



*How
international
solidarity
helped
topple
apartheid*

When South Africa Called, We Answered

***DANNY
SCHECHTER***

*Author of Madiba
A to Z: The Many Faces
of Nelson Mandela*

*Preface by Tony Sutton
Editor of ColdType magazine*



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Author of Madiba A to Z:

The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela

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in association with ColdType.net

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*All Praises To People From Many Lands Who Stood With the
People of South Africa And Did So Much Over So Many Years To
Support Their Liberation*

SELECTED COMMENTS ON DANNY SCHECHTER'S BOOKS

MADIBA A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela (2013)

‘Storytelling that is unique, refreshing and revealing...
Mandela emerges more nuanced than I ever understood
and ever more admirable.’ – **BILL MOYERS**

“Schechter has long earned his spurs by embracing our
struggle and communicating its strengths and weaknesses
from those risky times, to deepen a life-long contribution
over five decades as a committed and insightful writer,
reporter, critic and filmmaker. He is an outsider who
learned to think like an insider.” – **RONNIE KASRILS**

Occupy (2012)

“Danny Schechter is the Trident Submarine of the
American media. He silently gets underneath their barges
and blows the hell out of them.” – **GREG PALAST**

The Crime Of Our Time: Wall Street is Not Too Big To Jail (2010)

“Fully living up to his reputation as the News Dissector
goes right for the jugular in this rich and informative
analysis of the financial crisis and its roots. Not errors,
accident, market uncertainty, and so on, but crime,
major and serious crime. A harsh judgment, but it is
not easy to dismiss the case he constructs.” – **NOAM
CHOMSKY**

“Danny Schechter is the People’s Economist.” – **NOMI
PRINS**, *author and former Managing Director of Bear
Stearns and Goldman Sachs.*

Plunder (2008)

“Social Critic and journalistic researcher-Danny Schechter—deserves our appreciation for identifying yet another crucially important issue that has been ignored by our mainstream media and national leaders.” – **Dr. ROBERT D MANNING**, *Author of Credit Card Nation*

When News Lies (2006)

“Danny Schechter is not just another media watchdog. He is usually way ahead of the pack.” – **TOM FENTON**, *former chief foreign correspondent, CBS News*

“Danny Schechter in Weapons of Mass Deception is to the news media what Joseph Heller in Catch 22 is to the American military and the second world war.”
– **MICHAEL WOLFF**

News Dissector (2001)

“South Africa Now was important not only for what it reported, but for how it reported, working with the people closest to the actual reality...I am pleased that Danny Schechter is still with us in the trenches as an independent observer and journalist of conscience.”
– **AHMED KATHRADA**, *Nelson Mandela's prison comrade*

“We need 50, 100, 1000 Danny Schechters, And we need everyone to take his words to heart.”– **ROBERT McCHESNEY**

The More You Watch, The Less You Know (1999)

“Schechter’s feisty book is an extension of gutsy endeavors that have typified his work as a media insider and outsider.” – **NORMAN SOLOMON**

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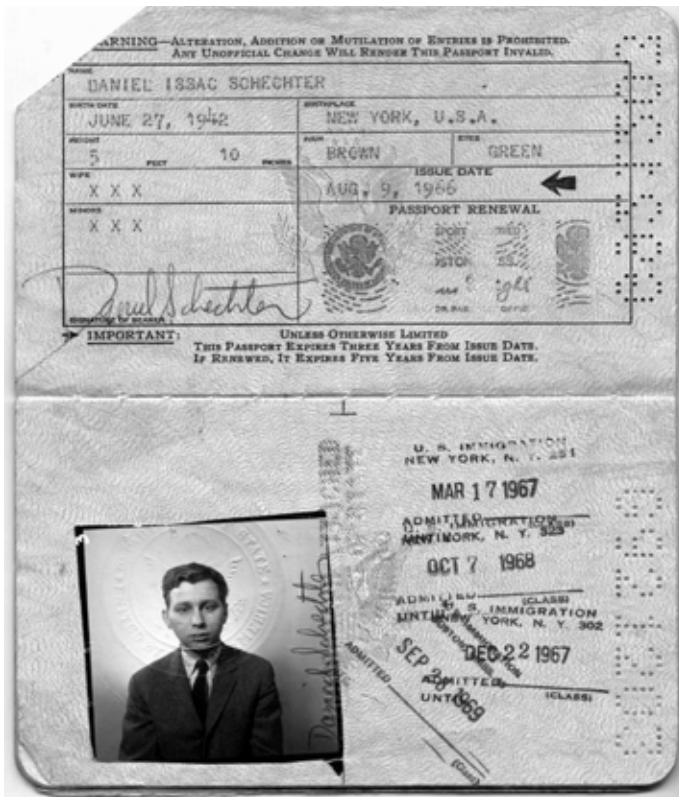
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Danny Schechter's U.S. Passport with South African visa, 1967

1967

Safari

IT'S 1967, THE SUMMER OF LOVE. I AM LOOKING DOWN AT THE top of the giant goldmine dumps as the giant BOAC plane I am riding in circles for a landing in Johannesburg. Suddenly, the seriousness of this trip hits me. I feel like a spy. It's my first time in Africa, my first time so far away from home. I had always wanted to go on a safari. This isn't one.

I am also scared shitless. I am here as part of the ANC's illegal underground, a "London recruit."

I ask myself: am I being brave or just stupid?

I am surrounded by what they call apartheid, in a society I barely understand. I said yes to the "mission" for political reasons, but I am in over my head in personal ones.

I wasn't sure if I would make it out. I did – but something unexpected happened: I never really left.

Now it's 1990 – I haven't been allowed into South Africa for 23 years. A man comes out of a small room in the old airport arrivals area. He wants to see my passport again. He stamps it again. I have only been given 10 days with a strange proviso: "No Reporting."

Two years later, I am back again to film a visit by the Dance Theatre of Harlem. I am told my visa has been held up by the then Foreign Minister Pik Botha. Mr. Mitchell, the Director of the Dance company calls me in New York and tells me "They don't want you here."

He asks, "Danny, what have you done?"

I feel like the last banned person. I had to call a friend in

high places, who had been unbanned two years earlier, to press Pretoria to let me in. When he did, they relented.

Why was there all this anxiety about a small fry like myself?

In another two years I'm back again, but this time with a letter signed by Nelson Mandela inviting me to document the ANC election campaign. The Hollywood TV company that agreed to make the film with me tried to take it over and, when they failed, pulled out. I am alone. I have one video handycam and no budget. South Africa's first multi-racial election has become one of the biggest stories in the world. Every media company is here. Every car and camera has been rented. I am the odd man out, a producer without a production, until a local movie producer comes to the rescue and saves my ass.

After shooting for two weeks, the election is over. We are celebrating at a funky restaurant in the Joburg suburb of Yeoville, once a Jewish neighborhood, now a Nigerian and Congolese one. We left our gear and tapes in the car. After the last drink, and toast to the South African "miracle," we leave to find the car is missing. Everything has been stolen. All our work gone!

But, somehow, our luck turns. The car had already been driven into the ground and the engine had been cutting out. The thieves coasted it a few blocks down the hill and tried to start it, but when it shut off, they abandoned it. They never looked in the trunk. The force or the miracle was with us: We recovered it the next day, sitting in the street with all the cameras and tapes intact.

When I told ANC leader Joe Slovo about what had happened, he remarked, "Only in South Africa, can you lose everything at night and then find it in the morning."

I was back a year later, this time to document an event at Robben

Island prison, just off the coast of Cape Town. The draconian penitentiary was then still in business. The “old” prisoners including Nelson Mandela have returned for a reunion in a country that seemed to have changed overnight. I am here to make another film. The election was a sign that the New South Africa has arrived in a place that still represents the Old South Africa. History slaps me in the face.

Tokyo Sexwale, known as “Comrade Tokyo,” so named because of his martial arts orientation, invites me into “his” cell. He slams the door. It locks. He climbs up on the bed and looks out of the window. He tells me that when he was kept there, he and his comrades would “leave” every night – in their imaginations. They left for London and New York but were back in the morning.

What an image.

The cell was small, very small. I am not sure I could have survived a day.

Over the years, Tokyo became a politician, then an industrialist and a multi-millionaire. I haven’t seen him for years, but I know he was fired from a Cabinet post and became mired in a nasty divorce. In 2013, he returned to New York, flying in first class this time, I’m sure, but was turned away by US immigration. His name, it seems, was still on the terrorist list that Nelson Mandela was removed from a full 18 years after his release from prison.

Tokyo was taken into custody in the year that President Obama would go to South Africa to sing Mandela’s praises, one of 91 heads of state at his funeral. In post-911 America, paranoia knows no bounds. What a farce!

I have been in and out of South Africa almost every year, in and out, making films, attending conferences, seeing old friends, and following ‘the story’ for good and bad. My ‘terrorist’ stint has been forgotten.

South Africa has become my adopted other country, while some people there think I am South African, possibly believing that I am related to a former race car driver named Jody Schecter.

Sorry, no relation!

In my own way, I fought for the country's freedom, too, as a media-maker and troublemaker. (I later learned that Mandela in his youth was given the name Rolihlahla, which translates as troublemaker.) I am hardly in the same league.

My story doesn't belong on any A list except, perhaps, my own.

But what an adventure it has been...

PREFACE | TONY SUTTON

A country we call our second home

LOOK BACK AT THE MAJOR EVENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE final decades of the apartheid era and you'll keep coming across the name of Danny Schechter – organizing, cajoling, pulling strings, and reporting the truth that an evil regime would have preferred to hide from an often ignorant and uncomprehending outside world.

His fight began in the sixties when, as a student at the London School of Economics, he became a close friend of three of the South Africans at the heart of the ANC in exile: Ruth First, later assassinated by the bomb of an Apartheid agent; her husband, Joe Slovo, considered the revolutionary group's intellectual brain; and Ronnie Kasrils, a leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed underground and, later, Minister of Intelligence in the ANC's second post-Apartheid government under Thabo Mbeki.

Schechter became one of the organization's London Recruits, a cadre of young non-South African idealists who flew into South Africa to detonate clandestine pamphlet 'bombs' in the heart of the nation's biggest cities. Their aim was not to kill people, but to make everyone aware that the ANC, although banned and exiled, was still a key part of the struggle.

"Scared shitless," he set off his bomb and then decided, on impulse, to attend the funeral of Nobel Prize-winner Albert Luthuli

in Natal, hitching a lift to the grave site, then strolling nonchalantly through a frightening crowd of stoked-up ANC militants surrounded by a phalanx of equally-fearsome and notoriously trigger-happy white policemen.

I first heard of Schechter's exploits at a party thrown by a gang of bemused and boozed-up foreign correspondents nine years later, weeks after the Soweto students riots of 1976. I'd been a journalist in Johannesburg for a year, and editor of *Drum*, the renowned magazine aimed at black readers, for just three months, when the revolution began. My only photographer had been detained on bomb charges (he was released a year later uncharged), my staff was harassed by cops and security police wherever they tried to work, and the first issue of *Drum* that I edited after the riots was declared so dangerous that the government made it an offence to possess a copy (a ban that lasted until the fall of Apartheid many years later). So, it was a good time to have a few beers and laugh at the exploits of a long-haired and impossibly-naive American radical. Brothers under the skin, I thought: bemused, bewildered, and over our heads – yet committed to a worthy cause.

I didn't hear the name Danny Schechter again for another 25 years, although I was a witness to the consternation caused by a campaign, fronted by Bruce Springsteen's guitarist Little Steven Van Zandt, to shame musicians into boycotting the Sun City casino/hotel complex in Bophuthatswana, one of South Africa's racial homelands, where many top US entertainers including Frank Sinatra and Linda Ronstadt had appeared. The music boycott was a morale-shattering blow to the Afrikaner government, which had banked on using showbiz to maintain the semblance of a normal society as it battled to control dissent, particularly from the younger generation who, unlike their parents, realised that the maintenance of the status quo was both unattainable and

undesirable. Schechter, I learned years later, was the prime mover of the Sun City campaign. After that, he launched the TV program South Africa Now, which worked tirelessly to show Americans a picture of apartheid ignored by their mainstream TV stations, after deciding that, as a journalist, he ought to do something to fight the media war in his own “field.”

Schechter and I next crossed paths a dozen years ago when, now resident in Canada, I began to use his News Dissector columns on my web site, ColdType.net. We became partners in publishing when I produced his book, “Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception”, a year later. Never again, I vowed, after the massive task of sorting out an unedited manuscript and a never-ending set of rewrites on endless page proofs. Then, a year later, another phone call: Would I help him do another book, this time on the financial crisis which later led to the 2008 stock market crash. “No re-writing, no piles of page proofs. Promise.” Of course, I agreed. Now, what was that about re-writes? Hmm, some things don’t change, but friendship survives all adversity. This is the seventh book we’ve worked on together – we’re partners. Danny provides the words. I sort them out. He does a bit of editing, I do a lot of moaning and whining.

This is my favourite of his books. It’s more personal, full of shared acquaintances, similar memories, and experiences of a country and continent that, despite their many faults, are etched deep into our hearts. Read it and you will understand our affection for South Africa, a troubled land we both call our second home.

*Tony Sutton
Editor, ColdType
Toronto
April 2014*

FOREWORD

A soldier of solidarity: Fighting apartheid from 10,000 miles away

THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT A COMMITMENT THAT MAY SEEM TO SOME more of an obsession. I am an American who has been connected to the fight for freedom in South Africa since the 1960's.

When the anti-apartheid struggle appealed for support, I was one of the many who answered, first as an activist, then a journalist. Like others, I marched, rallied, campaigned, boycotted, sat down and stood up. But, unlike most others, I went there, at first illegally, and then on countless trips to cover stories, make documentaries, and report on developments. I remained engaged.

While I am proud of this track record, I know I was never alone because the solidarity movement inspired by the struggle in that country went global – well before the age of the Internet – in the way that videos now go viral.

There are accounts to be written about the anti-apartheid movement and organizations in England such as Defence and Aid, the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) and – in the US – Trans Africa, the Africa Fund-American Committee on Africa, and campus and community groups such as the one that recruited a young Barack Obama at Occidental College. There are stories to be told about church-based campaigns, labor initiatives and international calls to action, including those initiated by the United Nations.

The anti-apartheid movement grew into a significant global force and there are online archives that document their work. I supported many of their political campaigns, but I also waged

some of my own as an outgrowth of media projects that actually were seen by and touched large audiences,

This is my account of that activity and those media initiatives. It is also about the challenges we faced, the joy I experienced in doing meaningful work, and also the misgivings I later felt.

We joined the global celebration when apartheid fell and hailed the ANC liberators who fought for so long against the odds before they became the ruling party as democracy replaced a racist system of authoritarian rule.

We cheered when Nelson Mandela became President and, although we realized that while we were never the prime movers in making this transformation possible, we knew we had helped play a role, and that our efforts were welcomed and appreciated. Few struggles for justice ever built such a global network of support and solidarity.

That may have appeared easy in retrospect, because the issue seemed so black and white, so right and wrong, but it never was. There were long years of setbacks and despair as a superior technological power kept a people's movement in check in South Africa with external backing from self-interested powers the world over.

I know that the celebration of one moment of triumph has not led to a transformed country. Like many in this fight – in South Africa and in other parts of the world – there has been, predictably, waves of disillusionment...

When you are in the heat of battle, there is little time for reflection or even criticism, especially when you are struggling against an evil that was as racist as it was economically oppressive. In those dark days, we often plunged into a confrontation that was driven morally and politically.

The crimes of apartheid, the killings, the mass incarcerations,

the tortures and the repression that went on for decades stared us in the face. We knew the names of many in prison and others in early graves. We were sensitized to the pain and sacrifice of so many ordinary people. We tried to support them, to stand in solidarity and learn from them.

Now, with Nelson Mandela's death, we saw how many in the world feel the same way – at least about him. An unprecedented 91 heads of state attended a memorial service in South Africa, while the UN General Assembly convened a special session to honor his life and contribution. (Significantly, most of the solidarity stalwarts had been forgotten, not invited to speak or recognized in displays of official speechifying, most of which was predictable, perfunctory, and not very memorable.)

The solidarity movement succeeded beyond its wildest dreams, especially after mass media joined the celebration by providing hours of airtime. The coverage became more of an act of deification than elucidation. At the same time, even in the celebration of an extraordinary life, there is a gnawing, often unspoken, pause because it all didn't come out quite the way we all hoped it would, hungering as we all were for the defeat of an evil system and the construction of a new one – a success story to be proud of.

A few years back, I had a visit in my New York office from the now late Mazisi Kunene, then a gray-haired eminence, best known as a talented Zulu intellectual, poet and writer whom I first met in the London of the '60s when he was crisscrossing the world for the African National Congress of South Africa.

A decade later, we would reconnect when he was teaching African literature at UCLA. His bonds to the organization had frayed by then, but he was never really drawn to the life of a politician anyway. Now, he had gone back home to South Africa

after 32 years and says he finds it strange and is still adjusting. (He would eventually be honored as poet laureate of South Africa.)

We ruminated about our lives and the bizarre circumstances that brought a member of the clan of the royal Zulu kingdom into a thirty year encounter with a younger self-styled “Jewlu“ from the Bronx.

I tell him about my first visit to South Africa, then 32 years earlier, reading some of the journal entries below that I first scribbled into notebooks I had just found stuffed in the back of a drawer. He is surprised. And I am delighted that he likes my writing. His approval means a lot to me. He points out that not that many American activists were connected to the struggle then. Not many remained connected as I have – as a participatory journalist – over all these years.

We speak of some of our political disappointments with the “New South Africa,” about many contradictions and some opportunists in power. At the same time, we agree that is amazing that the liberation, flaws and all, happened at all.

He looks at me, and says quietly, that he believes that I helped make it happen, that my work – my articles, research, TV shows etc. – mattered. Earlier in the week, the TV correspondent Bill Moyers had praised me publicly in similar terms. It feels good to know that your work made some difference, at least to people you respected as well as TV audiences that are not always easy to measure. It certainly had the attention of the many people who identified with and supported the struggle.

For three decades, being engaged with South Africa made a major difference to me, illuminating my own life in more ways than I can express. One lesson, I guess, is that if you believe in something deeply enough, and stay with it long enough, you might just win.

“And it was your victory too,” Mazisi says with a smile.

“I guess,” was my reply

I never thought of it that way before. If it was partially “my victory,” it also becomes partially my responsibility to understand what’s happened there over the years, for good and bad.

What I also think about was how my immersion in the South African issue, with South Africans, and at times in South Africa, gave me a chance for direct exposure to these issues while at the same time providing me with a way to remain in sync with, and be useful to the values I champion often at a time when many progressives in the USA were reduced to lots of grumbling and multi-issue occasional protests. Years later, I did get back involved in the domestic struggle when the hopeful Occupy Wall Street demonstrations erupted. I documented that movement, and wrote a book, *Occupy*, about it.

