

HOME

NEWS

SPORTS

SHOWBIZ

NEW YORK

OPINION

LIVING

BLOGS

AUTOS

12.18.2013, 02:00 AM

New play 'Loving Obama' by John Ransom Phillips eyes the presidential psyche



BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

A President who grew up without a father is one of the themes of 'Loving Obama.'

Days after that awkward Nelson Mandela funeral selfie, another portrait of Barack Obama is developing — and it's a psychological one.

A new in-the-works play, "Loving Obama," now in auditions, finds the commander-in-chief at sea, spiritually.

"It's a mythic tale of self-discovery," says playwright John Ransom Phillips, who was inspired by Obama's 1995 memoir, "Dreams From My Father."

"Obama feels the continuing loss of his father who was never there for him," adds Phillips, an artist with a doctorate in the history of culture from the University of Chicago. "He wants to fill this black hole of incompleteness. He's on a journey of reconciliation."



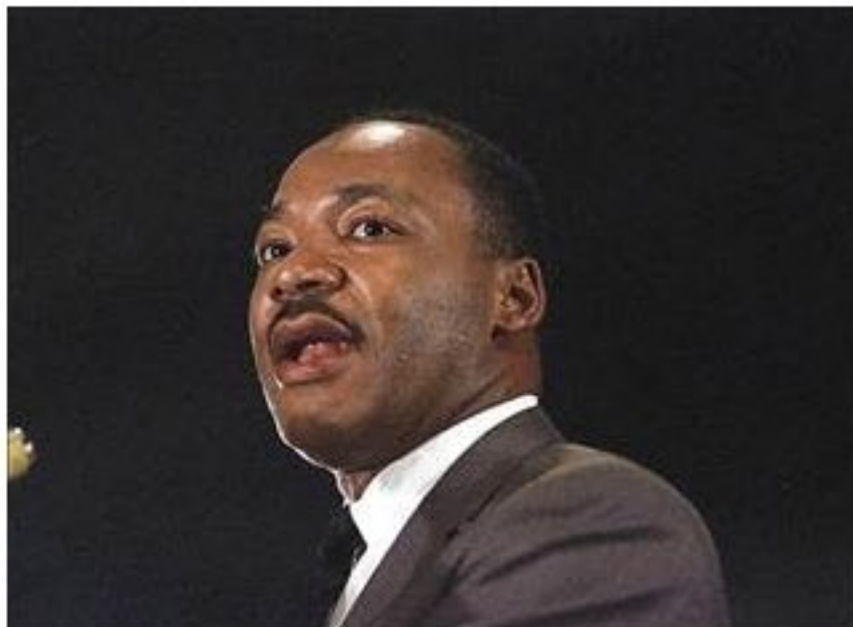
John Ransom Phillips, author of 'Loving Obama'

Despite the title, "Loving Obama" is already generating plenty of hate — like its main character, perhaps.

"I've never gotten nasty emails before," Phillips says. "People are reacting to the title. But the play isn't about me loving Obama, but about Obama embracing himself."

The 44th POTUS encounters several men during his quest, thinly veiled stand-ins of iconic leaders: Al Sharpton (known as Sharpie in the play), Jesse Jackson (called Jack), Martin Luther King Jr. (simply "Luther") and Malcolm X (who is only called X in the show).

"Some of the influences are more positive than others," says Phillips. The character of Luther, he adds, "is most capable of contributing to Obama's journey."



AP

A character similar to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. accompanies Obama on his spiritual quest in 'Loving Obama.'

A workshop production of the play will run in February and is shaping up to be a mixed-media piece. It combines drama and dance by choreographer Sidra Bell, who is directing.

"Loving Obama" is part of a Phillips series on Presidents that combines paintings and text. "Loving Obama" is the lone drama in the series.

That said, expect a flattering portrait. Phillips voted for Obama twice and even offered the campaign a painting called "Barack Obama in Watery America."

Maybe "Loving Obama" is a good title after all.

"Loving Obama" will run Feb. 21-22 at ArtPond Foundation Studio Space, 313 E. 58th St. in Manhattan.

jdziemianowicz@nydailynews.com

Author: **Joe Dziemianowicz**