

Mark Obama Ndesandjo: First Brother Raps about His Autobiography and Barack

By Kam Williams
For The Skanner News

Born in Kenya in 1965 to Ruth Baker and Barack Obama, Sr., Mark Obama Ndesandjo is an accomplished musician, author, artist and businessman. Prior to settling in Shenzhen, China, he earned a BS in Physics from Brown University, an MS in Physics from Stanford, and an MBA from Emory.

A half-brother of President Obama, Mark consults worldwide, employing his considerable telecommunications, international marketing and branding experience gained as a senior manager at Lucent, Nortel and other companies. He is also fluent in Mandarin, both as a speaker

and CDs, "The Untimely Ones," "Night Moods" and his own composition "Reflections on William Blake."

He regularly gives piano lessons to orphans in and around the city of Shenzhen, and he was appointed Volunteer Image Ambassador and Special Olympics Image Ambassador by China. Furthermore, he founded the Mark Obama Ndesandjo Foundation, Ltd for cultural exchange, whose goal is to bring art to disadvantaged youth.

Kam Williams: Hi, Mark. Thanks for the interview.

Mark Obama Ndesandjo: No, I am actually very honored, and I'm glad we finally linked up. It's been months, hasn't it?

son in many ways. I've read your interviews. You've touched base with so many interesting people from all over.

KW: Including your sister, Maya, who touched me at the end of my interview with her, when she said, "I won't forget you and I would love to meet you someday."

MON: That's great! The art of the interview includes understanding yourself, and if one is trying to be thoughtful, it's a way in which one can see parts of yourself that perhaps weren't so clear before. So, you have a very important tool, and I can understand what Maya meant.

KW: Did you know that I also went to Brown and



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and as a writer, and he's an avid brush calligrapher, too.

As an author, he has published the novel, "Nairobi to Shenzhen," as well as an intriguing autobiography, "An Obama's Journey." Musically, he's released 3 pi-

[Laughs]

KW: Yeah, the 12-hour time difference can make it a little hard to connect by phone. I already know that from writing for some Asian outlets.

MON: That's right. You're truly a global per-

lived in the Grad Towers while I was there.

MON: Omigosh! Another Thayer Street refugee. [Laughs] What a small world it is, Kam.

KW: I found "An Obama's Journey" fascinating.

MON: Thank you. It was a very difficult book

to write.

KW: I can imagine. It's so revealing emotionally. Plus, you had to deal with the burden of your brother's being in the public eye.

MON: I'm so glad you liked it. Writing a book, you have to reach very deep inside of yourself to share a message that will touch the readers. Otherwise, people will know, and it won't connect.

KW: Some of what you wrote about Barack, like how, for political reasons, he lied to the press about when he first met you, was very revealing.

MON: One of the focuses was just to share some of the important

facts that have shaped lives in our country and in individuals in my family. Hopefully, people can take positive lessons from that, and use it to make a change or do something positive. I don't speak for Barack. I speak for myself, as you know. There are many things about him that are difficult and almost inscrutable. That's part of the mystery and also part of the reason for his success. When he said that he'd only met me for the first time a couple of years before, when he really hadn't, it was very surprising and disappointing to me, because it seemed like politics were taking precedence over family. Having been

through the excesses and the extreme emotional politics of family dynamics had already made me very sensitive. But that being said, I support my brother. He's a remarkable person, and he's changed my life in many ways.

KW: I have asked for permission to interview him many times, but the White House has repeatedly declined. Should I give up at this point?

MON: I hope that you get a chance to interview him one day. It'll probably happen. So, don't worry too much about it. [Laughs]

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the Top 10 TV shows in the country.

Despite the unparalleled achievement, Norman occasionally found himself facing discontent in the ranks, such as a rebellion on the set of "Good Times." It seems that some of its cast members had become upset about the series' portrayal of African Americans.

Esther Rolle, who played Florida, complained about the buffoonery, while John Amos, who played her husband, James, became so disillusioned that he left the program after three seasons at the peak of the program's popularity. Matters came to a head when the Black Panthers stormed Lear's office, demanding that he present some positive African American characters. That prompted Norman to give Archie Bunker's irascible neighbor George Jefferson his own spinoff as a wealthy businessman "movin' on up" on Manhattan's ex-

clusive Upper East Side.

Co-directed by Oscar-nominees Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady (for Jesus Camp), "Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You" is an intriguing retrospective offering a revealing peek inside the mind of a pivotal figure in the evolution of American culture. For, Lear, now 93, appears prominently in the documentary, along with luminaries like George Clooney, Jay Leno and Russell Simmons, to name a few.

An alternately penetrating and poignant portrait of a true trailblazer!

Excellent ★★★★★

Unrated

Running time: 91 min.

Studio: Loki Films

Distributor: Music Box Films

To see a trailer for *Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You*, visit: TheSkanner.com.

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