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© Helen Bond, Bernadine Barr, Izolda Fotiyeva, Fang Wu

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Through Children's Eyes

President Obama and the Future Generation

A new book explores uncharted territory, the political views of children and youth around the world in response to the controversial 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first non-White President of the United States. *Through Children's Eyes: President Obama and the Future Generation* examines how youth in Sierra Leone, China, Jamaica, Russia, and the United States made meaning of a president whose background and ancestry seemed so foreign that some people today still doubt his citizenship, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Barack Obama, raised by his white mother and grandparents, lived extensively outside the United States. His Kenyan father attended Harvard, but grew up herding goats and today his relatives are scattered from Europe to Kenya to Indonesia to Kansas. Following the 2008 election optimism surged for race relations in the United States and human relations in the world. Adults everywhere were paying attention and evoking children as positive or negative symbols of this new future, but no one was asking whether actual children in the United States and around the world were inspired by or even noticed these events. How did youth between the ages of 9 and 17 around the world understand Obama's complicated heritage? Did they believe what happened in America might be possible in their own countries or in their own lives? What might they predict for race relations, as they inhabit a world with fewer boundaries, more diversity, and greater access to information and each other than ever before?

The book probes these questions by transporting the reader from inner-city neighborhoods in the United States, to a post-conflict society in Sierra Leone, West Africa, to Jamaica where songs and t-shirts celebrated Barack Obama. The reader delves into Xi'an, China, the start of the ancient Silk Road, and on to Ekaterinburg, Russia, where students struggle with conflicting yearnings, one for international peace and the other, for an opportunity to trounce once and for all the old playground bully, the USA. The book compiles a rich harvest of writing, drawings, and one-word impressions by children who deeply pondered this new world figure, the future of race relations, the future of human relations, and the meaning this political event had for them personally.



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Four social scientists of different racial and ethnic backgrounds discovered rich and unexpected findings about world politics, race relations, the Obama Effect, and racial identity from this qualitative study of youth in five countries. **Helen Bond**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Howard University who has studied education and youth in Africa and India. She served as an international researcher (consultant) with the United Nations Development Program in Ethiopia and a 2011-2012 Fulbright-Nehru Scholar to India. **Bernadine Barr**, Ph.D., is a Collegiate Professor at the University of Maryland University College. She is a scholar of multicultural childhood, education in the United States, and was awarded a Spencer Post-Doctoral Fellowship to research institutions for children. **Izolda Fotiyeva**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Howard University. She specializes in physics and mathematics and is a native of Russia and expert in Russian culture and language. **Fang Wu**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in Early Childhood Education at Howard University, and is a native of Beijing, China and an expert in the Chinese culture and language. She frequently travels to China and was a recipient of the 2011 Fulbright Specialist Program. All four authors live in the Washington, DC area. Each author's contributions bring to life the past and present culture that shapes students' responses in the study.

This study of a singular moment in political history is situated in the new sociology of childhood, for youth in the study reveal themselves as informed thinkers, actors, and agents in their own right. They provided resounding answers to those who might ask why we should listen to the voices of youth ages 9 to 17 around the world and why there should be a place for them at the table. Two quotations suggest the depth of responses from young people in this study to the 2008 election of Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States:

"I don't understand it: there was slavery in America just 150 years ago and now they have a black president!" Eleventh-grade boy, Ekaterinburg, Russia.

"It means that my dreams can never be far fetched. That anybody can achieve greatness, any race, and any color. Dreams are still possible." Seventh-grade girl of African and Indian descent, Kingston, Jamaica.

Authors are available for appearances and interviews and can be reached through The Key Publicity, Heather Smith
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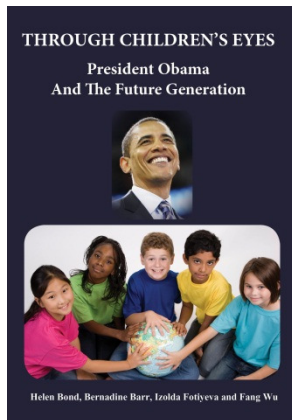
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This book examines how school-age children and youth in the United States, Sierra Leone, West Africa, Jamaica, China, and Russia made meaning of the election of Barack Obama as the first non-White President of the United States. The book is developed from an international research study exploring how children and youth understood Obama's identity and messages. The book further examines whether youth believed race relations in their country or human relations in the world might change as a result of this historic election. Children made vibrant drawings of "what President Obama means to me," revealing their innermost thoughts. Youth also revealed how they learned about Obama, including their surprising one-word impressions of him. The rich contents of the book, the issues it raises, and the insights it provides will offer readers a unique opportunity to look into the minds of the future generation around the world.

