

Sen Barack Obama's campaign office released this memo Monday morning in response to the L.A. Times story.

Today, the Los Angeles Times published an article entitled "Fellow Activists Say Obama's Memoir Has Too Many I's" which implies that Obama partially fictionalized events in Altgeld Gardens in the 1980s in order to enhance the role he played in the community there.

The implication is false, and the article is misleading. At no point in the work does Obama take "singular" credit for initiating and leading efforts on the Altgeld asbestos problem. In fact, those who worked with him confirm that he preferred a background role in the matter, refusing to claim credit or even be in pictures taken of the community group. However, despite the fact that he shunned a public role, Obama's work is clearly remembered by Altgeld residents, other organizers, and the reporter that the LA Times and others credit with bringing the problem of asbestos in Chicago's public housing to light.

LA TIMES: Obama Says He Initiated and Led Efforts That Thrust Altgeld's Asbestos Problem Into the Headlines

FACT: Obama Helped Residents In Altgeld Organize, But Stayed in Background

Yvonne Lloyd Worked With Obama In Altgeld Gardens: "He Always Stayed in the Background...Behind the Scenes." Yvonne Lloyd, a mother of 11 who was the basis for the character "Shirley" in *Dreams of My Father*, worked with Obama during the effort to remove asbestos from the Altgeld Garden apartments. She remembers that Obama "trained us to be leaders...I would come to him with an issue and he would help us figure it out [but] he always stayed in the background. And we used to say to him, 'Barack, come on and do this,' and he would say no. Even when we took pictures, he always stayed behind the scenes, because it was our community." Lloyd attended the meetings with the Chicago Housing Authority described in *Dreams of My Father* and remembers working with Obama on the issue, saying that he "helped us make presentations, but he never scripted us. Because that's [scripting] not telling the truth. And if I'm telling the truth, I can tell it anywhere." [Conversation with Yvonne Lloyd, 2/9/07]

Linda Randle, A Community Organizer In The Ida B. Wells Project, Worked With Obama: "He Didn't Take Credit for Anything." Linda Randle worked in the Ida B. Wells housing project, which also had problems with asbestos, as a community organizer. She filed a complaint with the EPA and worked with Martha Allen, a reporter for the Chicago Reporter, to bring the public's attention to the issue. Randle, who knew Obama through his work in Altgeld, said "Barack and I would get together and we would talk... When he was having problems [with the work], we would talk about it – he would ask, 'What do I need to do to open up my head to hear what they're saying to me?' ...But he didn't take credit for anything." [Chicago Reporter, June 1986; Conversation with Linda Randle, 2/16/07]

LA TIMES: Others Say...That Credit for Pushing Officials To Deal With Asbestos Goes to A Pre-Existing Group and A Local Newspaper Called the Chicago Reporter

FACT: Reporter That Broke the Asbestos Story For the Chicago Reporter Gives Obama, Others Credit for The Action Taken By the Housing Authority

Martha Allen, Reporter With the Chicago Reporter: Proud of The Work She Did on Asbestos, But Community Organizers including Barack Obama Were Working On The Issue “Long Before” She Raised It. Martha Allen, who did the original reporting on the issue of asbestos in Chicago’s public housing projects in 1986, said that although she’s proud of the reporting she did for the Chicago Reporter, she can’t take credit for the action that was eventually taken by the Chicago Housing Authority. “That [taking credit] implies that I opened the eyes of folks in Altgeld [on this issue] and that’s not true. Obama [and others like Linda Randle] were working on this long before I got there.” [Conversation with Martha Allen, 2/16/07]

Chicago Reporter Articles Credited With Raising Issue Do Not Mention Hazel Johnson or Her Group, People for Community Recovery. Martha Allen’s reports on the asbestos issue in 1986, which Rep. Bobby Rush credits with raising the profile of the asbestos problem in Altgeld Gardens and Ida B. Wells, do not mention Hazel Johnson or People for Community Recovery, Johnson’s group. Linda Randle, who filed the initial complaint with the EPA, is mentioned in the story Allen published in June. [The Chicago Reporter, June 1986 and July, 1986]

* Linda Randle Remembers Working Closely With Obama on the Asbestos Issue. Randle, who knew Obama through his work in Altgeld, said “Barack was working with the women in Altgeld [on asbestos] and he brought some of them to talk to me, and then we put together a meeting for me to go talk to them in Altgeld.” Although the residents of Ida B. Wells and Altgeld Gardens failed to join forces on the issue, Randle and Obama continued to work together. [Conversation with Linda Randle, 2/16/07]

Chicago Reporter Article Credit Protests in Altgeld Gardens With Helping Raise Public Awareness of the Asbestos Problem in Public Housing. In addition, Allen writes in the July edition of the Chicago Reporter that the Chicago Housing Authority’s decision to remove asbestos from the Ida B. Wells Extension Homes was triggered by her story in June and “by the protests of residents at another South Side housing development, Altgeld Gardens [at] 130th Street and Langley Avenue.” [The Chicago Reporter, July 1986]