My participation in politics went from organizing to getting involved in journalism – mostly research, writing and media making. As one who grew up in a labor home, the ideas expressed in the trade union anthem “Solidarity Forever” was not just a musical declaration, but became a personal imperative. I first heard the 1930’s labor song sung by Pete Seeger who also popularized South African songs like Senzenina (What Have We Done?), and Wimoweh, a hit under the title, *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*.

Before South Africa seized my imagination and captured my commitment, I had been deeply immersed in the civil rights struggle in the US, in the rural South and the urban North so I was no stranger to activists, movements and dramatic confrontations. Both experiences led to forming lifetime friendships with people from other cultures and experiences who at times, no doubt, considered me an oddity.

Yet, it is always true that helping others helps yourself. The great Rabbi Hillel the Elder expressed it well eons ago, “If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And when I am only for myself, what am I? And, if not now, when?”

I was also part of the anti-war movement as an activist and journalist. I was forever documenting its actions and arguments. I reported from Vietnam in 1974, from the North, South and “liberated” areas. I didn’t know then that a few years after my visit, leaders of South Africa’s African National Congress would also visit Hanoi and become a beneficiary of their solidarity in the form of strategic military advice.

Millions of people worldwide made apartheid an issue, and it was the scale of the involvement of so many that provided the momentum. It is never just a few great men who make change, a notion that Mandela has associated himself with. One axiom I like: “it’s not the ship that makes the waves, it’s the motion on the ocean.”

South Africa became a symbol and a passion in those years, on a very turbulent ocean, and like so many when they learn to swim, I jumped in headfirst. I had no idea that I would be there from the 1960’s to the present, from my 20’s to my 70’s.

Many came and went, but in some senses I never left, even though, as I write today, at age 71, knowing what I know after learning what I did, there are only a few trumpets to blow, but no great transformation to boast about yet, despite all the heroic moments and tragic sacrifices.

Yes, I had illusions, and, so I guess I am somewhat, disillusioned, troubled by the corruption that is pervasive there as it is here, aware of the great divides and gaps that remain. But history has ebbs and flows, the oceans waters come into shore as waves and then get sucked back out with undertows. Nothing moves in a straight line.

We may chant the slogan that powered Guyana's brief uprising, 'forward ever, backward never,' but, sad to admit, their dreams were crushed and their moment was overturned – in part because of their own mistakes and contradictions – just as the bright hopes of South Africa's march forward is now in pause mode with powerful forces trying to push the erase button.

Not everyone can or does stay true to the call of revolutionary fervor. We age; we succumb to temptations that we justify first to ourselves and then to others as needs, even as internal and external pressures persuade us that our ideals must mellow if we are to get things done.

Co-optation walks hand in hand with self-seduction as pragmatism and opportunism erodes our certainties, and our choices become more complex. So it is with individuals and movements alike. As bureaucracy and oligarchy set in, the poets and activists tend to get pushed out. Idealism gives way to pragmatism and rationalization.

At the same time, even as the daily news from South Africa often depresses, I still see the changes that the struggle brought. They are not perfect or even adequate, but they are there on a material level, and in the minds of people who, in the apartheid years, could never have imagined any change would ever come.

A half a loaf is sometimes better than none, and all these years later, I don't regret my own choices which allowed me to be a modest participant in some of the efforts to support the fight for freedom.

If you had asked me two decades ago – on May 10, 1994, when I was filming the ecstatic crowds in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria after Mandela had been sworn in as South Africa's President, how I would feel 20 years later, surrounded by an ANC government in the hands of what seemed like a self-serving elite

that was as corrupt, in many cases, as in other African countries, I would have denied that prospect. I would have been blinded by the optimism we all felt.

Back then I would never have believed that poverty and inequality would be deeper today than it was then. I would have dismissed that projection as the ravings of what Spiro T. Agnew, a former U.S. Vice President, called “nattering nabobs of negativity.”

And yet, all is not well in today’s South Africa, just as all is not well in the rest of the developing world. We underestimated what it would take to overturn historically embedded structural economic problems. Many of us who cheered on national liberation struggles now recognize the *nativité* in our ranks. I asked former labor leader Jay Naidoo about what happened: “We are 18 years into our democracy. We can’t even blame apartheid. We have done something wrong and this is what we have to get to,” he told me.

He was talking about neo-liberalism, a system tied to the market and its money-focussed values. South Africa is not unique in succumbing to a social disease dubbed “affluenza,” but I asked him about the way neo-liberal solutions took root, with big business retaining its power and wealth by controlling the economy, even as the government was now in the hands of the majority.

“Did we expect that in SA we would become part of the scenario. No!” he practically shouted. “We were the model of the world, man. We were the ones that had the idealism and the power to create a different scenario. How did we fall into that trap? We can’t accuse imperialists for doing that to us. We did it. We made certain decisions. I am shocked today when I hear someone say we sold out because we didn’t take power. We controlled the state.

The largest procurement budget of this country is in the state budget; we control half this economy with the state corporations. We have power. We have not used that power correctly.”

Why that is, and the details of how that happened, is beyond the purview of this book, but we can't ignore the fact that even what seemed like the best of outcomes can and do go wrong.

Read history. Including my own. My unconventional bio, *Nelson Mandela, Madiba A to Z* – was published in 2013, just weeks before Mandela's death, an occasion for scrutinizing his legacy, especially on the left where some believe he “sold out,” while just as many on the right believe, “once a terrorist, always a terrorist.”

Similar questions were raised after the American and French revolutions and after the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. None of these movements achieved their highest hopes. More recent movements are riddled with the same contradictions, in Cuba, Venezuela or, closer to South Africa, in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique.

As I write this, in February 2014, I have just received a report from a leading journalist in Maputo where the soldiers of Frelimo defeated the Portuguese colonialists with the slogan, “A Luta Continua” (The Struggle Continues”):

“Maputo, 18 Oct (AIM) – Jorge Rebelo, Mozambique's information minister immediately after the country's independence in 1975, and once one of the most powerful men in the country, has attacked ‘bootlickers and sycophants’ within the ruling Frelimo Party and the Mozambican state.

“Interviewed in Friday's issue of the independent weekly *Savana*, Rebelo declared ‘the country is, unfortunately, infested with this sort of person. The state apparatus is infested with them because people are chosen on the basis of their ability to lick the chief's boots’.

“‘We’ve all witnessed this’, he said. ‘It’s enough to open some newspapers. But those who write, receive instructions to defend some ideas and guidelines, and they agree to do so. But the sycophants are pushing the country to the abyss. So I urge these people to stop being sycophants and to be guided by their own thoughts.’ ”

Is the problem sycophants, or corrupt officials, or the corrupting values and greed that a market economy makes possible and encourages? Is it that overturning a regime may prove easier than building a new one? Does all this mean that the impulses towards internationalism and solidarity will invariably disappoint and are self-defeating? I think not.

I don’t regret the choice I made to get involved, just as I did in the movement for civil rights in America, and the movement against the war in Vietnam. Not only were we on the right side but the winning side – or so we believed.

Today’s South Africa is a different country, and a far better country, than the one I first went to. It has a different spirit and certainly different possibilities. Perhaps what needs to be appreciated is how long change takes, and that the real obstacles are often rooted in the system itself. Democracy needs to be watered just like plants.

My thanks go to all the friends and colleagues I worked with, fussed with, fought with, and collaborated with over so many years on the South Africa support and solidarity efforts I discuss.

Some of you were well known – politicians, funders, diplomats, rock stars and “important” (or, maybe,) self-important) media professionals. But, most were activists of all races, nations and backgrounds who saw a wrong and wanted to right it, unrestrained by big egos or self-interests.

Without them, few of the initiatives and adventures I revisit

in these pages would have been possible, like the liberation movements we covered, if they were not collective undertakings. I know i wasn't always the perfect self-effacing comrade and could be volatile and difficult, but many of you kept me in line, and taught me to behave and value what mattered. I am proud of what we achieved.

Please be warned that there are some repetitions in the text because in some of my essays for different outlets, I drew on earlier articles. Much of this narrative was written while I was producing films and TV shows because I felt the process and their rationale should be explained. I am not an academic, nor did I have any grants to take time off to write. It was, like so much of this work, done on deadlines and on the run.

Very special thanks to Tony Sutton, the editor of ColdType magazine at ColdType.net – a British-South African-Canadian media veteran who worked with me to publish this book. He was editor of the renowned Johannesburg-based anti-apartheid Drum magazine during the years of revolt after the Soweto riots of 1976, and is a respected veteran of the South African media wars.

I would also add my appreciation to Alex Dake of Cosimo, an alternative publisher, who released this book

*Danny Schechter
News Dissector
New York
April 2014*

Africa Journal 'Summer 1967'

ARITHMETIC

Cape Town '67

Who is in control, who?

It is the black man says my friend Susan:

75% of the laws are written to keep him in his place.

79.4% of the propaganda explains away his condition

51% of the neurosis stems from the fear of his wrath

In short, the country revolves around him. His labor propels it; his passion defines it. The potency of color causes sterility among the colorless. The former are oppressed but the latter suffer. He will be here if anyone is left.

THE RAINS

At 4 p.m., the rains came

A witness wrote:

"A thundershower washed away the blood in the street."

Picture the storm for a moment

The sky is dark, lightning crackles far way

Rain is fierce in mid-March

In Sharpeville township,

The Transvaal

"I honestly thought this was it"

A white South African tells reporters

10 years later

I genuinely believed the bloodbath was coming

*Sound familiar
Was about to begin
About 700 shots fired that day
A lot of shots, 700,
The crowd non-violent
75 cops, white, open up
69 Africans, black, die
bullet holes in black backs
180 hurt
The emergency begins
15 years ago now
15 years of thunderstorms
washing clean bloody streets
leaving them wet with shame
And in New York
London, Paris
Speculators speculated
Hedged, tsk tsked, and
Invested more.
Were winds of change to blow
The diamonds away
And if the gold fell in other hands,
Would it all come tumbling down?
Bankers sing the internationale of self-interest
To one another
Singing in Afrikaans, not Xhosa,
Of course.
Let us talk small print
Hard cash, the bottom line
Of imperial slime
And the prudence of white business*

*Who after Sharpeville
Sent \$17 million into exile?
By years end,
\$207 million headed
For other markets overseas
Just in case, they explained
Just in case*

PART 1

Immersion: What Drew Me In



**Danny Schechter at the funeral of ANC President
General Albert Luthuli, Natal, South Africa, 1967**

POLITICS IS ALWAYS PERSONAL

Going underground: Why I went in 1967 and never really came back

THERE WAS A CERTIFIED LETTER WAITING FOR ME WHEN I returned from filming Nelson Mandela across the United States on his triumphant tour in 1990, just months after he won release from a 27 year prison ordeal. I was convinced that after that reception, apartheid had to be on the way out, and that the government was changing.

But change was moving at a snail's pace. The letter was from the South African Consul in New York. It read as follows:

Dear Sir:

Your application for a visa for the Republic of South Africa has reference.

The Department of Home Affairs, Pretoria, has informed this office that your application has been unsuccessful.

Yours faithfully,

Vice Consul (Migration)

After that lovely word “faithfully,” there appears a chicken scratch signature that would do any Park Avenue doctor proud. Apparently, New York consular employees never gave out their names for security reasons, as I found out when I tried to reach this mysterious Vice Consul who handles would be ‘migrants’ like myself. I agreed to call her “Miss Smith,” a not a very Afrikaner sounding name. She had no explanation to offer for the rejection of my visa application, “It was done at a higher level,” she finally admitted.

Earlier in the year, in late January, I had received an identical letter when I had hoped to go to cover Mandela's release. I joked with my ANC friends that no sooner were they unbanned, than I was banned.

After complaining to the State Department, and being urged to reapply since the country is "changing," I received a third rebuke on September 4th. If each one of these requests didn't cost \$18 in the application "process," I would go on collecting them to wallpaper my office.

It seemed obvious: some South Africans don't want me there. I finally got backin, but only for ten days. I had to agree that I would do no reporting, a pledge I found difficult upholding.

I am sure that part of the reason for this official hostility had to do with the television program I produced. They didn't like our weekly series "South Africa Now," and for good reason, but my file in Pretoria's intelligence archive must have more than that one entry.

I am not sure when their intelligence apparatus picked me up, and added my name to what must have been quite an international enemies list.

Was it in 1985 when I helped produce the "Sun City" anti-apartheid record featuring 54 well known musicians? Or does it go further back to a past littered with published articles about apartheid, and as many protest meetings. I was definitely a blip on their radar screen. Perhaps they had access to my CIA files as well.

Could they have been on my case way back to 1964 when I was part of an anti-apartheid sit-in outside the Chase Manhattan Bank in lower Manhattan with SDS colleagues? I was a lot thinner then, and South Africa was a much more distant abstraction.

Or did they become aware of me first in England two years

later when I attended the London School of Economics and befriended a fellow student, Ruth First. Ruth was a legendary South African journalist forced into exile with her husband Joe Slovo, then a leader of the South African Communist Party. He was for many years considered the country's "Public Enemy #1," and denigrated falsely as a "KGB Colonel" to appeal to cold war fears and make it appear the fight for justice in South Africa was all the work of commissars in Moscow.

Could they have been bugging the Slovo's home in London's Camden Town when I was a Sunday brunch regular back in the sixties where I watched them fiercely debate revolutionary politics, and was encouraged to join in?

It was Ruth who really taught me most, by her example and her brilliance, why South Africa was important to know about, and do something about. Pretoria hated her, and with more reason than they had for hating me. Moviegoers may know that it was her story that was dramatized in the film "A World Apart," based on a screenplay written by her talented daughter Shawn. Ruth was murdered by a book bomb sent by a government assassination squad, while teaching in exile at the University in Mozambique.

Did the security police know of my friendship with Pallo Jordan, once a New Left activist in America who was to become the Minister of Posts and Broadcasting in the "new South Africa," or my association with other ANC leaders, including Ronnie Kasrils, another LSE student who was also active in the ANC underground. He ended up spending years training the MK, the movement's guerilla army, and became a Deputy Minister of Defence of the very Armed Forces he spent a lifetime fighting and Minister of Intelligence for Thabo Mbeki, until Mbeki was forced from office. But, perhaps, just perhaps, they remember me somehow from my first sojourn to South Africa in the summer of

1967? I was then 25 years old.

I ‘went out’ to Africa then, as the English say, for a three-week holiday on a student fare. In some ways, I’ve never come back. I’m not sure what it is about that country that exerts such a pull but I’m not the only journalist to whom it has happened. Joe Lelyveld, later the editor of the *New York Times* won a Pulitzer for a book about South Africa. In it, he wrote that no country he’d ever covered had the same personal impact on him.

I later had the eerie experience of interviewing Dirk Coetzee, an Afrikaner and former Captain in the Security Police who was part of the covert hit squads that targeted Ruth and many of her comrades. He knew he had blood on his hands, but actually defected to, and was embraced by, the ANC.

Joe Slovo died of cancer in 1994, after negotiating the deal that made democratic elections possible. He was Minister of Housing in Nelson Mandela’s government and consistently ranked #2, right behind Mandela, as the person black South Africans respected most.

In the late 1980’s when people asked me when I was last there, I tended to say, “this morning”, because for so many years I have been deeply immersed in reading about, researching, reporting on, and, in effect, living with South Africa when I couldn’t travel there.

It was as if some South African gene had gotten mixed up in my DNA. I developed a passion for the country’s people and their struggle from a distance and it wouldn’t let me go. I realize now that the relationship has been unequal: I have received far more from the transaction than I have given.

South Africa is a special place, an eerie mix of the familiar and unfamiliar set against a landscape that is magical in its beauty. Every contrast there is pointed; every contradiction, revealing.

Horrible racial oppression co-exists with enough relaxed moments of racial interaction to make New York by comparison seem far more tense and polarized.

A black nanny has raised almost every white South African, while most blacks, except the generation born after 1994, called the “Born Frees,” had been united by oppressive laws and attitudes. At the same time, there is an interracial intimacy there for many on a personal level that has always conflicted with the reality of apartheid that had disenfranchised the majority and institutionalized inequalities on a vast scale. Musician Hugh Masekela says blacks survived the assaults of apartheid by outsmarting their oppressors – by being “wiley” and one step ahead. He credits a culture of resistance driven by humor and song.

When I first visited in 1967 during what was “the Summer of Love” in America, the country was firmly in the grip of a State of Emergency. There were few visible indications of black protest. As an American civil rights worker, I looked for such signs, and thought that I, of all people, would be able to sniff them out if they were there.

In Mississippi, at the height of the anti-segregation confrontation back in 1964, white ‘nawthin” college kids like myself had no problem getting black people to express their feelings, or willing to talk about ‘the man.’ That was my experience at home – but not in South Africa where blacks form the majority with a long history of resistance going back to 1652, and a clear sense of community and identity.

South Africa was not the American South, and apartheid was never another name for segregation. We could at least appeal to a Constitution that theoretically guaranteed everyone’s rights. In South Africa, the law upheld racism and there was no Constitution.

There, blatant economic exploitation was as much the problem as racial separation.

Over these years in Africa, there have been as many man-made disasters as natural ones. AIDS has ravaged the continent, and one can't forget the outrages or forgive the misleaders and criminals like Idi Amin, Mobutu, the architects of Rwanda's genocide, or a succession of egomaniacal military madman in Nigeria, just as colonialism's legacy can't be ignored. Despite the wars – Biafra, Angola, Somalia – it hasn't all been one great disaster or mess, but there have been major problems – and there still are. As I write, South Africa at least stands out as a not so minor miracle. Who would have imagined that?

The deaths of Africa's great leaders and thinkers – like Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba, Ben Barka, Kwame Nkrumah, Samora Machel, Augustinho Neto, Thomas Sankara, and great South Africans including O.R. Tambo, Chris Hani, Ruth First and Joe Slovo, or cultural figures like Barney Simon of Johannesburg's Market Theatre – hasn't helped. Neither have Western indifference or hostility, and the “look-the-other-way” mentality of the mass media.

But, in my lifetime, and hopefully in some small part through movements I served or the music and journalism I helped produce, South Africa became “free”, as did Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. In more than one sense, we all won even if, as we look at what was won, it seems far less than we hoped.

South Africa helped vindicate a faith, born in the 1960's, nourished in the cauldrons of activism and educated by the disciplines of journalism, that people can change the world. And that change was not in the first instance imposed from above, but struggled for from below. It was those struggles that generated international pressure, forcing the old government to negotiate.