- The book is written with a general and academic audience in mind.
- **General Audience:** Young adult readers from age 12-to-adult. Would be of specific interest to audiences interested in youth and ethnic studies, politics, and world affairs.
- **Academic Audience:** Teachers, faculty in Education and Human Development, Psychology, Child Development, Political Science, International Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women Studies, African Studies, Russian Studies, Chinese Studies, Caribbean Studies, Childhood Studies, Youth Culture, and Urban Studies.



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Endorsements

"Politics uses children as symbols all the time. Candidates kiss babies. Elected officials decry policies as bad for kids or promote them as good for future generations. But as much as politics often uses children as symbols, few take the attitudes, opinions, or emotions of children seriously enough to ask kids themselves what they are thinking and feeling. In this important new book a group of respected researchers corrects this deficit by making children the subject of a smart inquiry into the current political and racial environment. The authors rightly point to the election of President Obama as a meaningful shift in American racial politics and ask how the symbolic and substantive reality of a black president changes how children around the world perceive America, opportunity, and their own life chances. It is a compelling, serious, and often surprising book that deserves a wide readership. No other text asks and answers these critical questions that desperately need answers. This book takes us around the world in a fascinating exploration of the minds of the world's youth as they witness the Obama moment."

~Melissa Harris-Perry, Professor at Tulane University, and host of
"Melissa Harris-Perry" on MSNBC, USA

"*Through Children's Eyes* is an important book. It documents the effect of Barack Obama's 2008 election on school-aged children in a number of countries to show how he has become a figure of hope and the personification of peace and an end of racism in many places around the world. The book very carefully traces differences in school-age children's and youths' reactions to Obama's election in the form of their drawings of the president and their answers to questions about how they learned about him and how he has impacted on their lives. Quite patently, the children's drawings speak volumes: In Sierra Leone a youth depicts him as a Big Man. In China, children and youth draw him, incredibly movingly, with Asian features. And in Russia, he is depicted alternatively as bringing peace between the two nations or as a figure of violence. Thus *Through Children's Eyes* is not undifferentiated in its analysis of the Obama effect on children in five very different nations. The book is to be highly recommended both for those interested in political education and development and those wishing to inquire into the effect of the Obama presidency beyond the provenance of the United States."

~Greta Olson, Professor at Institut für Anglistik, Justus-Liebig-Universität,
Giessen, Germany

"*Through Children's Eyes* provides a unique perspective on President Obama's ascent, from the world's most valuable resource, our children. The authors masterfully organize children's prose and art to give a rare glimpse at how [children believe]



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current events will shape tomorrow. The book is awe-inspiring and fun. It will stimulate the highbrow, while entertaining the leisure reader. The book embodies the landscape of a new world, with bigger dreams, looser boundaries and deeper human connections.”

~Ivory A. Toldson, Associate Professor at Howard University, Senior Research Analyst for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, and Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Negro Education*, USA

“The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 was an historic moment for our diverse democracy. We are only now beginning to understand its profound significance. This book is an excellent start for our much-needed dialogue. The voices of the next generation show how far we have come and how far *they* will take us.”

~Frank H. Wu, Chancellor and Dean of the Hastings College of the Law, University of California, USA



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About the Authors

Helen Bond, Dr. Bond is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Howard University in Washington, DC. She received a Bachelor's of Science degree in Education from The Ohio State University, a Master's Degree in Communication from West Virginia University, and a Ph.D. in Human Development from Virginia Tech. Her dissertation research focused on education and human development in Ghana, West Africa. Her teaching and research interests are international education, sociology of childhood, technology and social change, the education of women and girls, and human rights. She teaches courses in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and team teaches an interdisciplinary course on social media and political change in the African world in the Department of African Studies. She won the 2012 Inspirational Interdisciplinary Award at Howard University for her work teaching this interdisciplinary course that resulted in a presentation at the Centre of Governance and Human Rights at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. In 2009, she won the Teaching with Technology Award for excellence in the integration of technology in the curriculum. Dr. Bond was also selected as a 2011-2012 Fulbright-Nehru Scholar to India to teach and conduct research on peace education and teacher quality at the College of Education at the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu India—a renowned college where Mahatma Gandhi laid the founding stone. As a Fulbright Scholar, Dr. Bond spoke on the education of women and girls at Avinashilingam University for Women in Coimbatore, India and lectured on similar topics at Sacred Heart College for women in Kerala, India and was the first foreigner to visit Sri Sarada College of Education in Salem, India, where she currently serves as an international reviewer on the Sri Sarada Journal of Frontiers of Knowledge. She also served as an international researcher for the United Nations Development Program and Ministries of Education in Ethiopia to conduct a nationwide study on the development of a teacher licensing system in Ethiopia. Dr. Bond has published widely including articles in the *Sociology of Education: An A-to-Z Guide*, *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, *Journal of Transformative Education*, *Handbook of Research on Culturally Aware Technology*, and the *Weekly Journal of Higher Education* published by the Association of Indian Universities. She also published chapters in the following books, *Pathways to the Holocaust* and the award winning *Evoking Genocide* chosen as the “Outstanding Academic Title” for 2010 by Choice Magazine, the leading journal of librarians around the English-speaking world. Dr. Bond served four years as a Human Rights Commissioner appointed by the Governor of West Virginia and confirmed by the State Senate.

