



## Who Wrote *Dreams from My Father*?

When Barack Obama's autobiography *Dreams from My Father* was published in 1995, which he began writing while at Harvard and later finished in Chicago, it was greatly praised by the critics as a wonderful story of one man's coming to grips with racism. Charlayne Hunter-Gault wrote: "One of the most powerful books of self-discovery I've ever read...It is also beautifully written, skillfully layered, and paced like a novel."



No one questioned the ability of this novice writer to produce such a "lyrical" and "compelling" memoir at the age of 34.

Meanwhile, questions about its authorship began circulating in the conservative underground, hinting that Bill Ayers might have had a hand in helping Obama write this acclaimed book. But it wasn't until Donald Trump brought up the subject of authorship in an interview by Laura Ingraham that it finally gained traction in the media.

Trump commented that *Dreams from My Father* read like a novel written by Hemingway. It was much too good for someone who had never written anything before. And he compared it with Obama's second book, *The Audacity of Hope*, published in 2008, which was written as a political tract with none of the style and beauty of the first book. Indeed one of Obama's left-wing readers was so disappointed that he wrote in an Amazon commentary:

"There is a lot of apparent chastisement of political parties in general, but the author specifically cites examples from the republican party. Though I hail from the left, I got frustrated that he would present an argument that would seem like common sense, talk about how we need to centralize our political system, and then rip the republican side apart... doing just the opposite of what he says we need to stop doing!

"By the end of the book, it felt more like a political stunt to discredit republicans and get ready for the White House than a book about changing the country. Ironically, I felt more sympathy towards republicans than I felt at the beginning of the book. A nice subtitle to the book would have been 'The Audacity of Hope: Why the Republican Party Is Supremely Evil and Powerhungry.' "

And what about this rumor that Bill Ayers, co-founder of the radical Weather Underground movement that carried out bombings in the early 1970s, had had a hand in helping Obama write his autobiography? Christopher Andersen, in his book *Barack and Michelle, Portrait of an American Marriage*, finally provides the answer.

The project for the memoir began after Obama had been voted the first black president of the *Harvard Law Review* in 1990. His appointment made national news, and when Jane Dystel, a literary agent (and daughter of Oscar Dystel, former CEO and chairman of Bantam Books), read a glowing profile of Obama in the press, she contacted him and persuaded him to write a brief book proposal based on his life. Dystel then submitted the proposal to several editors and in 1991 a deal was struck with Poseidon



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Press, a division of Simon and Schuster.

Obama pocketed the first half of the \$150,000 advance — quite a sum for a first-time author — and returned to his law studies, intending to write the book between classes. Obama graduated from Harvard Law School in June 1991 and returned to Chicago. He married Michele in 1992.

Obama and Michele spent the next two years making all of the connections that would help Obama launch a political career. But during that time, the future Illinois senator spent too little time on the book he was contracted to deliver to Simon and Schuster. Andersen writes:

When the publisher finally cancelled the project in 1993, Barack worried that they would come after him for the \$75,000 he had already been paid....But when Barack informed them that he had spent the money — and that he and his wife were still chipping away at their massive student loan debt — the publisher agreed not to press the issue.

But Barack's enterprising agent was able to land him another book deal with Times Books, a division of Random House, with an advance of \$40,000. Convinced that the book could become a bestseller, Barack and Michelle took a leave of absence from their jobs to work on the project. But by early 1994 Barack found himself once more in a hole, afraid that he would not be able to deliver a completed manuscript due in September 1994. Andersen explains:

It was about this time that, at Michelle's urging, he sought advice from his friend and Hyde Park neighbor Bill Ayers. Michelle had known Ayers's wife, Bernadine Dohrn, at Sidley Austin, where Dohrn worked as a paralegal between 1984 and 1988. Dohrn's father-in-law, former Commonwealth Edison CEO Thomas Ayers, just happened to be one of the firm's most important clients."

Barack had gotten to know Ayers' father and brother John on the Leadership Council of the Chicago Public Education Fund where all three had served. Another friend of Ayers and Barack was Jean Rudd of the Woods Fund, which had provided Jerry Kellman with the funds needed to hire Barack as an Alinsky community organizer in 1985. Anderson writes:

"Neither Michelle nor Barack seemed particularly troubled to discover that William Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn had been two of the 1960s' most infamous radicals — leaders of the Weather Underground terrorist group that set off thirty bombs in the 1960s and 1970s. . . . What did interest Barack was Ayers's proven abilities as a writer."

Indeed, it was Ayers' 1993 book, *To Teach*, that impressed Barack with its fluid, novelistic style which he wanted to emulate in his own book. Ayers agreed to help Barack write his book. Barack then gave Ayers all of the tapes he had made of interviews with his family as well as a box full of notes and his partial manuscript. And Ayers got to work. Andersen elucidates:

"In the end, Ayers's contribution to Barack's *Dreams from My Father* would be significant — so much so that the book's language, oddly specific references, literary devices, and themes would bear a jarring similarity to Ayers's own writings. Even the caveat at the beginning of *Dreams*, in which Barack points out that he uses invented dialogue, embellished facts, composite characters, inaccurate chronology, and pseudonyms to create an 'approximation' of reality, resembles Ayers's defense of the inaccuracies in his memoir, *Fugitive Days*."

Thanks to Ayers' assistance, Barack was able to deliver his manuscript to Times Books for publication in the summer of 1995. After its publication on July 18th, Barack embarked on a ten-day national book



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tour, basking in the sunlight of celebrity authorship.

So what have we learned from all of this? That the relationship between Barack and Michelle Obama and Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn was quite intimate. Indeed, when Barack was ready to run for the Illinois Senate, it was Ayers and Bernadine who launched the campaign in their own living room.

Of course, Barack makes no mention of Ayers' help in his acknowledgments, which is what an author would normally do. It is obvious that Ayers had done such a great job of ghost writing that Donald Trump would later remark that the book read like a Hemingway novel, suspecting that Obama did not write it himself. But we now know the facts.

We must thank Christopher Andersen for writing the first accurate and true account of Bill Ayers' important and crucial role in the writing of Barack Obama's memoir, of which most readers have no idea. But, fortunately for us, the truth has finally been revealed.



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