

Obama, Bill Clinton have common ground

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The Democratic primary contest may have placed them on opposing sides, but presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton have more in common than their voter party registration cards.

According to Ted Goertzel, a professor of sociology at Rutgers University—Camden, both men may owe their current success to their past upbringing by single mothers during many of their critical childhood years. Moreover, the two frequently sided with their mothers during conflicts with fathers or step-fathers.

In a recent essay comparing Clinton, Obama, and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, Goertzel found that “all are leaders with exceptional ability to share feelings and communicate empathy to large publics. All three charted their own course in life instead of following a family history or tradition. And all were raised by single mothers who did not have time to smother their children or dominate their lives.”

The author of the book “Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women (Second Edition)” (Great Potential Press), Goertzel studies the impact of parental influence on the evolution of prominent figures. In studying Obama, Clinton, and da Silva, the Rutgers—Camden researcher found that each leader lost their father at a very early age.

“Obama’s father left him and his mother to pursue a doctorate in economics at Harvard, and then returned to his native Kenya without

either of them. Bill Clinton’s biological father was killed in an automobile accident before Bill was born; his mother later remarried, but his stepfather had a drinking problem and abused his mother. Lula da Silva’s father ran off to Sao Paulo to start another large family before da Silva was born into a family of eight children,” says Goertzel.

While the mothers were busy raising their children, they also strongly encouraged their sons to get a good education.

“All three leaders felt anger or resentment with their father and stepfathers, and all three had close and warm relationships with their mothers,” continues the Rutgers—Camden educator. “But none of them became overly dependent on their mothers or remained in their mothers’ homes after reaching adulthood.

“None of these leaders modeled their lives or their careers on their fathers. Modeling themselves on their mothers may have helped these leaders develop skills in human relations and practical problem solving,” concludes Goertzel. “Not having to compete with their fathers for their mothers’ attention may have helped them build self-confidence. Not having to compete with their fathers, or being expected to realize their fathers’ ambitions, may have helped them to move quickly through adolescence into a career path that suited their own talents and ambitions.”

Source: Rutgers University

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