

# MIDLANDS

**B**

SUNDAY WORLD-HERALD

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2009

OMAHA.COM

## Perfect dignity inspires Kenyan

Though not exactly a Yankee Doodle Dandy, he was born on the Fourth of July — in Kenya, the land of President Barack Obama's father.

"When America celebrates its birthday," the 23-year-old said with a smile, "I also celebrate mine."

His name is Nicodemus Ondego, a student at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, majoring in management of information systems.

In November, as the U.S. presidential election results were announced, he stood in the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, obtaining his visa to study in America. With the time-zone difference, it was Tuesday night here but Wednesday morning there.



**Michael Kelly**

The U.S. ambassador, Michael Ranneberger, greeted Kenyans. Many danced in the

streets. Speeches were shown on TV by Obama and his opponent, Sen. John McCain.

Nicodemus remembers thinking, "You Americans have two very great leaders."

Last week, along with many others on campus, he watched the presidential inauguration. More than most at UNO, he marveled at the dignity and peace of our nation's succession of power.

After the contentious 2008 Kenyan elections, more than 1,500 died. As the Christian Science Monitor reported, recent elections in Nigeria, Congo and Zimbabwe have resulted in fraud, intimidation and violence.

**Ondego**

In America, we campaign contentiously — and for the victor, we throw a parade. Sometimes we contest the results, but then we abide by them.

Said Nicodemus: "It's a perfect example of democracy for the world."

Imperfect though we are, Americans strive to achieve our founders' dreams of a more perfect union.

In the middle of a city in the middle of the country, UNO students at midday Tuesday watched the central ritual in America's grand quadrennial ceremony.

David Michael Herrera, 28, a political science major who said his ethnic background is "black, Mexican and Irish," said he never thought he'd see an African-American become president.

Nikola Jordan, 25, a religious studies major, worked at a College Democrats table in the student center, next to Marine recruiters. She said she appreciates the sacrifices of people in the military, and she praised Obama's speech as "strong and hopeful to the rest of the world."

Warren Whitted, 31, who voted for McCain, said he nevertheless welcomed "a different set of ideas" and wished the new president great success.

Fractious difficulties cloud any president's time in office, but the start of a term brings the nation together.

Nicodemus Ondego watched the inauguration with students at UNO's international office. His surname begins with "O," like Obama's, and their ancestries are both from the Luo tribe.

Ondego's father, a health care supervisor, died of diabetes when Nicodemus was 18. An uncle is helping financially.

The foreign student is still getting used to our cold winter, which is most foreign to him — the forecast for Nairobi today called for a high of 81 degrees. But he has appreciated the warmth of people in Omaha.

Nicodemus hopes someday to return to Kenya. The level of technology there is low, he said, and he wants to help the nation develop.

That the son of a Kenyan can rise from a humble background and become president of the United States, he said, is "an inspiration to young people, an inspiration to anyone out there."

Every summer of his life, as fireworks light the skies of America, a man from Kenya will celebrate his birthday — and remember the perfect dignity he witnessed as the United States changed its leadership.

■ Contact the writer:

444-1132, michael.kelly@owh.com