

WITHOUT THE KING

A Film by
Michael Skolnik

USA, 84 Minutes, Color, 2007
Digibeta, LTRT Stereo
In English and siSwati



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SYNOPSIS

The tiny country of Swaziland is the last absolute monarchy on the African continent. Its leader, King Mswati III, faces huge challenges as he fights to save his people from starvation and the worst AIDS crisis in the world. At a startling 31 years, Swaziland has the lowest life expectancy in the world. It is these problems that have given birth to an underground revolutionary movement

intent on bringing democracy to the country.

The film explores the Royals' lavish lifestyle, replete with palaces for each of the King's fourteen wives, a fleet of expensive cars, designer wardrobes, and schooling abroad for his 22 children, while underscoring the poverty-like conditions lived by the majority of the people. This disparity is highlighted by a group of young "freedom fighters" in their quest to remove the King from power and form a constitutional monarchy. Their growing anger is chronicled in protest rallies, violent clashes with the police and glimpses into the severe living conditions prevalent in the country. When the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 42.6%, the highest in the world, hope for survival begins to be questioned.

At the center of all these worlds is the King's eldest daughter, Princess Sikhanyiso. Between her first year of college in California and her duties in Swaziland, the Princess begins to truly see what's going on in her country. When she returns home to attend the annual Reed Dance, where over 75,000 bare-chested virgins dance in front of the King, hoping to become his next wife, the Princess begins to question the role of the monarchy. As her father becomes more oblivious to the dire situation plaguing the country, her concern about a possible revolution becomes heightened as the documentary progresses. In the end, she is left with some tough decisions; what will become of her country and what will she do about it.

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HISTORY

The Kingdom of Swaziland is a small, landlocked country in Southern Africa (one of the smallest on the continent), embedded between South Africa in the west and Mozambique in the east. The former British commonwealth is headed by King Mswati III, who ascended to the throne upon the death of his father King Sobhuza II in 1981. He was introduced as crown prince in September 1983 and was crowned King on April 25, 1986, at the age of 18 making him the youngest reigning monarch.

Swaziland's constitution, or the lack of one, lies at the heart of political risk in the country. For the past fifty years Swaziland has been struggling to find a way of marrying the demands of the "modern" bureaucratic state with the power and privileges accruing to those owing their position to a "traditional" system centered upon the ruling Dlamini royal lineage. In 1973, King Sobhuza II suspended the constitution on the grounds that it did not reflect Swazi culture. Four years later, parliament reconvened under a new constitution that vested all power in the King. By the end of the 1980's, opposition to the monarchy was emerging from the ranks of organized labor and the students at the national university, who were willing to defy legislation that branded all criticism as subversive.



Opposition parties remained banned, and during the 1990's the confrontations with the government reached a new height. It did not help, that the AIDS epidemic began to run rampant throughout Southern Africa, with Swaziland being hit the hardest. To further add to the troubles of the country, in the late 90's Swaziland experienced a severe drought, which has lasted until today. In 2002, the UN began distributing food aid to counteract the effects of the drought. In 2005, Swaziland held the dubious distinction of having the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world at 42.6%. With the growing instability in the country, King Mswati III appointed a commission to draft a new constitution. The constitution was adopted on January 26, 2006. Today, there is still much debate on the merits of the constitution and the ability for this government to properly serve its people.

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BIOGRAPHIES

MICHAEL SKOLNIK

DIRECTOR

Most recently, **Michael Skolnik** directed *Lockdown USA*, a documentary film about Russell Simmons and his quest to end New York State's Rockefeller Drug Laws, that premiered at the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival. Michael is in post production for a film he is co-directing about Grammy Award winning artist, Wyclef Jean's quest to bring peace to his homeland, Haiti. In 2004, Michael Skolnik made his feature film directorial debut with the award winning, *On the Outs*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival. Michael was nominated for a Gotham Breakthrough Director Award and an IFP Indie Spirit Award for Best Feature. On the feature front, Michael is attached to direct *Stealing Cars*, produced by Maverick Films with a production start date for the fall of 2007. He also has a development deal with Universal Studios and is currently working on a film for Imagine, produced by Brian Grazer.

In 2004, Michael co-produced and associate produced two documentaries for HBO: American Undercover series: *Back in the Hood: Gang War II* directed by Marc Levin (*Slam, Street Time*) and *Heir to an Execution: A Granddaughter's Story*, a film directed by the granddaughter of Julius & Ethel Rosenberg. In 2003, Michael directed *Hooked: The Legend of Demetrius "Hook" Mitchell*, a documentary film about one of the greatest playground basketball legends to ever play the game. *Hooked* made its world premiere at the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival. Michael also directed award winning *La Esquina Caliente*, a documentary about the baseball games between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban National Team. His first film, Danny Hoch's *Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop*, Michael served as co-Executive Producer.