Mandela and his comrades were freed. An election took place. Democracy was installed. A Constitution was created. All of these were the building blocks of what the world saw as the miracle of the birth of a Rainbow Nation. It was like a fairy tale, and in some ways, it still is because deep and structurally underlying problems remain to be solved.

It is not over yet. I am sure it never will be. That is one of the few certainties I permit myself to have. Many of the struggles I cared about have moved on to a new stage.

And, now, so must I.

A CLASSROOM BY ANY OTHER NAME

Learning South Africa: What pulled me in

ONE OF THE THINGS I SAW WAS HOW THE TEXTURE OF SOUTH Africa's struggle was not being reported well in our own country. For years now, through articles, on the radio, television and films, I've tried to report on what's missing, to fill in some gaps. I am sure that similar problems exist in the coverage of other countries, as well as our own, but South Africa has unique characteristics, and became a prism through which to view – and judge – those of the larger world. When I first went there, there was no hope. On later trips, there was nothing but.

Most of what I learned about South Africa ended up on video, on the TV series “South Africa Now” and in films such as “The Making of Sun City,” “Mandela: Free at Last,” “Mandela in America,” “Countdown to Freedom” and “Prisoners of Hope”. These were all attempts to capture, decode and explain what was happening in South Africa and what we could learn from it.

The ANC ultimately won because it united people of different races and shifted its strategy as conditions changed. Perhaps that's what Nelson Mandela lectured Black separatist leader Lewis Farrakhan about when the organizer of America's Million Man March met him in 1996.

It is significant that the anti-apartheid movement in the United States was able to build support across racial lines in a way that many other movements couldn't or wouldn't. Its seizure of the moral high ground made it hard to dismiss.

As with many Americans, my first encounters with Africa came from movies – Tarzan flying on jungle vines, filmed as I later

learned, on a back lot in Hollywood. Years later, while profiling singer Tina Turner's comeback for ABC TV's 20/20, I learned that her ex-husband (and later, abuser) had been totally mesmerized by a Tarzan-like movie serial called, Nyoka The Jungle Girl that he watched as a kid while sitting in the segregated "colored" section of his home town of Clarksdale, Mississippi. He made his wife, Annie Mae Bullock, over in her image. "She was wild," he told me. "Tina became my Nyoka." Ike Turner was an exception among most Americans of African decent, who were taught to be ashamed of their links to Africa. It inspired him! In 1971, Ike and Tina starred in the Soul to Soul concert in Accra, Ghana, a dynamic show (and movie) of cross cultural solidarity to mark the country's 14th anniversary of independence.

As a kid, it was the media that first brought South Africa into my bedroom in the Bronx housing project I grew up in. I remember Life magazine's photo spread about apartheid in the late 1950's with its striking images of the winds of change, the bus boycotts and passive resistance campaigns that foreshadowed similar events in our country.

I also learned through music: folk songs such as "Wimoweh" from the Weavers, (Pete Seeger would later channel royalties for to its South African writer who was never credited or paid.) Zulu Warrior by Marais and Miranda, Zenzenina as sung by Pete Seeger, and later through the jazz of Hugh Masekela and the click song of Miriam Makeba.

By 1960, I remember being captivated by the infectious rhythms of African music, especially Olatunji's hit Drums of Passion, in my Cornell dormitory where freshmen blasted it on their phonographs out the window. ("Acky wah wah," he chanted in Yoruba, not suspecting, I'm sure, that it would turn on a bunch of crew-cutted adolescents in Ithaca, New York.)

So I guess I felt Africa in my feet before learning about it in my head. African students at Cornell began to teach me more. One asked my best friend, the late Ken Rubin, co-editor of *Dialogue*, the political journal we edited together, to help them organize a march to mourn the murder of the Congo's independence warrior Patrice Lumumba. Ken and I wrote a letter to our student newspaper, the *Cornell Daily Sun*, at their behest, calling for a solemn protest on campus. The foreign students had feared political retaliation by the authorities were they to write it. The dignified march went well, with the Africans in native dress, but was greeted with a counter-protest by campus conservatives who carried signs supporting Belgian colonialism that joked about cooking people in a pot.

(Years later, I learned that letter to the student paper had ended up in my FBI file. In 2009, I was able to tell Patrice Lumumba's son about that protest and finally share my personal condolences in his home in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was actually invited to sit down at the desk Lumumba used before his untimely death. That was 48 years later.)

Dialogue carried articles about Southern Africa back in 1961. After all, the world was changing. There had been a revolution in Cuba. The Third World was emerging as a force on the world stage, defining itself, challenging colonialism and its remnants. And young people were at the forefront of change, leading movements and taking over countries. Most commentators today see the history the '60s as only an American happening, but it was a worldwide phenomenon. Student movements in South Korea, Japan and Latin America inspired their American counterparts. I soon began to see our own battles as young wannabe change-makers through a global lens of internationalism and solidarity.

Years later, in '67, when I returned from that first trip to the

land of apartheid, I was convinced that South Africa was destined to become another Vietnam, another country in which the forces of revolution would collide with a repressive counterrevolution, aided and abetted by American intervention. As far as I could tell, that intervention was already underway, just not yet on a military level. In those days, South Africa was still considered a bastion of western interests and affinities.

Elsewhere in Africa, the old imperial order had given way to a new one that retained its dominance through neo-colonial influences, international economic institutions and multinational corporations. The more I learned about apartheid, the more I realized that foreign capital propped it up, in part, because the return on investment was growing alongside a lucrative emerging market.

South African apartheid thus was not just an isolated aberration but relied on the complicity of others. I began to realize that you couldn't understand or combat apartheid in South Africa alone. I slowly began to see Africa as part of a world system, and realize that, thanks to slavery and colonial plunder, the West's economic over-development was linked to Africa's underdevelopment: that our policies were driven by the desire for access to raw materials and markets with a negative impact. In essence they were 'undeveloping' Africa.

Once, African slaves were forced to help America develop its agrarian economy, which in turn fueled our industrialization. Today, our overseas assistance was primarily an exercise in self-interest, in opening new arenas to American business. I came to see apartheid as slavery by another name

As I became engaged with these issues, I was determined not to think of Africa as my own psychological or political colony. That seems to be the case with many area experts and

missionaries, who develop a sense of personal ownership of a region or a country, guarding their expertise and contacts as an act of self-aggrandizement. I never thought of myself as an African specialist, just a journalist and activist. I was mindful of the danger of turning the old white man's burden into some sycophantic white Marxist burden.

In those years, I was also cutting my journalistic teeth on a range of related issues. I became an investigative reporter for *Ramparts*, the San Francisco-based muckraking magazine of the '60s. *Ramparts* had exposed covert CIA funding of student organizations after discovering how they did it.

Phony foundations had been set up with a "triple pass" system through which money could be funneled from one foundation to another, deliberately disguising the real benefactor. In some cases the recipient group didn't know that they were being subsidized, but in many cases, they did. Usually a few key officials were in the know, "witty," in the intelligence parlance then in use. Once we learned how CIA money was being channeled – these foundations had to file IRS reports disclosing their own money trail – we started to look into who got what and why.

Because I was based in London, I was put on the Africa beat. I investigated why some labor group in Kenya or a political magazine in South Africa was receiving CIA subsidies. There were hundreds of such groups on their payroll. What services did they perform?

Through this type of journalistic detective work, we began uncovering the existence of what was called a Free World Empire, a covertly mobilized, multi-layered Cold War apparatus with a number of not so carefully disguised channels of influence, interlocking organizations and directorates, all reinforcing each other through a strategy of "cumulative impact."

The Soviets operated more openly; their front groups were more obvious. Ours were shrouded in a system based on plausible deniability. We discovered that the CIA had journalists on its payroll, that it planted stories through proprietary companies and phony news agencies. Some of these stories would first run overseas and then ‘blow back’ into the press at home.

Americans became the ultimate target of a steady stream of anti-communist propaganda designed to stoke our fear of the “red menace”, and engineer assent to a bloated military and intelligence establishment.

As we learned more about these CIA networks, I realized that I needed to know more about the African countries themselves to make better sense of where the money was going. I had to find out more about the politicians the US was backing, and the interests they were serving.

In some cases, those politicians were opportunists – never bought, just rented, playing the big powers off against each other. Soon my study of the CIA became an insufficient guide to African society. As my inquiries mushroomed, I started reading their history and learning about their political economy.

- Why did the Kennedy Administration back Portugal’s colonialists against African freedom movements led by Amilcar Cabral in Guinea Bissau or Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique?
- Was it true that Nelson Mandela was in jail because of a tip to the South African police by a CIA agent?
- Why was the United States aligned with the likes of the dictator Joseph Mobutu in Zaire, a former police agent who ran his country like a personal kleptocracy?
- Did we have a hand in Lumumba’s assassination?

- Why was American civil rights leader James Farmer dispatched to Africa to challenge Malcolm X's growing influence there?
- What was the US really up to in Africa?

Small questions turned into bigger and more serious inquiries as my research began to fill file cabinets. When I returned to America in 1968, I found new friends, white and black, with similar questions. We formed the Africa Research Group (ARG) to pursue an investigation we hoped might be helpful to those opposing this nefarious web of covert political warfare, counterinsurgency and support for repressive regimes in the name of democracy.

As we began to probe American policy in Africa, we found that there were a few professional Africanists doing the same kind of work with a questionable and sometimes shadowy impact. It became obvious that cold war priorities had contaminated academic research.

There were scores of grants to study what the Russians were doing in Africa and only a very few looking into what Washington was up to. Millions of dollars were invested in studying the tribes of Africa, while our Africanists themselves had turned into a tribe – often on the payroll of government agencies, foundations, specialized institutes and think tanks, all serving the same worldview and indirectly, economic interests.

In 1969, our Africa Research Group published a “tribal analysis” listing these connections and naming the Africanists linked to these agencies, covert and overt. We called it “African Studies in America: The Extended Family.”

It created quite a stir in the academic world. We were denounced as McCarthyites of the left for circulating it at a meeting of the African Studies Association, which was also being challenged by

black students because of its virtually all white composition.

Allied with African-American students demanding more racial diversity in the field, we saw ourselves as rebuilding bridges that had collapsed when the unity of the civil rights movement splintered into nationalist rhetoric and separatist rage.

The Africa Research Group was prolific, publishing a book about South Africa, pamphlets, and articles that were picked up in underground papers, African magazines and even Elijah Muhammad's *Black Muslim* newspaper. Over the years that one filing cabinet in my study turned into 40 or more. Soon we were operating out of a small apartment, our own "secret location," identified only through a post office box. Perhaps because we had studied the CIA so closely, we were turning into one ourselves, coming up with documents like a Pentagon study of "Witchcraft and its implications for counterinsurgency."

The inspiration for our efforts came from one of sociologist C. Wright Mills' devotees, Martin Nicholas, who called on his colleagues to start looking up, rather than down for the causes of our problems – to study the powerful as much as the poor. We included a quote from one of his articles in our literature:

"What if the machinery were reversed?," he asked. "What if the habits, problems, secrets and unconscious motivations of the wealthy and powerful were daily scrutinized by a thousand systematic researchers, were hourly pried into, analyzed and cross referenced, tabulated and published in a hundred inexpensive mass circulation journals, and written so that even the fifteen year old high school dropout could understand it and predict the actions of his landlord, and manipulate and control him?"

This what-if scenario inspired the emerging field of radical research, which specialized in power structure analysis. The best known was produced, first, by the North American Congress on

Latin America (NACLA). There was NARMIC – a group probing the Military Industrial Complex. In California, radical researchers wrote about the emerging Pacific Rim. And, then, there was our Africa Research Group.

For a time I was a full time staffer with ARG, living with Africa while living in Massachusetts. I could survive on our small salary only because my then significant other, the historian Linda Gordon, was so supportive. She was teaching at a local university and drawing a real salary. She could afford the rent.

In 1976, eight years after we launched the Group, the students in Soweto staged their uprising and brought the brutalities of apartheid once more into public view. The dramatic protests and violent reaction put the issue of South Africa back on the world's agenda and on the front pages.

While the press was clearly sympathetic to the protesters, they seemed unable to present their story clearly, I was asked by the editors of *MORE*, a media review, to assess the problems. I was struck by the misuse of language and the superficial reporting.

Soweto was being described as a “suburb” of Johannesburg, as if the meaning of suburb that conjures up one set of images in America was transferable. Soweto was no more a suburb than the American Revolution was a little uprising in the colonies – it is an overcrowded township with a population that rivals Johannesburg.

Comparisons with the American civil rights movement were made without noting that in our country, people fought to extend the protections of a constitution to all citizens while in South Africa, there was no constitutions, and racism was legal and mandated by law. The economic underpinnings of apartheid were hardly scrutinized and the liberation movements rarely covered.

1967

The day I joined the Revolution

I WAS 25 YEARS OLD. I HAD THE SENSE OF HUBRIS AND INVULNERABILITY that comes with youth. I was political. I was passionate. I was part of a generation that wanted change and was determined to be part of the struggle to achieve it.

We were living in the 1960s, revolutionary times in ‘Swinging London,’ and were shaped by its fashions, hopes, and some of its illusions. We loved the Beatles and fancied ourselves ‘Street Fighting Men’ like the Rolling Stones. We wanted to be Che Guevaras (who was killed in 1967). We were engaged as activists and ready to rock. We wanted the war in Vietnam to end and the apartheid system to end with it.

Many of us were eager to serve our values and join the fight for justice around the world.

My opportunity to join a real revolution came in the form of a furtive and hushed invitation from a friend in the African National Congress to secretly slip in to apartheid South Africa, to “help.” It was a chance to put my life on the line for a cause I believed in and to support a movement I admired. It was hard to say “no” even though I was scared shitless at the idea of actually doing it!

Before I came to the London School of Economics and started getting to know some South Africans, I had been deeply immersed in the struggle for racial justice in the American civil rights movement. I had been a student activist who dropped out of college to organize in Harlem. I had worked on voter registration campaigns in Mississippi. I had experienced fear

and the saw the ugliness of repression and segregation.

I met Martin King. I bantered with Malcolm X. I could sing all the songs. I was part of a committee that organized the great 1963 March on Washington. I was engaged in what we called the “MOOVEMENT”. It defined me and educated me and helped me transcend my working class Jewish roots in a Bronx housing project. I went from a neighborhood stage to a national one – and then an international one.

I was not a “red diaper” baby – my parents were Social Democrats, not communist – but the whiff of socialism and a family history in the labor movement shaped my values. I was, as a teen, considered a white boy who got it, who could also dance and get down.

I also learned about apartheid. My first encounter was through the pages of Life Magazine. I had read Alan Paton’s Cry the Beloved Country in high school. At college, I met some South Africans and was outraged by the realities they described. I quickly learned more about the “winds of change” said to be transforming Africa.

I soon saw a connection between racism in the USA and the RSA. I also knew that my own country was on the wrong side even though Bobby Kennedy went there and some Americans rallied against apartheid. Like Che, I believed in 1-2-3 Vietnams and saw South Africa as a domino in an emerging global conflict between imperialism and democracy.

It was there, in London, that I first met Ruth First, the brave South African journalist and activist and now a heroine/legend of the first order. She was in my class at the LSE but also in a class by herself. Perhaps because we were both outsiders in an often-parochial English academic culture, we became friends. She made the situation in South Africa vivid and personal for

me. She was a journalist, too, and a marvelous storyteller. And what a story she had.

One of her daughters, Shawn, would later write a fabulous dramatic movie about one chapter of her life called “A World Apart”. Another daughter, Gillian, later wrote a book complaining that her parents had more time for the revolution than for their children.

She was married to Joe Slovo, a leader of the ANC’s revolution, whom the press described as “the white man who led a black revolution”. They were not part of some academic debating society, but immersed in a real revolution, a war with serious risks and high costs. Many of their comrades were in prison, others in early graves. There she was, forced into exile, bringing up three girls who I knew resented her political priorities, but knew she was tied to a struggle far away that consumed so much of her time and energy.

I was more of a New Leftist. She came from an old left tradition but was breaking away in her own way, towards feminism and a stance critical of Stalinism. Through constant argument, she pushed her husband Joe, a Communist Party stalwart, in the same direction. He would later become a leader of the armed struggle, a chief negotiator and, later, a Minister in the Mandela government.

Ruth would be assassinated by a South African covert action unit that sent a book bomb to her in Mozambique on August 17th 1982. She then became a revolutionary martyr. I visited her graveside years later on a reporting assignment in Mozambique.

Ruth and Joe were not directly associated with my decision to “go south.” I was recruited by Ronnie Kasrils, a fellow student at the LSE and a bundle of determination to transform South Africa

through the ANC. (He, too, would later become a government Minister.)

Their movement was compartmentalized so I don't know if they even knew. I didn't tell them because I was warned to stay silent for security reasons.

I was never designed to be a secret agent – I am too affable and talkative for that – but I mostly kept my decision to go on this unpaid “mission” to myself. That was the first challenge – learning how I thought a secret “operative” (which I really wasn't) was supposed to act. I was anxious to share my fears with others and seek reassurance, but I couldn't.

Next, even though the “operation” was “heavy” (to use a term much overused at the time) I was not armed. I came to understand its importance. The ANC was fighting a life and death battle. Many of its leaders were in prison or forced into exile. They had to communicate with their base in the country and keep the spirit of resistance alive, or at least its appearance, while they regrouped and reorganized.

Sending letters to activists from inside the country and creating a stir that would be related by word of mouth to generate a “buzz” was worth the exercise. Guerilla warfare is often about propaganda. It is often armed propaganda, but not always.

My task was to help deliver some messages, post some mail, and send some political flyers flying in a public place to keep the then-banned ANC's capacity to communicate visible. I was given piles of postcards and told how to get stamps for them and then mail them from a local post office, assuring they would get a postmark.

Some of the post cards went to addresses in London so that my “handler” could confirm that that part of the job was done. When I went the post office, I noticed South African soldiers

going in. I freaked out, but they were probably sending packages to their Aunties. I summoned up the courage to be brazen, to act as if I belonged there. I had become a “postman” from another world. The mail was sent.

The next part of the mission involved creating what amounted to poster bombs. It involved attaching the clock mechanism of a parking meter to a bundle of ANC flyers held together by string attached to a small blade. At the appointed moment, the clock would go off and the blade would slice through the string and the fliers would fly.

I was assigned to go to Durban, a city known for its beaches and warmer weather on South Africa’s East Coast. I took the night train down from Jo’burg. I was on the lookout for people following me and tried not to be obvious – I probably tried too hard and became all too obvious. I was convinced I was under surveillance. I walked around and around the streets and looked at where the police cars congregated, and what people wore.

I noticed that a lot of the whites wore short pants, and I bought myself a pair in an attempt to “blend in.” I realized that what I was doing, while low key, wouldn’t be if the security police snatched an American with a poster bomb in a satchel, and hundreds of post cards addressed to ANC sympathizers.

