

Many African Americans' ancestors have come from Ghana or West Africa broadly in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and have complicated family histories as Amanda Holpuch suggests. Barack Obama has a very personal relationship to Ghana and Africa broadly in regards to his very own father's generation who struggled politically to give birth to new nations. Men and women of Barack Obama Senior's generation fought through to the beginning of the anti-colonial and decolonial movements which led to independence for many African countries in the mid-twentieth century. The round Bakota from Ghana, a traditional carving representing an ancestor and a featured object in local reliquaries, complements



Obama: An Intimate Portrait, by showing thematic connections and complicated histories of Africans Americans' and their ancestors.

The Kota began making these famous reliquary guardian figures beginning in the 18th century, but was largely ceased under British colonial rule. The figures were carved from wood and covered with brass plates or copper discs and towered over each basket with the lower diamond shape reaching into the vessel being attached. The skulls of their ancestors were presented, explained, and ritually honored in regards to venerated ancestors taking part in the lives of their descendants. In crisis situations, families used these figures or other objects such as baskets when consulting their ancestors. Among these powerful objects, according to Melchardt

(2015) the Kota culture group only showed these baskets at ceremonies involving the whole village. This piece is known as a "reliquary guardian" because it guards the graves and remains of passed ancestors. On each basket containing an ancestor's bones hoisted up was a reliquary guardian figure, specifically, the 'mbulu ngulu' ('reliquary basket with figure').

In regards to modern art in the early 20th century, and specific to the 'mbulu ngulu', Melchardt (2015) explains that "the 'modernist' artists living in Paris in the early 20th century were especially fascinated by the radical abstraction of the human body manifested in the Kota 'mbulu ngulu'" and even more interesting, relating to the development of European art, "The development of 'cubism' in European art would not have been conceivable without the awareness of these Kota reliquary figures and other African art objects" (Melchardt, 2015).

In a sense, Obama himself serves as a reliquary guardian, in a sense where through his presidency, he was, and still symbolizes support for protecting the lives of African-Americans. Obama, suspected to be a descendant of the first African slave in the colonial United States of America, can give us insight to the lifetimes of suffering and civil war efforts of his descendants. Holpuch (2012) labels Obama as a "leader of the free world and the ultimate realization of the American dream". Obama, being a venerated ancestor, took part in the lives of his descendants, just as the reliquary guardian does for contemporary Ghanaians who ritually honor their ancestors.

Barack Obama (2009) connected with Ghanians in sharing a personal connection, sharing a visit and speech concerning independence and how his Kenyan father, "grew up herding goats in a tiny village, an impossible distance away from the American universities where he would come to get an education. He came of age at a moment of extraordinary promise for Africa".

Obama came from a kin of strong, powerful Ghanian roots, who remembers his families past history, taking the world on as a leader, motivated by the great leader who inspired him. Barack Obama's honorable engagement, physically and emotionally, in African and African-American communities is rooted in a history of shattered lives from not only Ghana, but West Africa broadly regarding the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Obama in many ways connects honor and 'guardianship' of his past ancestors, stemming from Ghana, just as where the symbolism of the reliquary too stems from.

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