Bernadine Barr, Ph.D. Dr. Barr is a Professor (Collegiate Professor) in the School of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Maryland, University College. She received an undergraduate degree from Brown University, a Master of Fine Arts degree from University of Chicago and a Ph.D. in Child and Adolescent Development from Stanford University School of Education. After college, Dr. Barr served as a Peace Corps



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Volunteer in Cuzco, Peru, where she founded a center for nutritional recuperation for infants and their Quechua-speaking mothers. Living six years in Latin America, she is fluent in Spanish. After returning to the United States, she developed museum programs for school children and studied for her Ph.D. At Stanford she served five years as an Academic Advisor to undergraduates with significant health problems. Her dissertation, "Spare Children," examined the use of children in orphanages as subjects of research in medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and education. She served as a Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Stanford University School of Education and a Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department of Psychiatry at the Stanford University School of Medicine. During her postdoctoral years Dr. Barr traveled to England, Sweden and Hungary to discuss possible ways to improve the outcomes of children living in institutions. She won an essay prize from the Society for Social Research in Medicine in England for a research paper on an early use of the incubator at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. She has 12 years of teaching experience and experience designing courses in teacher education, multicultural education, multicultural child development, parenting, race relations, and global migrants and refugees. During this time she co-authored book-length modules published by University of Maryland University College for online courses in ethnic relations and in race relations. In her teaching, she works to reach disadvantaged and minority college students by using students' own essays as text in her university courses. Dr. Barr is a mentor to faculty members who are new to online teaching at UMUC. Her most recent paper is "The New Nature of Knowledge and the New Pedagogy of Online Education," a scholarly presentation of a paper in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, via live teleconferencing.

Izolda Fotiyeva, Ph.D. Dr. Fotiyeva received her degrees in physics and mathematics at The Ural State University, Russia and Russian Academy of Science. Her interest in teaching emerged by the time she attended post-graduate school and became closely involved in a successful program that taught core school subjects to children in rural and underprivileged areas. While successfully working as a research scientist, her passion for teaching grew and she eventually decided to focus on education as her principal activity and passion. After her arrival to United States from Russia in 1995, Dr. Fotiyeva started working as a producer on a public television station, fulfilling her dream to produce public affairs programming. In 2002 she was nominated for an Emmy Award as a producer of WHUT Television station's flagship show Evening Exchange with Kojo Nnamdi. In 2004, she won the Telly Award for producing. In 2003 Izolda published her first book "Math with Mom" which introduces children and parents to the world of early mathematics. In 2010 she published her second book "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Algebra Word Problems" with Alpha Publishing, a member of Penguin Group, Inc., where she introduces high school and college students to the world of mathematics. In 2005 Izolda joined the faculty of the Howard University School of Education where she teaches mathematics and science courses to help preservice teachers be more effective with children in K-12 schools. As a native Russian, Dr.



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Fotiyeva speaks fluent Russian and is familiar with Russian culture, Russian schools, and the Russian way of life.