A wrong move, I realized, and the very people I came to help would be put at risk.

I fiddled with the leaflets and the clock mechanism. It kept slipping. Unlike my dad, I was not “handy.” It took a repeated effort to get it right, I then had to place it in the appropriate location, which would give the very subversive (and certainly illegal) flyers the most public visibility. That required reconnoitering and finding a point of entry and egress. I found a parking structure over a busy street. As I watched it, I was afraid

people were watching me. They probably weren't. I was white in what was then a white city with "non-Europeans" restricted as to where they could live, and even sit. As much as I hated to admit it, I blended in as just another "whitey".

Others, whom I didn't know, were doing the same and all the flyers were going to be set off at the same time in different cities. I was conscious of the time and timing, and worried that someone might interfere or that, mostly, I would screw up. I was as scared to abort the mission as to complete it. I wasn't sure if someone from the ANC had been assigned to watch me.

Once I found the appropriate place, I had to position the device, set the timer, turn the meter, and then disappear. In short order the leaflets would be dumped out in a public street, picked up by some, and noticed by pedestrians who would probably call the cops.

It was all to demonstrate that the ANC was still alive in the country and an appeal for anti-apartheid activism and denunciations of the government. It was an ingenious idea and I think I pulled off my "bombing" well. (How innocent this all seems now in a world where serious bombings are a daily occurrence in scores of countries, taking scores of lives.)

It was hardly a heroic guerrilla mission, but the risks were real. If anything happened, I was told to send a postcard to a mail drop with the stamp upside down. I never figured out how any cops that caught me would allow me to send a last postcard or how that would get me out of jail.

I put that thought out of my mind. I did my "job." My fears of being a klutz were exaggerated. I had been well trained. I have a feeling that if captured and connected with a banned organization considered terrorists of the highest order, my "vacation" in Sunny South Africa would have been a prolonged

one. I thought of that, years later, when I visited Robben Island prison. I would not have liked “living” in that hellhole.

The reasoning for my recruitment made sense: South Africans in exile were too high profile to go “home.” They would be arrested on sight. American students and English students were not known and so could, it was hoped, slip in as tourists. We were also disposable, I later realized. The ANC would not suffer a big loss if we were captured. The seriousness of what I had gotten myself into only hit me later. (One of my fellow “London Recruits” was captured years later and jailed for a long stint.)

I was keeping a scrapbook during my years in London and wrote about my state of mind, hopes and fears.

On June 27 1967, I turned 25 and a girlfriend wrote me a note which partially speaks to my mental state and the culture I was then part of:

“For your birthday,” she wrote, “I give you permanent immunity from the army, more time in which to do your things, lots of beautiful weather, good food and wine, US withdrawal from Vietnam, a secret map of the Pentagon’s security system, luscious girls falling in love with you helplessly, tact, subtlety and sexuality forever.”

My dad sent his hope, “that in your lifetime you should know only happiness and peace.”

Going to a war zone was a funny way of finding peace, but go I did, by plane, BOAC, through Kenya and on to Johannesburg. I remember flying into the city of gold. I was worried I would be caught along with my suitcase and its hidden compartment. I feared they knew I was coming. I didn’t realize what a small fish I was.

I breezed through with a “Welcome to South Africa” from airport officials. I was relieved, but it was a terrifying moment. Afterwards, I would tell myself how stupid I had been, how dangerous it would have been had I been busted as an agent of a “terrorist movement.” (Yes, Nelson Mandela’s movement had been outlawed as terrorist under South Africa’s draconian Suppression of Communism Act and so defined as well in Washington).

South Africans then, like some Americans today, saw terrorists under every bed. Robben Island was a segregated jail but I am sure they could have found an empty cell for me. I was supposed to keep to myself, talk to no one, blend in, stick to the routine and trade on my white skin privilege. I had rehearsed and reviewed the itinerary that was planned for me. I did what I went to do, but I couldn’t just do that. It was just not my style. I was also a journalist. I was an adventurer and this was the ultimate adventure.

I just wasn’t disciplined enough to play a small part and vanish. I had to see the country and get a sense of the movement that was, I later learned, well underground.

What I didn’t know then would be how that trip, and the encounter it gave me with South Africa, would change my life forever, would involve me in that struggle for the next 40 years, would lead me to write countless articles, make six films with Nelson Mandela and produce 156 weeks of a TV news series called South Africa Now.

I went to South Africa in “the summer of love” but in some ways never left. In fact, I fell in love with the country and its promise, something I, unlike others, lived to see.

Before I took the trip, I tried to make it sound as if I was just fulfilling an obligation and then would quickly move on

to other pursuits after I did my “duty.” I actually wrote that in the form of a poem of sorts under the heading of 23 July 67 and tucked it away.

I am surprised now about its anti-political tone as I re-read it and how ambivalent I really was. Maybe I was just posturing as if this was no big thing. In fact this small sojourn would turn out to be a very big thing, although I have avoided talking about it because it was also clearly a case of a journalist crossing the line from a supposed “objectivity” to advocacy. Remember, I was still a student. Even now, I fear that this story might end up in the CIA file that I know the government has on me. I have seen an earlier incarnation, all blacked out, documenting my days in London.

My hesitations then were honest and naïve and expressed this way in a journal entry written on the day I left London for South Africa:

23 JULY 67

*This trip that I make,
In fear,
With hope
Is my response to language
I am overstuffed with
Declamations and admonitions,
Exclamation points!
Let's be done with it
Already & move on
There are bigger
Things, more important*

Matters

The personal mystery

The joy of construction

The fever for creation

All of these things make politics a lesser concern

And its destructiveness

An absurd disposition

So I will pitch in,

“Do my Bit”

And speed the moment

When larger

Visions can be pursued.

We have to start somewhere.

At the bottom of the page, I later noted, “On 12 September I returned alive & wiser.”

Wiser indeed! Issues and problems can be abstractions until you see them up close for yourself, until you go there.

I have been back to South Africa many times but I will never forget the first time. (We always remember the first time in our pursuits, don't we?). I have written about the experience (sans the “secret stuff”) in my book “The More You Watch The Less You Know “about my later career in big media.

Ironically, the first thing I saw when the airport bus deposited me at the Jo'burg train station was a newspaper headline “Detroit Riot: 37 Dead.” A year earlier, I had worked in Detroit for Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, whose claim to fame was that he had prevented a Watts-type riot. His luck had run out. The Motor City was in flames. And I was reading about it in, of all places,

South Africa, where a police state had been established to make sure rebellions like that didn't occur.

At that moment, America's racial problems seemed worse. Our civil rights movement was disintegrating in the bitterness of insurrection and internecine racial division; South Africa's movement was on hold, but poised to erupt again.

It was hard for me to meet black people there. Attempts to even make eye contact with black workers guarding white property in Durban were hopeless. They stared past me and spoke to each other in Zulu. I felt frozen out, however much I naively wanted them to think of me as a brother, as an ally in the liberation struggle.

I was white, therefore one of their oppressors. I later realized that I had reduced the problem to one of race when it was far more layered and complex. Those Zulu workers most likely didn't speak English and if so, couldn't understand me. Many had also been taught as children that eye contact with strangers is impolite.

I found the unextinguished flames of the South African struggle quite by accident, after I drew a bath at a small Durban beach hotel. I started reading the paper, noticing an announcement that the next day a funeral would be held, not far away, for Chief Albert Luthuli, then President-General of the African National Congress and a Nobel Peace Prize winner. He had died mysteriously, allegedly in a train accident in the rural area to which the government had banished him. I was thinking about going to the funeral when I noticed that I hadn't been watching the tub. It had overflowed, with water spilling over into the hall.

I jumped up, unplugged the bath and raced one floor down to the lobby to find a mop. The Indian man behind the desk

said, “No, no, I’ll send the boy up,” referring to the African man sitting to his right. I didn’t see any boys. I shot back: “No, no, just give me a mop. I made the mess. I’ll clean it up.”

He and the “boy” came upstairs with me, and we all dried the small flood. I asked them to please not call me baas. He smiled. The Indian guy told me that I was the first white man there who had ever cleaned up after himself. That broke the ice. I then asked how I could get a ride to Luthuli’s funeral.

At first he said it wasn’t safe, but then disclosed that he and a cousin were going to see their family in a nearby Indian township and that they would take me if I chipped in a few Rand for gas.

Sure enough, the next day, a brilliant Sunday morning alongside the Indian Ocean, I piled into a crowded jalopy with a few other Indian passengers. As we passed through Natal’s rolling hills and vast sugar plantations, we noticed several planes flying close to the ground, circling up ahead. They were monitoring the funeral site.

“That is the church where the funeral is taking place,” I was told. “It’s not safe to take you there directly.”

Instead he dropped me off about 300 yards away, on a dusty side road. “We will pick you up exactly here in one hour, sharp,” I was told. “Be here because it is not safe to wait.” This man seemed to have a fixation with the words “not safe.”

He knew something I didn’t.

As I started toward the church, camera in hand, I noticed about a hundred black people in khaki uniforms lining up for what looked like a parade and carrying black, gold and green flags. I recognized them from photos as the flag and uniforms of the ANC. But the ANC was banned, their leader, Nelson Mandela locked away for life on Robben Island near Cape Town,

clear across the country. This wasn't supposed to be happening. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and started taking pictures, walking with them as they marched up to and into the church.

It must have been a strange sight, that small army of chanting black militants with a skinny, long-haired white kid tagging along. (Yup, I was skinny once.) They marched right past a larger army of police who had the place totally surrounded. They weren't stopped, I was told later, because much of the Western diplomatic corps led by the Swedish Ambassador were there along with some western reporters. Some white policemen started taking pictures of us. I was later told that was because many of the demonstrators were quietly picked up later.

The place was inundated with plainclothes as well as uniformed cops. A few started pointing at me as if to ask, "Who is that guy and where did he come from?" They probably had all the whites accounted for. Most had been brought into this African area, with permission, under escort. I had just shown up on my own. Suddenly the words "not safe" took on a real meaning.

Inside the church, the ANC folks took up position in front of their chief's coffin and unfurled their flag. One small, uniformed black man put his right thumb in the air in the ANC salute, keeping it there for almost the whole ceremony. I kept staring at him, not believing his strength and fortitude in a heroic gesture of defiance.

And then the singing started, hymns that reminded me of many a hot night in Mississippi when freedom songs were the movement's first line of defense against the cops and the Klan. South Africa's church music and freedom hymns were even more vibrant, rich with call and response rhythms. The sound made you ache with its beauty. That's when I first heard Nkosi Sikeleli

Afrika (Lord Bless Africa), then banned, now a national anthem.

The speeches were electric in their intensity, including one by a young student, president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Her name was Margaret Marshall, and she was as gorgeous as she was eloquent. I was not prepared for someone who was so white and blonde to also be so eloquent and uncompromising in her denunciation of apartheid. At that time, in South Africa, it was dangerous to speak or write about such things. Her words were received warmly by Chief Luthuli's family.

The late ever-eloquent writer Alan Paton was also on hand, but Margie's remarks were more memorable. We would become friends when she moved to Boston as part of an outflow of white liberals. She later married the late columnist/reporter Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* and has just stepped down as the Chief Justice on the highest court in Massachusetts.

After spending some time in the Natal area, I traveled on to Cape Town, the "mother city," a place that felt to me like England if it wasn't for the beautiful Table Mountain and the vast African townships that surrounded it. I remember visiting the Parliament buildings and watching a group of liberal whites hold a vigil. I think I may have brought them a flower or two, as a symbol of the hippie-yippie counterculture I was also very much part of.

Then I didn't know about the so-called "Alternative Afrikaners" who also supported ant-conscription and anti-apartheid activism. The movie, *Searching for Sugar Man*, about the American singer Gonzalez tells some of that story.

An American friend put me up in a quiet suburban community near the beach. Her beau, a white jazz musician, an excellent bass player, who played in one of the country's few interracial

bands, took me on a tour of Gugulethu, a nearby township. We went without the proper pass, were intercepted by the police and asked to leave. I was there long enough to see the great gap that existed then, and exists now, between white wealth and black poverty. It remains one of the biggest such gap in the world.

In Johannesburg, I toured Soweto on a government tourist bus that cost about 25 cents and included a stop for tea at an official tourist center that would be burned to the ground years later in the Soweto uprising. I wrote about that trip anonymously for the *Village Voice*. The bus stopped at government-backed workshops for the disabled, took in a model creche or nursery school, stopped at the weirdly named Uncle Tom's Hall (a community center) and also toured that section of Soweto where the handful of black millionaires lived.

If you could imagine a German sightseeing trip through "Auschwitz-Land", that's what it felt like.

On April 27, 1994, I found myself back at Uncle Tom's, which hadn't changed very much, to film something that had: South Africa's first democratic and multiracial elections. On that day vast lines stretched in front of the hall while thousands waited patiently for voter cards.

Did my "mission" make a difference? Maybe, a small one at first, but, I would like to think, a larger one later as I used what skills I had on high profile media projects like Sun City and South Africa Now to try to wake up America to the truth about South Africa.

Back in 1967, none of us would have believed how long it would take to win the country back and how much misery, heartbreak, murder, and madness was yet to come. The Soweto uprising was years away as were the township uprisings.

The idea of a peaceful change occurred to only a few. Many dismissed it as an unachievable dream.

And yet it happened. History happened. South Africa became the rainbow nation, a world “miracle” at a time of so few miracles. Many in that world credit Nelson Mandela but he, and all of us who became involved, and stayed involved, know it took much more than one man – it was the powers of leaders with integrity, men like Oliver Tambo, and the Sisulus and Chris Hani and Ruth and Joe and Ronnie and Pallo and so many others, who sparked and led the ANC and its people’s movement.

More than that, it was the determination of millions that made a difference, with songs to lift our hearts, toyi-toyis to move our feet and slogans like Amandla Ngawethu and Viva to free Mandela and move the movement forward. And I am sure there were many more secret “missions” that we still can’t talk about yet. That helped, or in my words then, “did their bit.”

The activists who invited me into their movement back in the 1960s believed they could liberate their country, and fought with dogged determination through all the dark times when change seemed so unlikely.

They also believed in me, a person who cared from a far-away land, and a culture that was not their own.

I say Viva for that.

They didn’t give up, and neither have I.

Yes, I know problems remain. The contradictions are still everywhere, now as then. We have not achieved nirvana there or here, but I was proud to be asked and prouder to serve in the small way I did. Doctors pledge to “do no harm”. I did none, and maybe did some good.

As my friend Abbie Hoffman would later say of our student

movement in 1960s America that fights for real democracy still.

“We were young. We were foolish, naïve and made mistakes. But we were right.

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AUGUST 28, 1967 – NOTEBOOK

On the beach in Durban: Meeting Whites in denial

(Four years to the day of the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice that I was part of as a civil rights activist. I was roaming around Africa)

DURBAN IS THEIR MIAMI BEACH WITH LONG SANDY BEACHES, surrounded by giant hotels and apartment buildings, all fronted by black watchmen guarding them against themselves. The town feels like the 1950s even though the Jefferson Airplane is on the radio singing “Somebody to Love.”

The exchange rate is 70 cents to a dollar although one man tells me dollars are better in the poorer countries. Not here, I ask? Oh no! We are a rich country. (They were rich then, under the “stability” of apartheid rule. In 1998, the rand fell to 15 cents on the dollar, a disaster.)

I am meeting people, mostly white people. A young man at supper tells me why he hates “Kaffirs.” I listen. He got fired for punching one. They are so stupid. He asked one to bring him something. The poor black didn’t know what it was. “They work for nothing and live at a low standard. There are bloody millions of them. If I was the government, I’d step in with bloody birth control so quickly.” He doesn’t like Cape Town. Too many coloreds! Once met a colored girl there. Asked her out and then realized she was colored. The most embarrassing moment in his life,” he calls it.

I meet Stevenson, a pipe fitter from Holland. A real Dutchman, 28-32, hair slicked back on each side. He has been here four years.

He worked most of them in the mines, that for whites, really meant being a supervisor. Says the Africans earn \$3 a month in the mine. They are from Congo and elsewhere and don't know about money, he claims. They get board and clothes. It is 95 degrees underground.

I ask him why he doesn't leave.

"For me it's the same all over. The same! I work. Period! Spend it today." He talks about his pleasures. Friday night, boozing and dancing in the Carleton Hotel; Saturday, the Races; Sunday soccer, Monday, work. He works for Shell. He is impressed with Americans. "Very clever, very efficient," he calls us.

His job is tiring although he admits the Africans do much of it. (He couldn't have imagined that years later Shell Oil would sell its headquarters building in downtown Johannesburg to the ANC. They would later protest when the Liberation movement kept calling it Shell House. The name was later changed to honor former ANC leader Albert Luthuli and is now called "Luthuli House.")

"Two of them fell off of hundred foot furnaces and were killed the other day," he blurts out.

What? I interrupt at his matter of fact detail dropped into a monotone description. Yes, dead, he repeats. One died the day before. "It's always like that," he says with a slight pause.

He tells me about his girl friend. She looks white, he swears, but confides that she doesn't have white registration. You'd be surprised, he chuckles, about how many colored girls have white boyfriends, even husbands. He was caught with a colored girl in Cape Town once. He drew a suspended sentence He then stops and looks at me, changing the subject back to THE subject. "Oh it will come. It has to. I tell you something. I won't be here when it does. Oh No."

(How was I to know that I would be there when it did? 27 years of pain later. May 10, 1994, Pretoria, when Nelson Mandela is sworn in as President.)

Baie Dankie, Suid Afrika. Thank you South Africa.

I meet two seductive white girls. I am turned on, until they open their mouths. One says, “You don’t know our bantu. They haven’t a care in the world.” The other: “Don’t you have apartheid in America? What do you call it – segregation?”

Uganda

It is 1967 and I am in Africa. AFRICA! Four years ago, I barely slept, my mind obsessed with the details of helping to mobilize the Great March of dreams. Three years ago, in ‘64, I was in Atlantic City lobbying the Democratic convention to seat the delegates from Mississippi’s Freedom Democrats, the civil rights fighters.

Two years earlier I was organizing the poor, door to door, in Syracuse; and, last year I was in Detroit wrapping up a year of unreality as an intern-scholar in the Mayor’s office.

And today? Its the Capital of Uganda, Kampala. What next? Where will I turn up in ‘69? Playing what role? I can’t even imagine. I was standing in front of Parliament in the days of what Ugandans later called “Obote 1,” the era of independence leader Milton Obote’s first presidency.

I was staring at a plaque and thinking about how to get out of the blistering midday sun when I could swear someone called my name.

“Danny Schechter?”

There it was again.

It was Bob Van Lierop later an international lawyer and UN Ambassador for the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu. Then, he was on a after graduation ‘discover my roots’ tour that drove

many black Americans to Africa.