In 1997, while an undergraduate at UCLA, Michael Skolnik founded Equal Opportunity Productions (EqOp), an arts organization run entirely by young people. EqOp's mission was to bring an eight week theater program into L.A.'s most underserved public schools to help address the lack of curricular arts programming in inner-city schools. Michael is repped by Philip Raskind and Chris Donnelly at Endeavor. Michael is on the board the Hip-Hop Theater Festival, Kid Power DC and the Advisory Board of IFP/NY.

PAOLA MENDOZA

PRODUCER

Paola Mendoza, recently co-helmed *Autumn's Eyes*, a feature length documentary about a 3-year old girl who tries to navigate herself through the harsh reality of severe poverty, her teenage mother's incarceration and looming foster care. *Autumn's Eyes* made its world premier at the 2006 SXSW film festival. Ms. Mendoza also directed a short documentary, *Still Standing*; about her grandmother trying to put her life back together after losing her home to Hurricane Katrina. *Still Standing* made its world premiere at the 2006 Full Frame Film Festival. Ms. Mendoza, also an actress most recently starred in the 2007 Sundance Grand Jury Prize winning film *Padre Nuestro*. *Padre Nuestro* recently screened at the prestigious New Directors/New Films Film Festival at Lincoln Center. Ms. Mendoza also starred in the critically acclaimed film *On the Outs*, which she also co-created and received a nomination for Best Supporting Actress from the Method Film Festival for her portrayal of a 17-year-old mother addicted to crack cocaine. *On The Outs* was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, Gotham Award and was a recipient of the Audience and Jury Awards at the 2005 Slamdance Film Festival, as well as the Jury Award at the 2005 Deauville Film Festival. She will next be seen in *Good-Bye Baby, Coming Soon* and *One Night* all hitting the festival circuit in the Summer of 2007. Ms. Mendoza received her Masters in

Fine Arts from Sarah Lawrence College and her BA from UCLA. She is repped by Rachel Sheedy of Don Buchwald & Associates and Lillian LaSalle of LaSalleHolland.

JAMES ADOLPHUS
CINEMATOGRAPHER

Shortly after finishing film school, James Adolphus left the US to teach documentary filmmaking at An-Najah National University in the West Bank city of Nablus, Palestine. After returning to the United States, he began a two-year mentorship with acclaimed cinematographer Mark Benjamin. James worked along side him on a variety of projects including the celebrated HBO documentary, *Protocols of Zion*, directed by Marc Levin. In the fall of 2005 James and partner Joel Fendelman started Season of Light Pictures (SOL Pictures), a boutique production company, to produce documentary and narrative films. Shortly thereafter, he shoot and produced "*The Fighting Arts of Borneo*," a documentary about Chinese Kung Fu that examines the survival of traditional cultures in a rapidly changing modernizing world. James is currently shooting two documentaries. A film about a 15-year-old basketball player, "*Born Ready*" follows the life of Lance Stephenson who is said to be the next great legend in the game. "*Outside The Box*," is one filmmaker's personal exploration of her mixed-race identity that leads to an examination of one of the most interesting and least understood subcultures in America, black Jews. Over the years James has shot a number of short films including "*Too Bad*", "*Postmortem*" and "*Tremor*" for which he won an Audience Award for Best Cinematography.

MARTHA SKOLNIK
EDITOR

Martha Skolnik has been working as an editor since 1999. Martha most recently completed a documentary, *Lockdown, USA*, the story of the fight to reform the Rockefeller Drug Laws in New York State, as spearheaded by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons. It premiered last year at the Tribeca Film Festival. She just completed *Without the King*, the new documentary about Swaziland, a small nation surrounded by South Africa, done in partnership with Red Envelope. In 2004, she finished her first narrative feature, *On the Outs*. The film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and garnered 5 awards, including the prestigious Grand Jury Prize at the Deauville Film Festival, and both Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at Slamdance, the first time ever in the festival's history. Other projects have included; *Hooked: the Legend of Demetrius 'Hook' Mitchell*, an award winning documentary about basketball and drug addiction as told through the story of "Hook" Mitchell, a street ball legend; *A Conversation with Reggie Gaines*, writer of the Broadway hit *Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Funk*; *La Esquina Caliente*, a film that uses the metaphor of baseball to tell story of the impact of the Cuban embargo on Cubans and Americans; and *The Death of Two Sons*, an HBO project currently being screened across the country. Her next project is *Cry Haiti*, the story of Grammy award-winning artist Wyclef Jean, and his quest to save his country while re-defining himself as an artist.

Billing Block

RED ENVELOPE ENTERTAINMENT in association with SOZE PRODUCTIONS present a
MICHAEL SKOLNIK film "WITHOUT THE KING" editor MARTHA SKOLNIK director of
photography JAMES ADOLPHUS music MARK KILIAN executive producer TED
SARANDOS produced by PAOLA MENDOZA MICHAEL SKOLNIK directed by MICHAEL
SKOLNIK