



Dinesh Sharma

"The Global Obama" Interview

Dr. Dinesh Sharma is a cultural psychologist, marketing consultant and an acclaimed author with a doctorate from Harvard University. He is an Associate Research Professor (Honorary) at the Institute for Global Cultural Studies, SUNY-Binghamton; a senior fellow at Institute for International and Cross-Cultural Research, NYC; and a columnist for Asia Times Online, Al Jazeera English and The Global Intelligence, among other syndicated publications.

His recent articles and opinions have appeared in the Wall Street Journal Online, Wonkette.com, Free Lance-Star, Far Eastern Economic Review, Middle East Times, Middle East Online, Epoch Times, Biotech Law Review, Health Affairs, Media Monitors, DC Chronicles, Fredricksburg.com, MyCentralJersey.com, International Psychology Bulletin, and other journals. Dr. Sharma has been profiled domestically and internationally including in L'Echo, DeStandaard, Luxembourg Wort, 352 Lux Magazine, The Eastern Eye, Asian Affairs, Cincinnati Herald and The Skanner, to name a few.

On TV, Dinesh's work has been favorably reviewed on Politics Tonight (WGN News), Urban Update (WHDH Boston), City Line WABC Boston, KITV Hawaii, Bay Sunday San Francisco, and many other shows. On Radio, he has been featured on Conversations on the Coast in San Francisco, Reality Check FM-4 Vienna, South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) and

numerous other talk shows.

Furthermore, he has been a consultant in the healthcare industry for major pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device clients for about a decade. He is the author of "Barack Obama in Hawaii and Indonesia: The Making of a Global President," which was rated as among the Top 10 Books of Black History for 2012 by the American Library Association, Book List Online. Here, he talks about the follow-up book, "The Global Obama."

Kam Williams: Hi Dinesh, thanks for the interview.

Dinesh Sharma: Any time. It's very nice of you to conduct this interview. You reviewed my earlier book and the new book, "The Global Obama." So, I really appreciate it.

KW: What interested you in writing another book about Obama?



DS: Well, first, Barack H. Obama is a landmark presidential figure as the first black, multiracial, multicultural president from Hawaii and the Pacific. In the first book, Barack Obama in Hawaii and Indonesia, as you know, I documented, with ethnographic interviews, the childhood and adolescence of this history-making president. The idea was to show that the childhood of a historical leader speaks to the historical times and, in turn, shapes the future in some important ways. When I lectured around the world for the first book, I realized that he was more popular abroad than at home. I had known that from some of the early surveys by the Pew Research Center and The Economist. But when I toured throughout Europe, Asia and Africa, this was really brought home to me. So I wanted to do a book on that trend and try to explore some of the reasons for this finding. Given that no author has an expertise in all areas of the world, I decided to make this an edited book, with help from friends who span the globe. In the new book, we have covered five continents and more than twenty countries.

KW: Was it a harder sell, since the President's bloom has fallen off the rose, at least domestically?

DS: It wasn't a hard sell with the publishers or the reviewers. Most reviewers got the purpose of the project right away and supported it. In fact, the book is part of a series that is headed by James MacGregor Burns, who wrote the classic book on leadership and coined the term "transformational leadership," Georgia Sorensen, who worked in the Carter administration, and Ron Riggio, a professor of leadership at Claremont McKenna College. Given that Obama is a relevant historical figure despite the negative polling trends domestically, he has many more admirers than detractors at home and abroad. In fact, the publisher wanted us to focus on his leadership style within a cross-cultural context, which is the theme of the new book.

KW: How do you explain his enduring popularity overseas?

DS: I think it has partly to do with his international biography and global moorings in almost all continents--Africa, Asia, Europe and the US, of course. Professor Ali A. Mazrui calls him "the child of three continents." But if you include his Irish or European ancestry from his mother's side of the family, he may be called "the man of four continents" or the global president, a symbol of the changing times.

KW: What were you most surprised to learn about him in the course of your preparing this book?