I had met Bob as a student activist when I worked for the Harlem-based Northern Student Movement organizing college students in the civil rights movement. I had visited his campus with SNCC activist Julian Bond.

It was amazing that we stumbled into each other, by chance, in the center of East Africa. I was on my way out of Africa, and he was on his way in. He wanted to go to Mozambique and I gave him some contacts in the ANC and FRELIMO, the Mozambican liberation movement that I just met. He said he would look them up. He later went on to produce the first film on the revolution in that country. Our paths would cross again many times, but never quite this unexpectedly. I seemed to be connecting people even as I played tourist.

At that same time activism was bubbling over in America. The great Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka, who I also met several times, had written, "To look at America today is to understand very clearly that here is one society which is on the very edge of collapse."

Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania (1967)

It is the lunch hour. The town will reopen at 2 p.m. And then bake throughout the afternoon. I have spent the day walking on hot streets, past the open shops with their Indian merchants and sometimes, African assistants, up dirt-caked roads and see the occasional sign that asks in English (not Swahili) that people not litter the streets.

Unlike Nairobi, this is not a European city. It lacks those pretensions. Its streets are often winding, set at odd diagonals. They also shout at you: Nkrumah Street, a literal revolutionary arcade is lined with offices of the would-be liberators of Southern Africa.

The ANC of South Africa; FRELIMO, with its plans to transform Mozambique; ZAPU, envisioning the rebirth of Zimbabwe from the ruins of Rhodesia and on and on in alphabetical procession. And, also, as one would expect, the Chinese Association and nearby book shop featuring every word the “Great Helmsman,” Mao Tse-tung, ever wrote

Yesterday an incident: I had just left the small two room National Museum, with its wall displays of Mr. Stanley’s historic expedition to find “Dr. Livingstone, I presume”.

And also – still, even in this land of socialism, charts depicting the brave explorers who came to DISCOVER what many people here knew existed anyway.

African history here is still being told by colonials.

When I left the Museum, I walked past a small nicely groomed house fronted by a big sign and a bigger hope:

Organization of African Unity Liberation Committee for Southern Africa

I casually photograph the yellow placard as a revolutionary memento.

Soon, a young man runs up at me and taps my shoulder, saying excitedly there is a man in the bush up the road calling after me. I squint in the sunlight, barely see him and stroll on. But the chap is insistent, running after me with the news that the man is a policeman, and that I’d better see what he wants.

When I get closer, all I can see in the bright sunlight is a very small beard at the tip of a very black face, and only then, a rifle aimed at my head. He is pointing at my camera and asks if I took that picture. He is not amused. I had to do some quick explaining.

From Unpublished journal entries, 1967

WITH MANDELA IN LONDON

Honoring Ruth First and Joe Slovo

I KEPT CROSSING PATHS WITH NELSON MANDELA. WE CONNECTED again in London at a ceremony honoring Joe Slovo and Ruth First, two of his comrades and whose London home in exile was now being saluted with a English heritage plaque that honors homes of historical importance. They call it “blue-plaquiring.”

It is rare when revolutionaries earn such a distinction, especially in a foreign country, and perhaps rarer still when a world famous black leader pays tribute to two white activists who became legends in their own right for years of commitment and service.

In a sense, this story also challenges a certain type of media framing that reduced the apartheid issue into a black versus white racial issue, compared in this country superficially to the civil rights struggle.

In point of fact, South Africa’s fight was a national liberation battle, a fight for the rights of all people in that country to live vote, and have a say in their destiny. It was an anti-colonial struggle on one hand, but also a human rights fight that inspired sacrifices from all of South Africa’s many cultures, races, tribes, and peoples.

But, like so many stories about South Africa, the unexpected and unpredictable intrudes as it did that afternoon, in London. I was there for an LSE reunion but also invited to the ceremony by the Slovo Family

The featured guest was Nelson Mandela. That is why the press showed up in force, along with Alastair Campbell, former Prime

Minister Tony Blair's former and controversial spinmeister). He lived next door to Shawn Slovo.

Campbell's presence at the event rated as much attention as Mandela from the British press corps. Perhaps, Dr. Spin, as he was known, was attracted by a leader more inspiring than the one he served.

The event began with a short welcoming talk by Joe and Ruth's older daughter Gillian, who wrote a critically acclaimed book honoring her parents. She thanked everyone for coming and noted, that had Margaret Thatcher been in power when her parents sought refuge in London, they may have been turned down because she later publicly denounced the ANC as terrorists and opposed sanctions. (Gillian doesn't quite remember it this way.)

Her speech called for continuing support for those coming to England as refugees from today's human rights abusers.

Then, it was Mandela's turn to say a few words. He began by expressing the view that Gillian had been "too hard" on the "Iron Lady."

The crowd gasped,

No longer in power, Mandela felt free to say whatever was on his mind. He claimed, "Margaret Thatcher's problem was that she didn't understand us, and I had to explain who we were to her."

You could see the struggle veterans in the crowd wondering where he was going, and what the hell he was saying.

"After he schmoozed with the then British Prime Minister", he said, "she softened her hard line and gave him fifty thousand pounds as a donation to the ANC."

Now, the onlookers were muttering aloud, "what?" Should he be saying this in public?

Undaunted, Mandela went on to describe what happened next.

“When I returned to South Africa,” he said with a smile, “the comrades told me we can’t take money from Thatcher. She’s our enemy! How dare you?”

“And so, I looked at them, and, then at the check, and said, ‘well I can’t give it back.’”

I added jokingly, ‘I was bankrupt after all those years in prison. Maybe I will just deposit it in my account.’

“They were horrified at the idea and said quickly: ‘No, you can’t do that. Give us that check.’”

Everyone laughed, I assume, Campbell among them. No journalist there reported this amusing and revealing disclosure. They didn’t get it, unaware of how Mandela had become a masterful fundraiser, especially from the high and mighty including many human rights abusers and corporate executives.

Mandela also reminisced about someone else who had lived in that house: Ruth First’s father, Julius First, who had been the treasurer of the Communist party in South Africa,

“Julius,” he laughed, “used to give us wads of money in small bills in a brown bag. We loved seeing him.”

(More recently there have been rumors, claims and counter claims that Mandela was in the Communist Party in those years, not just allied with them. He had, when asked, repeatedly denied it!)

At that point, you sensed that some in the crowd wanted to cut off the microphone.

In a reminiscence about Mandela in the New York Times Magazine, former Editor Bill Keller was approving of Mandela’s solicitations of donations from business leaders, writing:

“Mandela explained that before the election, he approached 20 titans of corporate South Africa and asked each for at least a million rand – about \$275,000 – to build up his party and finance

the campaign. Nearly all of them agreed....

“...what struck me that day was that the executive class had become Mandela’s affinity group. I do not mean that he was bought, but that he found in the business moguls men a bit like himself: cool-headed, ambitious, practical leaders. Mandela’s manners were endearingly egalitarian. Every visitor to the president’s chamber, including cabinet members and diplomats and two intruding journalists, was encouraged to shake hands with the woman who brought out their tea. But his sympathies were with success.”

Clearly, and no doubt because of his status, Mandela moved as easily among capitalists as communists.

It is significant that upon his death by cancer in 1995, Joe Slovo, a lawyer by training and a political leader by choice, was buried in Soweto with tens of thousands of black people singing his name and honoring his contribution as a Minister in the Mandela government, a leader in the African National Congress armed struggle, and a communist who modified his tactics and rhetoric to help negotiate a peaceful transition to democracy.

In praising him, Nelson Mandela recognized that it was the movement that made the change, not one icon or celebrity. He recognized that whites, Indians, Coloreds and Africans worked together to bring down the apartheid state.

That lesson cannot be lost in all the hoopla and mystique of Mandela as a demi-God as is so often reinforced in the press or history books that salute “Great Men” as if they alone are responsible for social change. This view is reinforced in our celebrity obsessed media-mediated culture that builds up our heroes and, then ends up tearing them down.

In praising Ruth First, Joe’s partner, and a person who became my mentor, he recognized the role of committed journalists and

intellectuals, and the role of women in the struggle. He said, “in every meeting and march I attended, it was the women who often took the lead and were the organizers while raising their children. And battling to keep their families together.”

This is sometimes lost when we think of the male icons who tend to get revered. Mandela praised Ruth for qualities and courage that many in the movement may have lacked, as well as an intelligence critical of pomposity, arrogance and mechanistic dogmatic ideology.

She, too, was a communist who had moved beyond traditional CP practice to challenge her own husband, and the ANC to be honest and consistent. On the day of the 1994 election, Slovo spoke to me of Ruth’s outspoken criticisms: “She was right,” he said simply and forthrightly.

Ruth was assassinated in Mozambique where she went to teach, do research, and live closer to the front line. She was murdered by agents of the apartheid state, one of whom, was a security cop, I later met, when he “defected” to the ANC. He confessed that he was part of the plot. I visited Ruth’s grave-and the grave of her other fallen comrades in a cemetery in Maputo in 1986 while on assignment for ABC News.

Nelson Mandela would later marry Graca Machel, the widow of Samora Machel, the liberation movement general who became Mozambique’s President. He was killed in a suspicious plane crash. I met him, too, just before he boarded that Soviet airplane that would run, or be run, into a mountain on its return.

I met Ruth as a student in political theorist Ralf Miliband’s inspiring lectures at the London School of Economics. Her beauty on every level mesmerized me. I was dazzled by her ability to synthesize arguments and dismiss fools of the academic or political varieties. She was an African, a Jew, a feminist, a skillful author

and a gutsy fighter who also felt guilty about time spent away from her three girls, and always never being able to do it all.

She didn't have an easy time establishing herself in a pretentious English academic community. She was miles ahead of many of her teachers. She was fashionable and ferocious. She was the South African New Left before there was a New left there. She was a one-woman role model for the unity of theory and practice.

She had many critics among the Stalinists she quarreled with. Her friends adored her. The great South African writer and editor Ronald Segal paid tribute to her accomplishments concluding "I loved her then, I loved her now."

Ruth and Joe became people I wanted to emulate with my own emerging synthesis of activism and attitude. Unlike them, I didn't have a home in a movement or party or an organization. I guess I was more the "Lone Ranger". They inspired me to get involved with South Africa and I did so for the next thirty years as a researcher, writer, TV producer and filmmaker.

I am writing this on the tenth anniversary of the first democratic elections in that country. I had the privilege of documenting Mandela's run for office back in 1994 with Anant Singh with the film Countdown To Freedom. Whenever people I know tell me they can't bother to vote, I think of the thousands I filmed standing in long lines on April 27th for a right that had long been denied them.

While in London I was welcomed to a dinner at the home of Lindiwe Mabuzza, then Ambassador or High Commissioner as she was known, who earlier gave a moving speech explaining how black South Africans came to understand the need for a non-racial movement to free South Africa and "all who live in it."

She spoke of Ruth and Joe and the many whites that sacrificed

in the struggle in South Africa. Now she is helping to organize a conference so that today's South African leaders can reconnect with the many anti-apartheid activists who worked in solidarity with their struggle.

At the commemoration that day, I ran into Marion Kozak (Miliband), the widow of the brilliant writer and professor Ralph Miliband, who inspired so many students, including Ruth and I at the LSE. She had known Ruth well. She invited me to join her for quick coffee and sandwich nearby. Her two sons came along who I had met as kids: David and Ed Miliband. David later became Foreign Secretary, and then lost an election to his brother Ed in a fight to run the Labour Party.

To those of us who despair about the prospects of change or worry about how often truth is massacred in the mainstream media: Let us point to the truth of Joe and Ruth's lives and the real world success of their work. None us in London then would have guessed that the Apartheid state would have crumbled the way it did, or that a man convicted of terrorism named Nelson Mandela would emerge as the hero he did.

I never thought when I came to Sunday Brunch on Lyme Street in Camden Town so many times, so many years ago, that I would be back thirty five years later for a ceremony with hundreds of onlookers including Mandela, members of Parliament and the government. It was so impressive to hear the Slovo daughters Shawn, Gillian and Robyn speak so powerfully about their parents and their passions.

I once heard Bill Clinton say that we all want to be Mandela on our best days. True enough, but we all can be like Ruth and Joe today, and commit ourselves to ideas and ideals that are larger than our own lives and hopefully achieve the victory and the glory that they helped make possible.

PART 2

The Media War



**With South Africa Now reporter Philip
Tomlinson, Madiba Ato Z book launch, 2013**

MEDIA AND THE STRUGGLE

South Africa's Freedom Charter influenced my own Media Manifesto

World War 111 will be a guerilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation.” – Marshall McLuhan

AS A MEDIA CRITIC, I FREQUENTLY DISSECTED THE COVERAGE I was reading from South Africa. Later, I, and others tried to fill the gap and report on events there with more insight and concern. I saw it as contribution to a media war that the South Africans had, until that point, been winning, thanks to their covert propaganda campaigns and the low priority that US media institutions gave the story. I was one media professional who, with others, decided to challenge them.

I realized early on that if the liberation movement was to prevail, it needed a clearer communications strategy. It needed messaging that humanized the victims of apartheid and justified a resistance movement that was not just up against an enemy at home but a cold war environment and a western media apparatus that used being anti-red, in this case, as a way of masking being anti-black.

The Apartheid government had for years demonized the anti-apartheid struggle as communist controlled and aligned with the enemies of the west. It had insisted that Pretoria's commitment to preserving western civilization was in accord with the interests of western powers. It was well aware of how the McCarthy era in the United States had fought radicalism, and argued they were doing the same thing against an even greater threat in the country that was safeguarding the 'free word's' access to minerals, gold and

diamonds. They invested lots of both money and time in bonding with those in power in ‘friendly’ countries.

They made controlling media spin and information a central tenet in their strategy – and began using government monies covertly channeled from the Defense Budget to literally buy opposition newspapers and create influence in Western media that they feared were or could turn against white South Africa.

This became known as the Information Scandal or “Muldergate,” named after a Minister in the Apartheid government. In January 2013, J. Brooks Spector reminded South Africans of how pernicious it had been.

Activists mostly downplayed the power of media. Spector wrote in part: “the schemers decided to underwrite, from scratch, an entirely new, avowedly pro-government English language newspaper, ... But not too surprisingly, launching a newspaper from scratch, then as now, turned out to be an expensive, cash-eating misadventure, consuming both the secret stash of cash as well as a surreptitiously organized loan to keep it going....”

They also invested their lucre into a plan to win influence in the USA, “to deal with the enemy abroad was the effort to gain influence in Washington, the place that many government leaders feared was now becoming the real locus of their international troubles. As a result, they came up with the idea of buying their way to influencing the influentials in Washington. They wanted to gain control of the conservative but well respected, long established, but money-losing Washington Star, the capital’s oldest newspaper. Once it was in the hands of friendly forces, they could bend its editorial and news policy towards a more sympathetic view of South Africa as a bastion of anti-communism...”

This scheme was exposed and became a major scandal in South Africa, but the reasoning behind it had validity for their

cause as well as the fight to end apartheid.

Each side in this conflict had its media strategies and, in the end, ours succeeded better than theirs.

Soon, alongside the political and military battle, a media war began to take shape. That was one that I thought I had the most to contribute to in at least three ways.

First to help persuade my colleagues in movements for change in the US to embrace the South African struggle, and where possible allow it to influence our own struggles for political and economic justice. As a journalist and media activist, I had already been arguing that we had to make media itself an issue because it was controlled by a handful of large companies that distorted the news as they reported it, often marching in lock step with the government.

Those of us in the civil rights struggle and the anti-Vietnam war movement were frequently denouncing inadequate media coverage. An independent media movement soon emerged and I believed it could learn from the South African struggle by adopting a manifesto for media change similar in spirit to the ANC's "Freedom Charter" that enunciated what the majority of the people wanted and became its clarion call.

South Africa's Freedom Charter, adopted at a Congress of the People in 1955, outlined a vision and the principles for a post-apartheid society. It was written with input of thousands of South Africans who responded to a call to offer their ideas by writing demands on small scraps of paper that were sorted and drawn on in the final draft.

So, with a little creative borrowing, I drafted such a document for adoption at the 1996 Congress of Media and Democracy, which appeared in the Congress's final report. I include it here with no pretensions to literary originality, but, as a working draft for how

we might find a path and a program for media change. (Reading it all these years later, it sounds a bit pretentious, although it was the concept behind using a document as an organizing tool that attracted me.)

We declare before our country and the world that the giant media combines who put profit before the public interest do not speak for us. We proclaim this democratic media charter and pledge ourselves to work tirelessly until its goals have been achieved. We urge all Americans of good will, and people throughout the world who want to participate in a new democratic information order to join with us.

We call upon our colleagues, readers, editors, and audiences to inform themselves and the American people about the dangers posed by the concentration of media power in fewer and fewer hands.

Of course, it was not really adopted by any organized entity because we really didn't have a party like the ANC. American activists tend to be issue-oriented and campaign centered – not part of a more structured movement. Yet, in drafting it, and advocating for it, I tried to create an opening to talk about how we not only needed to show solidarity with South Africa and human rights movements worldwide, to but also learn from them.

Second, one way to show solidarity would be critique our own media coverage on the issue and provide information missing in mass media. When Nelson Mandela died, An African American website, The Root, surveyed black American journalists who covered South Africa. Many were very critical of the coverage he received in death that his struggle never was given when it needed it most.

Here are a few of the comments from journalists who covered South Africa.

- Sunni Khalid, a freelance broadcast journalist noted about the most recent coverage: “The CNN stuff was the worst, describing Madiba in MLK terms as a ‘man of peace!’ For Chrissakes, he was imprisoned because he took up arms against the government! And he refused his release several times because he would not renounce the armed struggle. When he was released, it was because [South African President F.W.] De Klerk agreed to HIS terms, elections, freeing political prisoners and unbanning of the ANC [African National Congress], PAC [Pan Africanist Congress] and others. [One television reporter] told viewers that Winnie Mandela-Madikezela was his FIRST wife! The guy never read Mandela’s bio.”

- Howard French of the NY Times; “I wonder whether this event will have any follow-on effect in terms of getting the American media and the public at large to think of Africa differently, which could begin with something so simple as thinking about Africa more often.”

- Jon Jeter: “By depoliticizing Mandela and rendering a portrait of him that is one-dimensional, the media does what they have always done, from ‘Birth of a Nation’ to hip-hop: appropriating the culture and iconography of African people to nullify its revolutionary reflexes and perpetuate hegemony over darker-skinned people.”

It seems clear that those in the know knew there was a big chasm between what journalists who knew and cared the most were reporting and what appeared in our press. For many years, relatively little was reported. Blacks in Africa had become a black hole in the American press..

