lives were our mothers. I think they were educated mothers who had a real understanding of Western Culture but yet wanted us to be global citizens.

MN: In a recent Politico article, you shared hopes of reconciling your relationship with President Obama after his presidency. What do you think will be different between the both of you in 2016?

MON: I have reached out to my brother since he became President and he has distanced himself from me and others in our family. Sometimes I think that is the politician within my brother. Barack is naturally reserved, so he would probably be the one that needs to reach out. After 2016, the only difference will be he will no longer be President. We will see what happens. I would love for him to work out some of these things with me, so we can connect and we probably will. There are so many families who have huge problems and I think my memoir can be a message for women and children around the world in regard to domestic violence. Sometimes we have to step back from our own pride and traditions. We must think outwards to share with people, our experiences.

Please note: A portion of the memoir's sales will be invested to the Mark Obama Ndesandjo Foundation. The foundation promotes art education for the youth and the sales will also aid organizations that help disadvantaged children worldwide.