Fang Wu, Ph.D. Dr. Wu received her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Beijing Normal University, Master of Arts degree in Preschool Education from University of Pittsburgh, and Ph.D. in Developmental Studies and Early Childhood Education from UCLA. Dr. Wu is an Associate Professor and Early Childhood Education Program Coordinator in the School of Education at Howard University. Dr. Wu served as a teacher educator in the United States for 20 years. In addition, she also has more than 10 years of teaching experience with young children in China and in the United States. Dr. Wu's research foci are on social and emotional development of children in China and in the United States, parenting effect on child development, and children adopted from China by American parents. She is also interested in developmentally appropriate curriculum and teaching practice in early childhood education. Dr. Wu taught summer seminars in China regularly since 1996, and she writes extensively for Chinese early childhood education magazines and radio shows since 1998. As a teacher educator, one of Dr. Wu's goals is to facilitate cultural exchanges hence increase mutual understandings between people in China and in the United States. Dr. Wu has twice received the Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad awards to take American teachers to China for cultural studies. She has also received the 2011 Fulbright Specialist Program award to teach in Shaanxi Normal University in China. As a native Chinese, Dr. Wu speaks fluent Mandarin Chinese and is familiar with the Chinese culture as well as the educational systems in China.



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Authors' Q & A

1. What inspired you to write *Through Children's Eyes: President Obama and the Future Generation*?

The initial inspiration came from the euphoria that surrounded the election of the first African American president of the United States and how people would always refer back to their children or to their niece or nephew as they reflected on the historical moment. There were newspaper accounts of voters holding the hands of children as they stood in lines at the polls. Yet no one was asking children or youth (those under the voting age) what they actually thought about the election of the first Black president. It was curiosity and respect for what children and youth have to say that inspired me to ask them what they thought about the contentious 2008 election.

2. What surprised you most while writing this book?

- We were surprised at the rich harvest of ideas that our very close reading and analysis of children's writing and drawings yielded. Even in few-word answers from our youngest subjects there were gems that enabled us to characterize a phenomenon whose contours were unknown to us.
- We were surprised at how much children in other countries knew about President Obama and the 2008 election. Even more interesting was how children and youth in the United States, Sierra Leone, Jamaica, Russia, and China came to learn about President Obama and what their sources of information reveals about the impact of the media, culture, and politics.
- We were also surprised to learn that many children had soaring expectations that President Obama might help them and their country. But not in Russia. The surprise was the hostility of many Russian children towards America.
- Equally surprising were the drawings made by children and youth and what these drawings revealed about youth's perceptions of Barack Obama, his wife and two children, and the United States. Chapter nine displays these drawings and author's discussion of their significance.
- Finally, we were surprised when we discovered the one word that children around the world most associated with Barack Obama. That word can be found in chapter eight of the book. Readers will also be surprised as they discover how these one-word associations of President Obama compared with that of adults and among children of different ages, sexes, races, nationalities, and countries.



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3. What were the challenges (research, literary, and logistical) in bringing this book to life?

We struggled to locate and reach subjects for this research as euphoria about the possibilities of Barack Obama's election gave way to economic gloom in the United States. We would have liked to have included more children and youth from other countries, but had limited time.

It was challenging to pull together previous research that provided grounding for the work we wished to do. For example, the most relevant research study of children's views of a sitting president took place in 1959/1960! Fortunately there are increasing numbers of contemporary studies of the ability of children to understand and reason about politics and discrimination in political life.

It was challenging to type out, print, and tape together five and six foot long spreadsheets that were about 4 feet wide and to distill from these great, unwieldy "quilts" both the subtle and the powerful points written by hundreds of children of a given age. Our Russian and Chinese authors had the further task of translating all children's responses into English.

A literary challenge was how to deal with children's misspellings and still retain the authenticity and freshness of their writing.

4. What are the most important points that you would like readers to have gained and appreciate after reading your book?

There are four important points we would like readers to take away from this book. First, the election of Barack Obama did not go unnoticed by children and youth in the US or overseas. While some youth were ambivalent and even indifferent, many youth in faraway places were listening to radios, talking to their families and friends and using a variety of media and cultural information sources to learn about President Obama. Many had more information about him and his family than we expected.

Second, some children and youth identified with Obama and saw his election as a symbol of hope for a new and better world. Some youth in Russia and Sierra Leone felt that America had finally become the democracy it touted itself to be. Minority youth especially saw him and his fine family as vindication of their own humanity. Their responses revealed the pain and heartbreak of racism and xenophobia worldwide.

Third, children and youth need heroes. They need role models who can inspire and encourage them. Some children in China drew President Obama as a superhero wearing



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a cape, for they hoped he might swoop in to fix the world's economies and other ills. A boy in China who is teased by classmates for holding his pen in an odd way was pleased to see that President Obama holds his pen in the same way and that gave him confidence. Children in Jamaica and Sierra Leone saw him as a president of the world figure who is able to help them in their tiny sliver of the world.