DS: When I prepared the manuscript, the sheer enormity of the challenges the U.S. faces abroad were mind-boggling. It became clear to me that the job of managing all of these conflicts simultaneously is, indeed, very difficult, especially, if the U.S. wants to remain the global leader in the 21st Century. That's why China does not necessarily want to be in the position of a global superpower. The other BRIC countries, Russia, India and Brazil, are not anywhere near being global superpowers. Countries around the world expect the U.S. to deliver, be engaged, and respond to their needs. Presidential leadership is a really tough job, does come not easily. "To those much is given, much is expected," to paraphrase President Kennedy.

KW: What has been your most special moment in your visits to the White House?

DS: Hard to say, but I think watching the President in the East Room when he hosts some of the sports teams, stars from the NBA, WNBA, and NFL, after they have won a championship. Obama is a sports aficionado! You can really observe that when he's around athletes. He gets a kick out of it. His inner-jock self comes out and his language becomes very jocular.

KW: What's it like to be a member of the press corps accompanying President Obama on a trip?

DS: Very interesting. As an immigrant from India who lived in Chicago for many years, or even as a graduate student at Harvard in psychology and human development, I didn't think or imagine that one day I would be covering the first black president at the White House.

KW: You traveled to various places where Obama grew up while researching your first book about Obama. Where did you think the seed of his presidential destiny was planted?

DS: Hawaii. His parents met there and he attended one of the elite preparatory schools on the island, Punahou Academy. Hawaii was the last state to join the Union in 1959 after the attack on Pearl Harbor and World War II. Obama's father arrived there as an exchange student in 1959 and Barack was born two years after Hawaii became part of the U.S. It shaped not only his inner-most self, his destiny, but also his vision of America as reflected in his saying, "There is no Red America or Blue America, only the United States of America." As the first majority-minority state, you could say that Hawaii shaped Obama's identity indelibly. They both grew up together, in parallel, and are now leading America towards being a blended nation, demographically.

KW: What will be the focus of your next book about Obama?

DS: Not clear yet, but something to do with American identity, politics and culture in the era of globalization, similar to what I have been writing about lately.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

DS: No one has asked ever said to me, "You're not African-American, so why are you so obsessed with Obama? Why is Obama your muse?" Or, "Aren't you tired of Obama yet? You know his polling numbers are falling."

KW: Would you mind saying something controversial that would get this interview tweeted?

DS: President Obama will be an even bigger statesman in his post-presidency, while working for Africa's development.

KW: What is your secret wish?

DS: To smoke a cigar with the President on the roof of the White House But, alas, he does not smoke anymore.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

DS: "The Future" by Al Gore, "A Singular Woman" by Jenny Scott, "Legal Orientalism" by Teemu Ruskola, and I just started reading "The Great Soul" by Joseph Lelyveld.

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

DS: Fish Curry.

KW: The Mike Pittman question: What was your best career decision?

DS: To attend Harvard, and recently the decision to write two books on President Obama, in that order. Hopefully, more to come!

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

DS: There is no limit to what one can do!

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

DS: That both my children will be well-educated, well-read and well-travelled.

KW: The Judyth Piazza question: What key quality do you believe all successful people share?

DS: Dogged determination – consistency and persistence in performance. It's not just enough to have good ideas, one has to deliver.

KW: The Michael Ealy question: If you could meet any historical figure, who would it be?

DS: There are so many – I would like to have met Freud, Jung, Gandhi, Nehru, Lincoln, Churchill, Martin Luther King, Mandela, Claude Levi-Strauss, Dali, Margret Mead, Camus, Foucault, Sri Aurobindo, Krishnamurti, other Indian Philosophers. And the list goes on.

As you can see, I think intellectuals are historical figures, too, because they can change the world with the power of their ideas.

KW: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to write about a president?

DS: **Always follow your path, or the road less travelled.**

KW: Thanks again for the time, Dinesh, and best of luck with the book.

DS: **Thanks very much, Kam.**

To order a copy of The Global Obama, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1848726260/ref%3dnosim/thslfofire-20>

To order a copy of Barack Obama in Hawai'i and Indonesia, visit:
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0313385335/ref%3dnosim/thslfofire-20>