When I returned from my first visit in South Africa in 1967,

I decided to try to do something about this media gap – first, through working with a research group, and then by writing articles critical of the coverage, conceiving a music project with well known artists, launching a TV series to report what was not being reported and then producing documentaries, articles and books.

1968-1972:

Learning curve: digging out the facts

Boston: From a Closed Filing Cabinet: The Africa Research Group

I BLAME IT ON THE CIA. MY WORK IN LONDON AS AN INVESTIGATIVE reporter led me into digging out some of the secrets that our own government was hiding in its covert activities in Africa. As they spied on African liberation movements, a handful of us decided to try to spy on them!

After my fateful visit to South Africa, I left London and returned to the USA, this time to Boston. And it was there that I found another way of expressing solidarity with South Africa – not with an underground mission this time, but by using my skills as a journalist when it became clear to me that important information about developments in South Africa were being hidden from the people there, and in my own country.

So I helped set up an underfunded but highly motivated citizens intelligence agency called the Africa Research Group (ARG).

ARG was formed as an outgrowth of the investigation, which I had undertaken as a Ramparts magazine reporter in London to flush out some tentacles of covert US intervention south of the Sahara. I was lucky to recruit others – Africa specialists and enterprising reporters – who were more in the know than I was.

As we identified organizations with CIA funding, we discovered that digging out the relationships was simpler than evaluating their underlying political thrust or gauging their impact.

This sort of assessment required a fairly sophisticated

understanding of African political economy as well as US foreign policy. It was clear that a group effort would be a more productive way of studying this phenomenon than any individual enterprise.

The Africa Research Group was an independent organization with a critical perspective on the impact of imperialism and revolution in Africa. When we organized in the fall of 1968, American bombs were falling on Indochina and the founding members were convinced that the policy objectives and strategic interests that led to war in Asia, would involve the United States in wars elsewhere in what we then called the “Third World”.

America’s alignments with apartheid and counter-revolutionary forces in Africa seemed particularly pernicious and destined to suck us into another explosive confrontation that the American people knew little about and would not support if they did. We saw the overt and covert US interventions in Africa as an international dimension of a racist society, which was under attack at home. We decided, as we noted in an original declaration of purpose, to try “to put the problem of African liberation on the map of American political consciousness.”

The political crisis and moral outrage provoked by the disclosures of massive, covert US involvement in the mid 1970’s in Angola became, in one instance, a confirmation of the essential validity of the Africa Research Group’s prognosis. CBS newscaster Walter Cronkite’s introduction to a series of nightly specials about the origins of the “Vietnam-like” intervention recalled concepts and language that our group had advanced years earlier.

It was as if history was catching up with us – although the Africa Research Group was soon no longer around. We had dissolved in 1972, in part, out of frustration with the seeming political marginality of our work and our own internal political disagreements.

The reports of US involvement in Angola dating back to the early sixties, and the fact that the CIA and South Africa found themselves on the same side underscored the importance of this work. The government was pursuing secret policies that we were trying to expose.

For example, in this same period, the National Security Council was considering a secret staff study advocating covert intervention and an alliance with the apartheid state. Henry Kissinger's report on southern Africa, prepared for the National Security Council in 1969 proposed a closer alignment with South Africa. That report also postulated that the US had major (although not vital) interests in Angola. The full text of the report was published in England as *The Kissinger Study of Southern Africa* (Spokesman Books).

Since African affairs are barely (and badly) reported in the United States, we felt that research and educational work was needed to arouse interest and inspire action on behalf of Africans struggling to end apartheid, colonialism, and neocolonialism. As college students or graduates ourselves, we sought to fuse our own academic skills and intellectual interests with a political commitment. Our framework was explicitly anti-imperialist: that is, we viewed American intervention in its global framework as the instrument of a small ruling class advancing its own special interests. While this analysis itself is not particularly original, we felt that in the case of Africa it needed a more up-to-date, empirical foundation and a non-rhetorical popularization.

At the outset, we found that although millions had been spent on African studies in the United States, very little of it illuminated the growing American penetration of Africa. Despite the involvement of hundreds of American companies and nonprofit organizations on the continent, few writers and researchers had

examined their impact. There were more books and monographs available about the “communist threat” than there were about the US presence. So we became pioneers in the uncharted non-existent field of American imperialist studies. We did all this, of course, before the advent of the Internet.

Our first task was developing a research methodology with our own sources of information and an accessible database. This meant a systematic monitoring of published material ranging from American newspapers to specialized reports by corporations; from the publications of African movements and governments to documents exposing the essence of official American thinking. Slowly, the Africa Research Group put together our own files and library with a host of technical studies and reference materials.

We concluded early on that Africans needed this information as much or more than we did. It turned out that there is more information available about Africa in American universities than there is in most African institutions. This form of scientific neocolonialism is one way of fostering dependency and mystifying Africans about the real thrust of US policy. Consequently, we developed our own contacts with progressive African forces and newspapers, trying to make material available that they might otherwise have little access.

We did what we could to provide material assistance in this form to liberation struggles. For example, we were able to get American scientists to undertake some research on the American-made herbicides that the Portuguese Air Force was using in Angola in response to a request from the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

We also helped publicize the cause of African liberation by reprinting and distributing publications and communiqués issued by various movements. We republished a pamphlet by Amílcar

Cabral, the head of the PAIGC liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau, and went to Washington to support his presentation to Congress.

The purpose of all our work was to popularize African issues. We wanted to encourage, if not inspire, political action. I argued in an unpublished working paper prepared for a January 1969 conference of researchers that specific information about Africa can have political implications and action consequences.

Here was a chance to marry Marx to Malcolm among anti-imperialist whites; and introduce some specific radical political content to a widespread (and extremely co-optable) cultural-psychological interest in Africa among black Americans.

Desired synthesis: possible joint action projects and international campaigns.

While these hopes proved somewhat idealistic, the Group's work did play a role in a number of campus struggles and anti-corporate fights. Our work did have some impact, and as my own CIA files – recently made available to me under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act – indicate, the CIA was keeping tabs on our work.

The Africa Research Group was best known by what it produced in its four-year existence. The output was prolific: it included books, pamphlets, reprints, newspaper and magazine articles, leaflets, and posters. Topics ranged from “power structure” studies of African class structure to more action-oriented agitational propaganda. Circulated at academic conferences and through the underground press, distributed by mail and through bookstores, these publications stirred controversies, provoked debate, and provided information that seemed consistently missing in most writings about Africa. In some cases, these materials were

translated and printed abroad. In one instance, an ARG expose triggered banner headlines and a diplomatic flap.

The Africa Research Group was an attempt to forge a radical alternative to conventional styles of intellectual work. We were a diverse group, and most of us were without specialized academic training or research experience. There were about ten of us who formed the core of the organization. We worked closely with a number of academic supporters and at the height of our activity spawned affiliated groups in New York, Washington DC, and the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The group also took part in demonstrations and often worked with other organizations active in similar regional research, such as the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS), and the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP).

This rationale and choice of audience had implications for the style and content of our work. We decided early on that we would try to avoid a dry and dull academic style as well as the rhetoric and jargon that had come to typify too many Marxist journals. We tried a more popular approach, integrating graphics, documents, and even cartoons into our publications.

Like many organizations identified with the American New Left, the group sought to abandon a hierarchical and alienating work style. Learning to work collectively was a difficult but positive accomplishment. A few people had set the group's initial direction, assigning tasks and developing contacts with other people and organizations. This was especially true in my own case and led to resentment, political discussion, and restructuring.

Collectivity may have sacrificed efficiency in some areas, but it fostered significant personal and political growth in individual members. Collective writing helped individuals temper their own

ego-involvement; it helped group members be self-critical without being self-destructive. It also gave us a method and structure for dealing with each other's work in critical and constructive ways.

Collectivity also had its problems. Group members sought to explain some of them in one draft of the statement released when the group decided to disband in June 1972. "We recognize with hindsight that we emphasized collectivity to an extreme degree. Group decision-making became cumbersome because it was applied at all levels. We let collectivity prevent experimentation with division of labor and undermine individual initiative. By emphasizing process over product, we were never as productive as we hoped to be."

The Africa Research Group disbanded for a number of reasons. Many of the original members had begun to tire of research and educational work. Some were simply burned out. Others wanted to move directly into a more activist type of political engagement. As one group statement put it: "Research work which is separate from action and organizing can often lead to isolation and academic detachment. In our own group, many of us felt dissatisfied with merely servicing a broad and diffuse audience with information. As the demands for our literature increased, and as mail requests for information became overwhelming, we felt ourselves turning into bureaucrats and found our energy drained away from research and writing. This reinforced our sense of distance from the political realities of America. We decided that this situation was not healthy."

After several years of poorly funded but intellectually and politically charged work, the core of the group began to dissolve. Some of us went into academic life, others into activism, and some, like myself, into journalism and the media. It was also a time when militant student movements seemed to be sputtering

out. At the same time, I moved into the media big time, as a radio broadcaster and then a TV reporters and producer. As my own skills became sharper, I realized I could make more of a contribution that way.

MEDIA MYOPIA (1977)

Is Soweto a ‘suburb’ of Johannesburg?

In the aftermath of the Soweto uprisings, I was asked by MORE, a professional American media review, now defunct, to critique the coverage of the Soweto uprising of 1976.

LIKE PREDATORS ON THE VELD, JOURNALISTS ARE QUICK TO smell blood – and they smell it these days in South Africa. As the increasingly repressive white minority cracks down on the increasingly frustrated black majority, Western reporters are arriving almost daily in Johannesburg. In recent months, all three US television networks have opened bureaus in the troubled country. Media stars like Walter Cronkite and Harry Reasoner have added Soweto and Pretoria to their international itineraries.

South Africa provides the type of neat, cut-and-dried story that American journalists love: four million whites, led by a neo-fascist Afrikaner government, exploiting and degrading 18 million blacks cooped up in Bantustans and ghettos. Out of this sorry equation comes all the stuff of conventional news: political drama, confrontation, and violence.

Predictably, that’s how most of the media have covered the story. With a few exceptions – *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor* among them – the complexities of South Africa’s conflict have escaped or been ignored by the media.

“The South African story has come down the tubes so fast,” says Tim Leland, a *Boston Globe* editor who has reported from

South Africa, “that the American public has no background information on it. The press, by and large, has not covered it with any sophistication.”

Jim Hoagland of the *Washington Post*, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1971 for his reporting from South Africa, agrees with Leland’s assessment. He recalls that during Vice President Mondale’s trip to Vienna last spring for talks with South African Prime Minister John Vorster, “Most of the reporters on the plane didn’t have a basic understanding of the policy issues or choices. Most of the time they asked questions for purposes of getting a lead, rather than for eliciting information that they could put into context.”

This lack of sophistication and understanding has led to a number of serious omissions in US press coverage of South Africa. These omissions fall into four categories and give rise to the charge that crucial aspects of the story are being distorted.

1. The reporting on apartheid

Apartheid is more than just a perverse system of racial discrimination – although it is that with a vengeance. Despite surface similarities, it is not a South African version of the racial segregation that was practiced for years in the American South. Invariably, correspondents identify apartheid as South Africa’s “system of racial separation or segregation,” and focus on its most visible practices of racial differentiation and domination. This conveys a simplistic image that obscures an understanding of some of the worst features of apartheid.

At its core, apartheid is an organized and highly structured method of controlling and exploiting black labor. Most American journalists, by and large, have yet to discover and fully report the economic underpinnings of apartheid.

South Africa runs on cheap black labor. More than 200

apartheid laws exist to keep it that way. “These laws, and the system of migrant labor which they are designed to regulate, have long provided the foundation for South Africa’s industrial and agricultural development,” explains Andrew Silk in an article he wrote for the Nation this fall after spending ten months in South Africa. Silk’s pieces were among the few to have appeared in the American press that discussed apartheid as an economic system.

By regulating movement and restricting the number of Africans who can live near white areas, the National Party government attempted to tightly monitor and regulate a hideously underpaid and captive work force. Virtually an entire population was turned into a migrant labor force. An additional series of anti-union laws prevent Africans from organizing to improve their working conditions. Unemployment – now estimated at 40 percent of the black South African population – is disguised by shunting workers off to rural “homelands.” This is the heart of the “separate development policy,” which at present assigns 13 percent of the land in the Republic – the worst land – to 87 percent of the population.

A few reporters, like Silk, have tried to explain this complex system of domination. But most focus instead on the Jim Crow surface manifestations of apartheid. “It may be because many journalists just don’t understand economics,” guesses Silk. “After all, the race problem is also a class problem. And because most American journalists are not well versed in looking at class issues, it’s difficult for them to see it. For most of them, the stress has been on covering day-to-day events. They don’t understand that a lot of the fervor in South Africa is because of the discontent of a working class.”

“Protection of white economic privilege has become perhaps the main product of apartheid,” writes Jim Hoagland of the

Washington Post. Hoagland agrees that this central characteristic of apartheid tends to get lost in the imagery of racist whites against segregated blacks. “The whole economic story,” he says, “has not been done well.”

A recent overview of apartheid in the *New York Times* by John Darnton, for example, began with an anecdote about the first black woman to win a multiracial beauty contest. The woman was not allowed to stay at the resort hotel in which she had won a vacation. Not until the ninth paragraph of the piece did Darnton explain that it was the exploitation of black labor that led to apartheid laws. He spent three paragraphs discussing these laws, but his emphasis was on how poorly these laws work and how hard they are to enforce. Darnton’s piece touched many of the right bases, but it failed to convey the economic foundations of apartheid.

2. The American economic and political role

Not only have American reporters had problems untangling and explaining the complexities of the South African economic system, they have also failed to grasp the crucial US economic relationship with South Africa.

In recent years, the United States and South Africa have become important trading partners. The US imported nearly a billion dollars of South African exports in 1976, while South Africa imported \$1.85 billion worth of American products. Moreover, investments by more than 350 US companies have nearly doubled over the last ten years to nearly \$1.7 billion. US banks have an estimated \$2 billion in loans outstanding to the South African government. In addition, the US has an important political and economic stake in safeguarding Britain’s \$7 billion economic investment in South Africa.

While total US economic involvement amounts to only one percent of all US corporate assets abroad, the tie to South Africa is hardly an insignificant one. Yet, the American press has been reluctant to explore these ties or to explain US policy as an outgrowth of this economic relationship.

Opponents of apartheid believe that Western economic involvement helps prop up the South African regime, while enabling multinational corporations to prosper. (In 1974, the return on investment in South Africa was 19.1 percent, compared to a world average of 11 percent) For years, at the United Nations and in other forums, African states and black South African organizations have crusaded for economic sanctions against South Africa. They've argued against the view promulgated by the Western powers that foreign investment will ultimately erode apartheid and transform South Africa.

Most press coverage of the economic sanctions debate reflects the US government's view that such sanctions would be counterproductive. Few newspapers or newsmagazines gave the pro-sanctions African perspective any substantive hearing.

In its report on the UN debate in October, *Time* magazine wrote extensively about the US vote in favor of a mandatory arms embargo, but devoted only one line to the resolution calling for economic sanctions that had been vetoed by the US, France, and Great Britain. Such sanctions were dismissed categorically by *Time* as a "step that would have caused real damage not only to South Africa but also to the Western powers and many small nations that trade with it." The *Time* article quoted South African government sources and a prominent white liberal – but no Africans. One week earlier, *Time* articulated its thinking on sanctions in a piece headlined "Embargoes May Sting, But They Don't Really Hurt."

Newsweek's coverage was similar, quoting unnamed economists to the effect that South Africa could withstand economic sanctions. In its October 3 edition, *Newsweek* stated that a world embargo on arms to South Africa was already in effect when, in fact, only a UN resolution for a voluntary ban had been passed.

John Burns of the *New York Times* was one of the few journalists to seek out and report African views – those of a worker in Johannesburg who would be hurt by sanctions but who favored them anyway, and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, the moderate leader of South Africa's 5.8 million Zulus, who has changed his position and now favors sanctions, as does virtually every other black South African leader. But even Burns' backgrounder of November 6 cited only one reason for sanctions, and then enumerated seven against. His sources were "many economists" and unnamed "white liberals."

One of the few mildly dissenting views in an American newspaper appeared in the last paragraph of reporter David Ottaway's news analysis in the *Washington Post* of October 28. In an article devoted to explaining why an arms embargo was too late, he noted, "More effective measures against South Africa would be such things as an embargo on loans and other economic steps. The (South African) economy is already in a recession and facing an 11 percent inflation rate, so this sector is more vulnerable than the country's military establishment." On the same day, the *Post* carried a column by Stephen S. Rosenfeld, writing from Johannesburg. Rosenfeld favorably quoted the views of white industrialist Harry Oppenheimer, who argued that the US should pressure South Africa with understanding. Rosenfeld also criticized the one man, one vote standard as "alien to the Afrikaners and, I believe, to many South African blacks." No South African blacks were cited.

Few papers explored what other economic options, short of a total US embargo, might be employed to exercise leverage on the South African government. In mid-November, the Carter administration hinted that it was considering other outside economic pressure. But such measures – including a possible cutoff of Export-Import Bank credit, or limits on future investment – were hardly discussed in the press. It seems as though the media was waiting for the government to act so that it might react.

The issue of economic sanctions only began to receive publicity after President Carter was reported considering supporting them, says Mzonke Xuza, a staff member of South Africa's Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) office at the United Nations. "It is as if the whole issue had to be made legitimate by white leaders before the press will seriously discuss our demands. For months, we have been trying to get our position on this out to the press, but they refused to print it. Yet, after Carter's press conference which raised this issue, we saw the television crews come crawling around us, with their people asking if we didn't think this was a positive step."

Reed Kramer, who edits Africa News, an alternative news service published in Durham, North Carolina, believes that "sanctions are considered a non-issue in the press because it is considered an unrealistic demand." Kramer agrees that there is not much press coverage about the strategic role American investment plays in such key economic sectors as oil, computers, electronics, auto, rubber, and communications. "What coverage there is," he says, "usually focuses on employment practices of US companies rather than on how important US investment, trade, and bank loans are to the South African economy."

"The British press, which is consistently more informative about South Africa than the American press, is also disarmingly frank about the role that self-interest plays in its rejection of sanctions,"

says Reverend Kenneth Carstens, a white South African exile who directs the North American branch of the International Defense and Aid Fund. “But your government tends to camouflage the significance of your trade and investment, and the press reflects this.”

Jennifer Davis, research director of the American Committee on Africa, echoes this view. “I find press people very uncritical of government sources,” she says. “They seldom consult groups like ours, perhaps because the conclusions of our studies challenge US government policy and the impact of the corporations.”

Davis was critical of the questioning of President Carter during his October 27 press conference, when he announced US support for a UN arms embargo. “The reporters didn’t even know what to ask,” she says, “and the questions they did ask showed unfamiliarity with the issue.”

