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Valentino Achak Deng

Founder of the Marial Bai Secondary School in
Sudan

Subject of "What Is the What" by Dave Eggers

THE LATEST: The New York Times' Nicholas Kristof is reporting from Sudan, where he visited The Valentino Achak Deng Foundation's newest school in Marial Bai. Check out [Kristof's blogpost from Marial Bai](#), about girls' education and Valentino's efforts to enroll more young women at the high school.

Valentino Achak Deng's life has been described by *The New York Times* as a testament "to human resilience over tragedy and disaster." Born in the village of Marial Bai, in Southern Sudan, he was forced to flee in the 1980s, at the age of seven, when civil war erupted. As one of the so-called Lost Boys, he trekked hundreds of miles, pursued by animals and government militias, and lived for years in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. He eventually resettled in America, to a new set of challenges. Deng's life is the basis of Dave Eggers' epic book *What Is the What*, which Francine Prose calls "an extraordinary work of witness, and of art." In 2009, as part of his Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, he opened the Marial Bai Secondary School, the region's first proper high school.

Valentino Deng spent his formative years in refugee camps, where he worked as a social advocate and reproductive health educator for the UN High Commission for Refugees. He has toured the United States and Europe, telling his story and becoming an advocate for social justice and the universal right to education. In 2006, Deng collaborated with Dave Eggers on *What Is the What*, an international bestseller that is now required reading on college campuses across America. With Eggers, Deng is co-founder of the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, which helps rebuild Sudanese communities by providing educational opportunities and facilities.

Valentino Achak Deng Speech Topics

What Is the What: An Evening with Valentino Achak Deng

With perspective and humor, Valentino Deng uses his extraordinary life to illuminate the lives, and the struggles, of millions. With storytelling grace, he takes you from the senseless tragedies of his early life (civil war in Sudan, refugee camps in Kenya) to his time in America to the hard-won triumphs of today (the opening of the Marial Bai secondary school in 2009). The powerful story that emerges is a testament to both the

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senselessness of war and the resilience of the human body and mind. Deng is a speaker of bottomless compassion, and of hope and integrity -- a man whose unforgettable life has humbled and enlightened thousands around the world.