Finally, children and youth have a voice that deserves to be heard and respected. They are disproportionately affected by war and conflict, yet have virtually no say in political affairs and peace agreements. While the children and youth who participated in this study answered our questions, they also shared with us their deepest concerns and longings for peace and prosperity—even while drawing pictures of war, death, and annihilation of the United States. Perhaps the greatest message of this book is that youth and children are the planet's greatest natural resource and how we treat them, listen to them, and respect them may well determine the course of our collective existence.

5. Why is this story unique?

This story is unique because it concerns a watershed time in politics in the United States, a moment when the racial divide seemed less important than the character of an individual, to borrow a phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It further is unique because it allows children to give us their insights on national events that usually have been thought of as the concerns of adults.

This story is unique because:

There is a blossoming research literature on children's awareness of political and racial ideas, but there are few, if any, books that look across national borders at the political views of children in response to a specific election.

There are several books compiling letters written by children to President Obama. Some include drawings by children, but none attempts analysis or interpretation.

This book is situated in the new sociology of childhood. Children are understood to be capable of analysis and reflection and no longer are portrayed as amateurs and inferior thinkers on their way to becoming adults. In this book, children are viewed as thinkers and actors and agents in their own right, capable of making informed and thoughtful statements about political events and racial arrangements in their own nations and overseas.

This book offers a global perspective by four social scientist/educators of different national origins and races.



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6. According to your research, what are a few of the controversial issues in relation to President Obama's election?

1. That race was irrelevant to the 2008 election. In fact race was a central issue in the election and was evident in the children's responses to our questions. For example, Barack Obama was referred to and framed as a minority in many responses.
2. That politicians and pundits used children as symbols of innocence and a better future or as malicious tools to incite fear in the 2008 election.
3. That children and youth are free of stereotypes and bias that adults face. Children and youth in this study were surprisingly aware of the prejudice and intolerance of the larger society. They continuously wrote about how the 2008 election might signify a change in race and human relations. Our research corroborates the research of others in this field, in particular, Rebecca Bigler and her colleagues. They found children recognized it was unfair that no woman or minority had ever been elected as president and reasoned in very stereotypical ways why that was so.
4. That many touted Obama's election as evidence of a post-racial society. Children and youth also picked up on this idea and wrote longingly of a colorblind world. Older youth were more cognizant of the realities of racism in the United States and across the world.

7. What advice would you offer your readers so they can make the most of the book?

Enjoy it and take the time to look at the pictures and Wordles (word pictures). Though the book is based on a research study, it is rich with materials accessible to a general audience.

8. Why is it important to listen to what children have to say about president Obama and politics in general?

These children are the first generation of children to grow up with the images of a Black, multiracial President and Black First Lady with two Black children playing on the White House lawn. The children and youth we talked to and the countless others we did not talk to, will hopefully go to school one day and open up a history book. In this history book they will read about how people who looked like the Obamas were once slaves and three-fifths of a person by law. Then seven pages later (history moves fast in a textbook) they will see Barack Obama and Michelle and their two lovely daughters waving to the crowd that victory night in Grant Park in 2008. The generation of children



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who participated in this study will grow into adulthood with a vastly different conception of who is capable of running one of the most powerful countries in the world. The symbolic and psychological impact on political and racial identity will be studied for many years to come.

Children and youth begin to develop a political identity early in life and that identity does not always mirror that of their parents. Their identity is influenced by many sociocultural factors like school, family, community, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and the generational milieu that the child or youth experiences while growing up. Some children of the Great Depression era grow up squeezing a dollar. Children who come to age in the midst of conflict and war grow up with other sensibilities that may be attributed to that environment. Children and youth in this current generation will come to age with very different ideas of who can be a leader, who can become president or be successful, despite the continued existence of sexism, racism, and xenophobia.

Knowing that children and youth of all ages and of all nationalities have important concerns that warrant our attention is important, for children are the world's greatest natural resource and the future electorate.

9. What are the common features found in your research among the different countries?

Across countries we found commonalities in children's responses that reflect their developmental stages. That is, we found support for Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Additionally, we found differences in children's viewpoints that reflected the strong influences of different cultures and political ideologies. We also found nationalism when children reflected in writing or drawing on their own nation's viewpoints. Those findings support the work of Lev Vygotsky, who focused on language and socio-cultural aspects of a child's world.

10. Any surprising findings in your research?

We were surprised at the depth, sophistication, and power of the observations made by children of all ages. Even some of the youngest subjects reported having opinions that differed markedly from those their families and friends held. Children are listening and watching national and international politics and they expressed opinions that are uniquely their own.