LA TIMES: Hazel Johnson’s Role Was So Prominent That It Was “Offensive” To Tell the Story of Altgeld Gardens Without Including Her

FACT: Johnson Was An Activist, Not An Organizer; CHA Action Came After Obama, Randle, and

Others Organized Residents Around the Issue

Johnson Raised the Issue With Public Health Experts in “Early 1980s”; No Action Was Taken Until 1986. Johnson raised the asbestos issue with Reginal Jones, a “scientist that [she was trying to get] to study possible links between the ailments that residents reported to her and [asbestos]...Jones visited Johnson in the early 1980s recalls sitting in her kitchen as she laid out hundreds of index cards listing the illnesses throughout Altgeld.” However, no action was taken to address the asbestos in Ida B. Wells or Altgeld Gardens until 1986. [Los Angeles Times, 2/19/07; Chicago Reporter, July 1986]

Jerry Kellman: Obama Pulled Together A Variety of People That Others Could Not. Jerry Kellman, who was the basis for the character “Marty” in *Dreams of my Father*, was Obama’s supervisor at the Developing Communities Project. When asked about the role that Johnson played in the asbestos work at Altgeld, Kellman said, “Barack pulled together a variety of people that someone like Hazel would not have been able to do at that point. Barack’s book is very accurate.” [Conversation with Jerry Kellman, 2/7/07]

Loretta Augustine-Herron: Hazel Johnson Was An Activist, Not An Organizer. Loretta Augustine-Herron, who was the basis for the character “Angela” in *Dreams of My Father*, was present at the initial meeting with the Chicago Housing Authority to discuss the issue of asbestos in the Altgeld Garden apartments. When asked about the role that Johnson played in the asbestos work at Altgeld, Augustine-Herron said, “Hazel was there [for the asbestos work]...[she] might have been an activist. But she was not an organizer.” [Conversations with Loretta Augustine-Herron, 2/9/07, 2/14/07]

* Augustine-Herron: Before Obama, “There Really Wasn’t Anything Happening.” Augustine-Herron said that “There was work [on the asbestos issue in Altgeld] going on before Barack got there, but before him, there wasn’t really anything happening. He really came in and started building a base and empowering people [Conversation With Loretta Augustine-Herron, 2/14/07]

Johnson And Obama Worked Together On Asbestos. “Altgeld Gardens resident Hazel Johnson, 69, worked with Obama in the Developing Communities Project on pushing the Chicago Housing Authority to remove asbestos from public housing and other issues. She remembers Obama renting a bus to take a group of residents downtown to protest at CHA headquarters. ‘He even got us coffee and doughnuts,’ she said. ‘And he didn’t have to do that.’” [Chicago Sun Times, 10/3/04]

LA TIMES: Obama Painted Altgeld Gardens Residents As “Pathetic,” “Meek,” And “Confused”

FACT: Obama Wrote of Residents With Respect; Saw Parallels Between His Personal Story and Theirs

Obama Wrote Admiringly of Women He Worked With in Altgeld, Respected the Challenges They Faced. In *Dreams of My Father*, Obama wrote, “They were spirited, good-humored women [the women he worked with at Developing Communities], those three, women who—without husbands to help—somehow managed to raise sons and daughters, juggle an assortment of part-time jobs and small business schemes, and organize Girl Scout troops, fashion shows, and summer camps for the parade of children that wandered through the church every day.” [Dreams of My Father, p.167]

Obama Saw Parallels Between His Personal Story and Altgeld Resident. “Sometimes I would stop by Mary’s house just to say hello, drawn perhaps by the loneliness I sensed there, and the easy parallels between my own mother and Mary; and between myself and Mary’s daughters, such sweet and pretty girls whose lives were so much more difficult than mine had ever been, with grandparents who shunned them, black classmates who teased them, all the poison in the air.” [Dreams of My Father, p.176]

LA TIMES: Obama Exaggerated His Own Achievements, Wrote that His Group Was Called “Obama’s Army” By Resident

FACT: “Obama’s Army” Was Sarcastic Reference To Small Turnout For An Event

Obama’s Army Sarcastic Reference To Small Turnout For First Visit to Housing Authority. Despite days of organizing, the turnout for his visit to the Chicago Housing Authority was smaller than Obama expected. He wrote, “...I counted only eight heads in the yellow bus parked in front of the school. Bernadette and I stood in the parking lot trying to recruit other parents as they came to pick up their children...When Angela, Mona, and Shirley arrived to see how things were shaping up, I insisted they ride with us to lend moral support. Everyone looked depressed, everyone except Tyrone and Jewel, who were busy making faces at Mr. Lucas, the only father in the group. Dr. Collier came up beside me. ‘I guess this is it,’ I said. ‘Better than I expected...Obama’s Army,’ she said. [Dreams of My Father, p. 238]