During the press conference, ABC’s Anne Compton asked Carter if he was worried about dictating domestic policy to South Africa. In his response, Carter denied that the US was meddling, and then made a revealing statement about the need for the US “to decide when we should and should not invest in another country.” But Carter’s opening provoked no follow-up questions on how the government could or might regulate investment.

A few newspapers have carried informative reports on US economic involvement in South Africa. The *Christian Science Monitor*, whose South African reporting frequently outclasses its competitors’, carried a well-researched report by Harry Ellis the day after Carter’s October 27 press conference. Ellis’s article disclosed that American steel and chemical industries are dependent on South African chromite ore and other metals. The paper also suggested that US exports to South Africa have grown so rapidly that 50,000 jobs could be affected if trade were cut off.

The *Rand Daily Mail* covered one story conspicuous by its absence from American papers. In late September, South Africa's Prime Minister John Vorster was given a standing ovation by 600 guests at a dinner of the American Businessmen's Luncheon Club in Johannesburg. The speech that drew so much applause was a blistering attack on US "meddling" in South Africa.

3. Reporting black South Africa

The American press has consistently slighted the black resistance movement in South Africa. "I don't think they want to show that there is a struggle going on," says Thami Mlabiso, the UN representative of South Africa's African National Congress, the country's oldest liberation movement. "The uprising of our people has been portrayed as a riot, or a series of riots. This has presented a distorted picture of the whole black struggle."

A survey of some press coverage during the Soweto rebellion in June 1976 bears out this charge. In its front page headline and lead paragraph on June 17, 1976, the day after the township erupted, the *New York Times* called the protests against the compulsory teaching of the Afrikaans language in African schools a "race-riot." A day later, a *Times* editorial spoke of "outbursts of racial hatred just ten miles from Johannesburg."

Newsweek reported that, "In the days that followed, black students and many adults roamed through the streets, burning buildings wrecking buses, and trying to find and kill whites." Curiously, a backgrounder on Soweto, written by John Burns and carried by the *Times* on June 17, indicated that white Americans received a friendlier reception in Soweto than in New York's Harlem.

Time magazine, like many newspapers, featured more

information from government sources than from blacks in its “riot” reports. In trying to explain who initiated the violence, the newsmagazine noted that police officials insisted that they fired in self-defense, while some witnesses (in this case black reporters) claimed that police had provoked the conflict.

“Exactly how and why a student protest became a killer riot may not be known until the conclusion of an elaborate inquiry that will be carried out by Justus Petrus Cille, Judge President of the Transvaal,” intoned *Time*, not bothering to note that blacks scoffed at an investigation headed up by a pro-apartheid Afrikaner.

As for black viewpoints on the Soweto events, few publications knew where to turn. *Newsweek* featured an interview with the aging, white liberal writer, Alan Paton, hardly a spokesman for the new generation of militant blacks.

Michael Kaufman of the *New York Times* could find no spokesman at all by June 24, complaining that there were no black South African groups to articulate “the feelings and motives of mobs and looters . . . There are no counterparts to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the Congress of Racial Equality. There are no Malcolm X’s or Sonny Carsons or James Baldwins who can publicly speak for the street people.” Kaufman, apparently, was not able to locate student leaders who were communicating quite well with their own people.

Four days later, Kaufman visited Soweto to interview witnesses who contradicted the thrust of many earlier reports by suggesting that African violence had an organized political character and was directed largely against government buildings, banks, and other symbols of the apartheid system. No residents expressed “get whitey” attitudes.

The *Washington Post*'s Jim Hoagland, whose in-depth pieces in the late fall of 1976 did much to explain the dynamics of the Soweto uprising, agrees that the press did an inadequate job covering Soweto. "When I arrived in late October, I realized that it had been an essentially unreported story. Part of the problem was vocabulary. It may not be accurate to call what happened riots. That in itself conveys a false impression. I am not criticizing people on day one or day two – you know, there were physical problems, and access to Soweto was blocked. But there was no follow-up. I asked wire-service people if they had ever gone into Soweto, but they hadn't." Hoagland also noted that no American newspapers, to his knowledge, employed black stringers who might have had greater access to the townships.

"I remember when the police riots first rocked Soweto," recalls Africa News' Tami Holzman. "Robin Wright of CBS had her cameras behind the police lines, reporting on wisps of smoke rising above Soweto. We had contacts in the township and were able to telephone people directly to get their eyewitness accounts. Other news outlets could have done the same thing, but they tend to have more contacts among whites than among the country's black people."

Holzman also criticized the media for referring to Soweto, the largest urban concentration of blacks in all of Africa, as a "suburb of Johannesburg."

"You can hardly call it a suburb," agrees James Thomson, curator of Harvard's Nieman Foundation and a one-time South African correspondent. "It's much more like a concentration camp or an Indian reservation. The images of South Africa, as conveyed to an American audience in 'language they can understand,' can be obscenely inaccurate."

4. The liberation movements

South Africa's liberation struggle did not start or end with the Soweto uprising or with the death of Steve Biko. A bitter fight against white domination has been underway for many decades.

In 1960, two of the country's principal black organizations, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), were banned, their leaders arrested, and many of their most militant members driven into exile. These two movements are now involved in organizing underground actions against the apartheid system. Both groups train guerrillas and claim credit for an escalating series of skirmishes, acts of sabotage, and guerrilla attacks inside South Africa. These actions have led to a series of trials throughout the country, few of which have been reported on.

Both movements maintain representatives at the UN and send delegates to third-world conferences. They issue publications and release position papers on a variety of South African questions. For some reason, perhaps because their approach is thought to be too radical, their political perspective is seldom acknowledged in the American press.

This failure to report on black liberation movements might be rooted in the structure of contacts that American correspondents have in South Africa. Most US journalists are middle-class whites with liberal sympathies who tend to seek out their counterparts in South Africa. Thus, a few white, South African liberals, who are relatively ineffectual politically in their own country, often receive inordinate attention in the American press. Until recently, only a handful of blacks were part of this elite group, and usually they were people who were considered "moderates."

"Take Steve Biko," says the American Committee on Africa's Jennifer Davis. "They made a fuss about him when he was dead, but barely covered what he actually stood for when he was alive.

Perhaps because he wasn't, in fact 'moderate' enough to their terms."

If the press doesn't do a satisfactory job of covering black South Africa, its stance toward the country's white minority is schizophrenic. Despite a clearly pervasive anti-apartheid bias, the dictates of professional neutrality often appear to lead to reports that equate the Afrikaner position with majority claims.

One recent example of this was an October 24 broadcast by ABC's Harry Reasoner from a white South African farm. Reasoner interviewed an Afrikaner who was pictured as "honestly paternalistic" and quite sophisticated (he "quotes Shakespeare"). Of the Afrikaner, who employs 13 black men, Reasoner said, "He would say his men are happy and he's probably right."

This type of all-too-common reporting reinforces the notion that the South African situation can be boiled down to a tragic clash of competing nationalisms, each with its own legitimate claims.

"If you are able to write a story which 'balances' these viewpoints, you miss the point," says Robert Maynard, formerly the only black national correspondent for the *Washington Post*. "And a lot of journalists are missing the point."

Improving press coverage

How can press coverage of South Africa be improved?

1. Better briefings for correspondents.

"I spent a year studying at Columbia University before I went to South Africa," says the Post's Jim Hoagland. "It is essential that reporters do more reading."

2. More utilization of South African journalists and stringers.

The *Boston Globe* maintains an exchange program with Johannesburg's *Rand Daily Mail*, which suggests the possibility of more collaboration between American newspapers and South African or British journalists, whose reporting is often more in touch with black aspirations.

3. More interaction with the black press in South Africa.

Harvard's Nieman Foundation has a long history of sponsoring visits by South African journalists, although it was only in recent years that blacks became fellows. Two great South African writers, Lewis Nkosi and the late Nat Nakasa, were among them. Percy Qoboza is the most prominent South African Nieman alumnus. The United States-South Africa Leader Exchange Program has financed other black reporters as interns on American papers. Perhaps when black Africans are working for American newspapers they can have a role in coverage.

4. Consulting specialized sources and news services.

Media outlets need to be made more aware of specialized African publications and should consider subscribing to Africa News, a professionally written, alternative news service in Durham, North Carolina. The research departments of such institutions as the American Committee on Africa, which has a wide range of academic resources and contacts in the African diplomatic community, should be consulted more regularly. Paul Irish, ACOA's Associate Director, says that the only media outlets that regularly tap the group's expertise are the alternative press, college papers, and some broadcast outlets such as Black Mutual Network News.

5. A team approach to coverage.

Newspapers often don't effectively coordinate their stateside coverage on a particular issue with the work of their foreign correspondent. As a result, coverage often lacks cohesion. Any

serious investigative reporting about US corporations in South Africa, for example, would require interviews and research in both South Africa and the United States.

6. Recognizing the liberation movements.

The ANC and PAC are often major sources of information about underground activity in South Africa. It's about time the US press recognized their existence.

Implementing these six suggestions will hardly transform the nature of the American press, but it might help some news outlets improve their deeply flawed coverage of the escalating crisis in Southern Africa.

Writing in this magazine at the end of the Vietnam War, Frances Fitzgerald said, "After 15 years of reporting the war in Indochina, the news organizations appear to have learned almost nothing, and their policies to have changed rather less than Henry Kissinger's." Will a similarly harsh indictment be necessary in the aftermath of the war in South Africa that seems on its way?

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PART 3

Arousing & Informing America



**Album cover of Sun City, Artists United
Against Apartheid, 1985**

1985

'I ain't gonna play Sun City'

NEWS ISN'T THE ONLY WAY TO UNDERSTAND A SOCIETY. Music and culture are often more powerful languages of communication. In the 1970's I became the News Director (known as the "News Dissector") of WBCN, a nationally known rock and roll radio station based in Boston. When I moved into network television in the 1980's, I produced popular profiles of well-known musicians for 20/20, the ABC News magazine. It was a period when I had one foot in news, the other in music. I soon became part of a major initiative against apartheid led by popular musicians.

In 1984-85, it was *deja vu* all over again, when South Africa's townships erupted. Again platoons of foreign journalists descended. There was some graphic reporting, but once again it subsided. The 'been there, done that', syndrome snapped into place. As human rights abuses increased, coverage decreased. Within a year, the South African government imposed the first of several legal prohibitions against aggressive media coverage. Back in the USA, an anti-apartheid movement was growing, but had yet to reach critical mass.

At that time, I was working for ABC News. What attention was being paid to Africa in America soon shifted from the continent's South to the Sahel, and to the famine in Ethiopia that had claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. For 18 months an African cameraman, Mohammad Amin, documented it, almost alone. He couldn't sell the story. Finally, his pictures couldn't be ignored and they soon brought the horror onto the world's TV screens. NBC News had them first in the US, but the rest of the pack soon followed. In Hollywood, Quincy Jones and Harry Belafonte

responded by organizing *We Are The World*, an all-star song to raise money for the victims. Artists in England had actually done it first with *Do They Know Its Christmas?*, followed by Bob Geldof's Live Aid.

I was delighted when it suddenly became hip to care about Africa. Celebrities mobilized their fans and forced governments to respond. I loved the initiative but I was distressed by the emphasis on Africa as victim, an object for pity, rather than a partner. No one was explaining how the politics and economics of the region had contributed to what was being described only as a natural disaster. The rock stars that responded did better at raising consciousness than effectively delivering aid.

It was then that I met Little Steven, a.k.a Miami Steve, in real life Steven Van Zandt. I had hoped to interview him for a story I was producing about Bruce Springsteen for ABC's 20/20 since he was the "Boss's" best friend and a leader of his E Street band. Ironically, he was in South Africa at the time, and only received my call on his return. The 20/20 segment was finished by then but he and I met anyway at a Broadway coffee shop. I was interested in his impressions of South Africa. He was intrigued to find out that I was so informed about the country.

Steven, who had parted with Bruce at the height of his success to go out on his own, had gone there to research his next record. Little Steven writes songs the way I write stories through an investigative process. He was interested in South Africa because he had read that the apartheid system was actually modeled after America's system of Indian reservations. He told me that when he was in South Africa, he was most distressed by a place called Sun City, an interracial gambling resort in the middle of an impoverished rural homeland, an obscene symbol of opulence. Steve was interested in writing a song about it to make parallels

between the treatment of black South Africans and Native Americans.

Springsteen biographer Dave Marsh interviewed Steven about what happened next. “Danny really inspired the thing,” Steven told him. “He said, it’s a shame you haven’t started the album yet. It would be great to get something out this year.” Finally, Schechter suggested, “Why don’t you just do a single?”

And he did. As he was writing it, I suggested that he name the names of the artists who had played Sun City in defiance of a UN sanctioned cultural boycott. I was probably still thinking of our exposé of conservative Africanists 15 years earlier. Steve wasn’t sure that was smart but did it anyway, asking in one of the lyrics, “Linda Ronstadt, how could you do that?” and singling out others like Queen, Ray Charles and Rod Stewart. These lyrics were later dropped because Steven felt that would become a media distraction and take the focus off of the message. He was right.

He came over to my loft and played the first rough mix. It was hot: part rap, part rock – very street. The song was high-energy, danceable, a gritty New York sounding tune, almost a counterpoint in its angry attitude and sound to the sweet harmonies of Hollywood’s anthem for Ethiopia. It was political too, teaching with every phrase:

*Relocation to Phony Homelands
Separation of Families I can't understand
23 million can't vote because they're black
We're stabbing our brothers and sisters in the back.*

So simple and yet so sophisticated, introducing the realities of the homelands and forced relocation into a debate about apartheid that always tended to be more moralistic than analytical.

Steven pinpointed the problem in human terms as separation of families and then identified the political problem accurately as the disenfranchisement of the majority. And finally by calling them our brothers and sisters, he made it a universal problem that can be challenged through personal action: “*I ain’t gonna play Sun City.*”

He went even further, indicting our own government:

*Our government tells us we’re doing all we can
Constructive engagement is Ronald Reagan’s plan
Meanwhile people are dying and giving up hope
This quiet diplomacy ain’t nothing but a joke.*

I loved the song. It was journalism you could jam to.

Steven now demanded my involvement: “You got me into this Sun City song,” he told me, “you got to help me do it by encouraging other artists to participate.” I was flattered and had no choice but to agree. For years in Boston radio, I saw how music could spread the news, how rock ’n’ roll was often a more powerful educator than the printed or spoken word. I thought to myself – if the news isn’t covering South Africa, I’ll bet when big stars start singing about South Africa, it will quickly become news. I was right.

I was now in the band. We called ourselves Artists United Against Apartheid.

I didn’t know what I was getting myself into.

Over the next several months, I held down two jobs, trying to keep them separate. By day, I was a network producer, by night, often into the wee hours, I was in the recording studio or on the phone begging artists to participate. Steven refused to invite his buddy Bruce Springsteen, not wanting to take advantage of their

friendship. So I did it. He was too shy to call Miles Davis, so I did that too. To my delight, Miles took the call personally, responding with one question: “When do you want me over there?”

I had also taken on the job of documenting the sessions on video. I convinced MTV to get involved and asked a friend, Hart Perry, to shoot the sessions. We asked each artist to explain why he or she was involved. At that point, we were still making the record without a record company or any money behind us. Just doing it. Steve was chipping in, and Arthur donated studio time. (Manhattan Records under the brave leadership of CEO Bruce Lundvall later released it, and then we could pay some of the bills.)

I was surprised that many of the best-known rock ‘n’ rollers were so publicity shy. Most of them had publicists who staged their media appearances. They weren’t used to cameras poking them in the face. Bruce Springsteen at first turned down my request for an interview. But just as I was walking away from him dejected, he ran after me and agreed to say a few words for the documentary.

When Miles started improvising in the studio that day, Steven and Arthur insisted that I not approach him with a camera. “It’s Miles, man,” Baker said. “He’s erratic, idiosyncratic, explosive, wild. Don’t mess with him when he’s playing.” I realized that they were intimidated by his presence and his genius. They were afraid he would walk out.

“You do your thing,” I told him. “I’ll do mine.” I then barged into the booth while Davis was setting up, introduced myself, and asked if we could videotape him. Through the glass I could see Steve and Arthur, head in hands, convinced that I had blown it. Miles smiled. “Bring it on,” he ordered. “Bring it on.” And we did, getting priceless footage in the bargain.

In all, 54 artists participated, many of my biggest heroes among them – Springsteen, Dylan, Miles, Jackson Browne, Peter Gabriel, Bono, Run-DMC and on and on. We started out to do one song and ended up with an album, with additional mixes and singles. There were 303 tracks on the single, some kind of record for a record. The job of mixing it down burned out some of the biggest names in the business. One had to be carried from the mixing board after 36 hours without sleep. In addition to the recordings, we produced a music video directed by Jonathan Demme with Godley and Creme, a video documentary that I produced with Hart Perry, a book and a study guide.

While all this was going on, I couldn't tell ABC News that I was helping to produce such a high visibility musical project on the side. They would not have approved. At the same time, I couldn't really propose a story about "Sun City" either because I had stepped over the line and become part of the story. I tried and mostly succeeded in keeping my name out of the paper and my mug out of the video. I was terrified that 20/20 would dump me if they knew what I had gotten myself into, especially if my affiliation with ABC was dragged into it. This made the project risky, but also incredibly rewarding, because after five years in the networks, I came to see that independent production could be more fun and fulfilling, without the editorial restraints, layers of control and pretensions of the corporate news world.

"Sun City" never achieved the financial success of "We Are the World" although it was picked as a hit by most of the most influential critics. For one thing, only about 50 percent of radio stations played it, many objecting to the attack on President Reagan. Some black stations said it was "too white" while many white stations considered it "too black." (How's that for a comment on our own apartheid?) It did provide a soundtrack for

the sanctions movement. It was premiered at the United Nations thanks to its Special Committee Against Apartheid and supportive UN staffers including E.R. Reddy and Aracelly Santana.

PBS refused to air “The Making of Sun City,” which won the top honors in 1986 of the International Documentary Association (IDA), because the artists who were featured were involved in making the film, and as a result, in their mechanistic view, were “self-promoting.” The song was banned in South Africa. But we raised more than a million dollars for anti-apartheid projects.

“Sun City” had as much or more impact in getting people to understand apartheid because of the plethora of news stories and TV reports about it. Pop stars did what politicians wouldn’t and journalists couldn’t: they spoke out bravely and clearly. They took a stand.

By standing up, they encouraged others to stand with them, and with the people of South Africa. In South Africa, our Artists United helped encourage musician Johnny Clegg to create a similar local organization. “Sun City” also inspired the South Africa Now TV series. So my journalistic interests provoked an independent musical project that in turn inspired me to create a news show.

It was through this series that I first met Nelson Mandela. Our work inside South Africa had endeared us to the democratic movement he headed. When he was released from prison in 1990, Stuart Sender, a member of our New York based team, managed to get into the country and get unique coverage. Globalvision produced a national PBS special, anchored by Charlayne Hunter-Gault that aired in prime time on that day. The networks were more interested in getting the jump on each other and in getting Mandela for an exclusive interview. The ANC decided to give each one of them 10 minutes apiece in the backyard of Mandela’s old

home in Soweto. One crew we often worked with was asked to shoot the interviews too, but for the ANC's archive. So there was Stuart, opening the gate as NBC's Tom Brokaw, CBS's Dan Rather, ABC's Ted Koppel and other news staffers from around the world strolled in for what turned out to be similar conversations with a man who mastered a media that didn't even exist in South Africa when he went to prison.

South Africa Now chose the veteran South African print journalist Allister Sparks for our 10 minutes. Mandela knew Sparks while the big name TV guys were more of a blur. Sparks had never done a TV interview before but his exchange was the most newsworthy, because he knew the story best, and was able to get the most of out of Mandela.

Meanwhile from New York, we angled for a more in depth hour-long interview. The ANC agreed to make Mandela available. We wanted to use Charlayne Hunter-Gault who had anchored our PBS special and was then on her way to South Africa. We approached PBS, certain that they would want such an exclusive and would promote it well – Mandela was then the biggest news story in the world. We were also sure that they would feel confident with Charlayne, a 15-year PBS veteran, the leading African American TV journalist and an Emmy winner for a series she'd done on apartheid.

To our surprise, the PBS brass nixed her, offering to finance the program only if Bill Moyers hosted it. Moyers is a distinguished journalist and a brilliant TV interviewer, but he will be the first to tell you, as he told me, that he was not then well versed on South Africa. But PBS insisted that it had to be Moyers or nothing, probably because they thought that his name would clear more airtime on the PBS stations than Charlayne's. What arrogance. Of course it was Mandela who would bring in the viewers.

Moyers was willing, but his schedule was overloaded, and it seemed unlikely that he could get a South African visa in time. Then, the ANC told us that wouldn't be a problem because Mandela was planning to leave South Africa for his first reunion with his ANC comrades then based in Lusaka, Zambia. But there were other logistical problems. With days to go, Moyers told us that he was sorry but could not do it. PBS promptly pulled out.

I was furious and feverishly tried to think about whom else to approach. The news networks were out because they had done their thing. That left the cable outlets and syndicated programs. It was then that I flashed on one name that would have his own reasons to score such a coup: Phil Donahue! Then America's leading afternoon talkmeister, Donahue was locked in a fierce competitive battle with Oprah Winfrey, a black woman who had had many guests on about South Africa. I figured that if Phil could get an exclusive with Mandela, and one-up Oprah in the process, he would go for it.

I was right. He jumped, and hired Globalvision to produce the interview. There were some problems. Donahue was on the road the same week that Mandela was on the road. He would be in Los Angeles while the ANC was meeting in Lusaka. We would have to uplink from the Zambian TV station, which had never handled a satellite broadcast to Hollywood. There were major technical problems. As it turned out, the Zambian technicians were brilliant and covered every base; NBC's team in California kept forgetting the time difference (GMT), and didn't realize that the sound and the video had to be routed separately. As a result, what could go wrong, did.

Our technical problems were dwarfed by a major snafu on the ANC side. Mandela was due in the studio at 7 a.m., but his over zealous bodyguard would not allow the ANC's information chief

in to collect him because he assumed he needed more rest.

So there we were at the appointed time, with the satellite bought and paid for, but no Mandela. The Donahue Show had 300 people sitting in the studio in LA, and the program's executive producer was screaming at us on an intercontinental call. Fortunately NBC's technical fuck-ups made it difficult to blame us. Finally, with a few minutes to go before we lost our satellite window, we could hear the roar of police sirens as Mandela was escorted into the studio. We put him on the line with Donahue in Los Angeles who heard him apologize profusely for being late. He asked if they could do it the next day. To the chagrin of the accountants at Donahue's company, whose costs were rapidly escalating, Phil agreed.

The next morning, Nelson Mandela was back and on time. For the first time, ordinary Americans could talk directly to the world's most famous ex-political prisoner. It was the best interview I had seen him give. He was animated and interested in the questions. The audience was thrilled to be speaking to him. Sadly, commerce trumps content; the Donahue people blamed us for all the technical problems and never worked with us again.

No doubt Mandela's media celebrity and the TV coverage had helped advance the struggle. Many other pressures, external and internal, ultimately brought down the walls of apartheid. Eventually, it was a process of popular struggle and nonviolent pressure, not violent revolution that turned the tide in South Africa. (In saying this, I don't want to diminish the impact that Cuban and Angolan forces had at Cuito Carnivale in Southern Angola fighting the South African military to a standstill in a battle that eventually led to independence for Namibia and more pressure on Pretoria.) Negotiations and compromises opened the door to democratic elections. Revolutionaries became reformers;

Communists became conciliators; activists overseas became irrelevant.

But in my lifetime, and hopefully in some small part through movements I served or music and journalism I helped produce, South Africa became free as did Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. In more than one sense, we all won. South Africa helped vindicate a faith, born in the '60s, nourished in the cauldrons of activism and educated by the discipline of journalism, that people can change the world. And that change itself was not imposed from above, but struggled for from below.

In a 2114 interview with *Backstreets*, The Bruce Springsteen fan magazine, Steven gave me some props, noting, "I called him or he called me when he heard about what I was doing, and he turned out to be a wonderful partner because he was so politically connected and also had such great media savvy... which we needed for this project desperately, because I was not that big a star to sort of be doing stuff like this, frankly. I was not that big a celebrity at the time. I was doing it all from pretty much willpower."

Update: *In January 2014, Little Steven was back in South Africa with the first concerts in that country by Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. He and Bruce sang Sun City live, electrifying the audience. You can see it on You Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JIUbRAXNCY&feature=youtu.be>*

(1988-1991)

South Africa Now and the challenge of covering South Africa

IN THE SUMMER OF 1986, WHILE ON ASSIGNMENT FOR ABC'S 20/20 covering Jesse Jackson's visit to Southern Africa's frontline states, I spoke with Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, outside his office in the country's capital, Harare, about a South African fostered destabilization campaign that Southern Africa's states claimed were costing them billions of dollars and thousands of lives.

I asked Mugabe if he would welcome American military help to protect his region from South African attack. He told me I was the first American reporter to ask him that question. He immediately took up the idea, explaining that US arms assistance would enable Zimbabwe to divert its scarce resources from military expenditures into badly needed educational and agricultural development efforts. Such a US commitment, he said, would serve as a powerful signal to Pretoria. In a crisp response – what we TV people call a “good sound bite” – he appealed for Washington's help.

After confirming that this was indeed the first time such a statement had been made, and because such “scoops” are often the adrenaline of news organizations, I called our foreign news desk in New York to find out if I should ship the tape for consideration by ABC's nightly news show. I explained the circumstances, why his statement was newsworthy, and that it had won Jackson's immediate endorsement. The response from New York startled me. The news editor on the other side of the line had only one reaction, a question: “Where is Harare?” It was clear that not only

would I have no sale, but that the story, and by extension, non-crisis news from Africa, was hardly on the network radar screen. I could have been calling from the moon.

'When it's not on TV, it doesn't exist'

It has become axiomatic that when an issue is not on television in the United States, it doesn't exist for most Americans who rely on TV news for their understanding of world issues. And news and developments about Africa in general and southern Africa in particular are not frequently covered. The exceptions are usually moments of high drama or when the pictures are particularly evocative as in the case of the bloated bellies of Ethiopia's famine victims, an ongoing coup or civil war, violence in South Africa's townships, or when a well known personality – say a famous “celebrity” like Nelson Mandela – is released from prison.

However, in the case of South Africa, network news coverage has played an important role in bringing the apartheid issue to world attention. There is no doubt that graphic reports of police violence and township responses helped galvanize world opinion against apartheid, and fueled anti-apartheid movements and their demands for sanctions. It is was to stop such images from getting out that the South African government imposed media restrictions between 1985 and 1986 that sought to, and did, limit what the cameras could see and transmit. Their rules were designed to intimidate and encourage self-censorship. They worked.

A year later, the Canadian Government commissioned a quantitative study of the effects of those restrictions and concluded that Pretoria has been “successful in driving images of violence, human rights violations and poverty in South Africa off the television screens of the western world.” The report

documented a sharp fall-off in coverage, even though as those TV images decreased, the rate of detentions and human rights abuses inside South Africa increased. Just why the networks were so cooperative with those restrictions and passive for so long became a matter of debate.

Media appeasement

The argument started when a former senior level CBS producer penned a *New York Times* op-ed page article calling on the networks, his among them, to unilaterally withdraw from South Africa if they weren't able to do their job. "They've kept us from covering the story because of the fear that by breaking the rules, we'll get thrown out," said Richard Cohen. He charged the networks with "media appeasement!" A Congressional Committee that deals with African issues took this issue so seriously that it convened hearings, inviting network officials to discuss their news coverage problems. The Committee was startled when not one broadcaster agreed to testify. The hearing itself was then not even considered newsworthy and so no news crews were assigned to cover it. Citing First Amendment freedom of Press concerns, network executives would not even cooperate with an official inquiry intended to call attention to the news that was not getting out.

In their defense – when any defense has ever been offered – news managers claimed that they must obey the laws in the countries in which they operate or they would not be able to set up bureaus, and, that they have to protect their people, and guard against their expulsion. Criticizing the government's press policies could, they feared, lead to expulsion. A few went further, noting that "the story" in South Africa had changed, and was no longer as vivid. By that they meant that the street fighting – and

the pictures it produced – had ended

One network foreign news editor told me he thought competitive pressures dictated the cautious response. Everyone wanted to make sure they were there, in place, when a “big one” – a story like Mandela’s release – broke. So for nearly two years, TV stories from South Africa were few and far between. And that was not because there were no stories to shoot, or that material could not be shot or acquired from many freelance crews. In this period, producers in New York put “on the shelf rather than on the air many reports that were filed.

While it is true that major events were happening elsewhere in the world at this time – in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union for example – and that the traditional 22 minute newscast can’t cover everything, it is also true, to quote a MacNeil Lehrer report, that the networks were “tiptoeing around.” They did not challenge a system of state imposed media censorship of the type that would later be taken up by governments in Israel and China. Not one American TV correspondent was expelled from South Africa at that time.

Former President Jimmy Carter would later excoriate the networks for a lack of coverage, while Jesse Jackson stated categorically that if the situation had been reversed – “If 26 million Africans held down four million whites under the gun,” the media response would be different.”

Was there racism involved? Some critics thought so, charging that most American news coverage was Eurocentric and that overwhelmingly white news organizations were not at bottom committed to covering a black freedom struggle.

Kenneth Walker, a former Nightline correspondent, one of the few black reporters ever assigned to that show, and to report from South Africa, told a talk show interviewer that the reason for

diminished coverage was that “news decisions in this country are made by about ten white guys who live within a 25 mile radius of Manhattan.” Walker called the lack of coverage a “failure of nerve and a failure of will,” even claiming that Nightline only went to South Africa for its first series of week-long programs in response to pressure from black staffers at the network.

Other media critics have contended that poor coverage of blacks in South Africa is not surprising in light of the “benign neglect” of black community issues in America. There is no question that America’s newsrooms tend to be racially homogeneous with few blacks in decision-making positions. Some who are, like Les Payne, the former managing editor of *Newsday*, committed his newspaper to enhanced coverage of South Africa. TV Anchor Charlayne Hunter-Gault has done the same at PBS’ MacNeil Lehrer News Hour. There are many individual journalists – black and white – who are committed to the story. There seem to be far fewer broadcast institutions that are.

Constructive engagement

Political factors may have been more central than racial factors. Since network news tends to march in lockstep with US government policy, often sharing its world-view and cold-war biases, it is important to remember that in this period the Reagan Administration considered South Africa an ally, and practiced a policy of “constructive engagement.” Network news programs never dissented sharply from that view, for example, rarely if ever looking at South African policy as skeptically as they came to see America’s Vietnam policy in the latter years of the war.

The opposition movements there, especially the ANC, were not taken terribly seriously in those years either. They were frequently tainted in western media the same way they were tainted in South

Africa's pro-government white press, as communists, frequently labelled "Moscow backed" without much background offered about their histories or political goals. Liberation movements in others parts of the Third World got similar treatment although dissident movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet bloc were usually treated much more sympathetically. Perhaps that's because network news programs have always been more captivated by East-West issues than North-South concerns.

Overall, most news editors cannot be accused of having too much intimate knowledge or interest in African liberation movements. When a story is perceived as of only limited interest at the top of a news organization, it is given only limited coverage by the rank and file.

It is possible that network news managements would disagree with my assertions. They would probably point with pride to their coverage of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. And it is true that the three networks and CNN sent a small media army to South Africa to chronicle that event.

Yet the monthly *Tyndall Report*, a trade publication, that surveys TV news coverage noted in the aftermath of that coverage in March 1990 : "South Africa received 176 minutes of coverage in one month. The total for the previous 30 months (August 1987-January 1990) was 412 minutes. Thus this month's coverage was higher than the annual coverage of South Africa (165 minutes) over the last two and a half years." In the period just before Mandela's release, South Africa ranked 27th - next to last - on the Tyndall list of major news stories being covered on American television.

The undeniable bottom line is that South African coverage levels are episodic and inadequate - and even when they aren't, on such stories as the Mandela Release - the levels of analysis

and background contextual reporting is usually very weak. There have been some exceptions – and exceptional programs – including some hosted by ABC’s Ted Koppel who at least cannot be accused of just parachuting in the manner of so many network superstars. What Koppel had going for him was more extensive air-time and a virtually unlimited budget. Going against him was that his program aired late at night.

Enter South Africa Now

It is against this background that, in April 1988, former CBS producer Rory O’Connor and I started the weekly television news magazine called South Africa Now. We believed from our own experience that the networks respond more to competition than to criticism. We wanted to demonstrate that the story of upheavals in the region, and the aspirations of the people who live there could be reported weekly on American television, despite the censorship there and indifference here.

We recognized early on that we would only have a running chance of defeating the censors by working with black journalists and video teams who were already in place in South Africa and looking for outlets. Collaboration became our watchword – and training South African blacks in TV journalism part of our mission. The staff now was multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-national, a mix of seasoned broadcast journalists and novices.

We believed that the people closest to the news on the ground are usually in the best position to explain what is going on. Since Southern Africans were most committed to getting their news out, we sought to equip them with the tools and skills to tell their own story. South Africa Now became a TV vehicle for Africans to report an African story, and for Americans to see and hear African voices.

Multiplier effect

We hoped that South Africa Now’s existence – and what publicity we could attract to promote it – would have a multiplier effect, keeping the issue of the suppression of news from the region in the public eye. We wanted to prod the networks to improve and increase their coverage by example. We were very ambitious in this respect and were accused of being “guerilla journalists” and advocates as a result.

We started South Africa Now with a small grant from the United Nations. Most philanthropic foundations did not touch us initially, contending that if the networks with their vast budgets – one billion dollars for the big three per annum – could not provide coverage, why did we think that our small company, Globalvision, could?

To prove that it could be done, we had to get on the air, establish our presence, and refine the “product” as we went along. Our Globalvision credo was that regular on-going programs – weekly series, not occasional documentaries – was what was needed to reach and build an audience for information Americans were not getting elsewhere. We started transmitting the show on one satellite network, and soon found our way onto PBS stations. We had hoped that once we proved we could produce a quality program, other funding could be found. Fortunately that’s what happened, but, unfortunately, at a low and hard-to-sustain level.

South Africa Now was on the air for three years, seen on leading public television stations nationwide, in the Caribbean, Japan, and Southern Africa. It was of course banned in South Africa. Getting the program on the air in the region gave the people who were making news there a sense of the program’s value. They could see and react to our work, mostly favorably. We also contributed weekly segments to Cable News Network’s “World Report” seen

in 82 countries.

Our budget went from \$200 to a \$15,000 weekly cash outlay with many in-kind services provided by friendly PBS stations. To put this in perspective, our annual budget for 52 shows approximated the amount spent each week for network news magazines like *Sixty Minutes*, *Prime Time Live* and *20/20*. We were forced to rely on foundation grants to pay for the show, which we produced on a non-profit basis. Unhappily, we could find no corporations to sponsor or “underwrite” the show. One programmer at a PBS station in Dallas was quoted as saying that *South Africa Now* is considered “not corporate friendly,” whatever that means. The lack of corporate interest in the show was no doubt linked to the fact that so many corporations have been on the firing line for their business dealings in South Africa.

Form and content

We were as concerned with what we would put on the air as in winning airtime. We started with a determination to provide stories that were not being covered. We also wanted to forge a style of presentation that might make the program more accessible to ordinary viewers. We wanted the program to be unique in both its form and content.

Form-wise, we opted for a high-energy presentation with many quick stories, flashy graphics, and grabby features. We decided on a magazine format with a diverse mix of elements rather than a talk show loaded down with experts. The idea was always to reach out to a large audience and not just talk to the small circle of the initiated. We did not want to become the TV show of the African Studies Association!

Our program mix was designed to include news, background reports and cultural segments. Culture often leads politics in

Southern Africa and is certainly an arena for the expression of ideas, values, and aspirations. Unlike traditional news shows which deal with culture as a second thought – in cutesy “kicker” stories at the end of the newscast or star-oriented “What’s Hot” segments,” we devoted a third of the program to culture with substantive reports on musicians, film, theater, and all the arts. Many of these reports were lively and entertaining, produced with a mass audience in mind.

We had serious discussions about how to cover the news. We emphasized context and explanation. Our newscast focused on the disenfranchised black majority, not the white minority. So, for example, when the networks featured reports on the whites only elections, we focused on the black voter boycott contesting their unrepresentative character. When some reporters feted President De Klerk as the “Gorbachev of South Africa,” we looked analytically at his record and at the limited nature of his “reform” vision. We emphasized the role that the mass democratic movements and their defiance campaigns played in pushing the government on to that road of reform. Unlike the network cameramen that tend to shoot from behind police lines, we wanted our images to come from within the movements for change, looking the other way.

We also tried to be careful about our use of language, avoiding such phrases as “black on black” violence. The stories on that subject usually missed the political, as opposed to the racial or tribal character of that violence. Violence against black township officials or fighting between activists of the ANC/United Democratic Front and the Inkatha movement led by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi stemmed from ideological differences that had to be explained. The role of the South African police and Army in this conflict has been central, although you wouldn’t know it from most TV reporting.

On one occasion we were able to compete head on with network efforts. That occurred when we produced a prime time special for PBS on Mandela's release which aired nationwide and in prime time on February 11th 1990 , the day of his long awaited walk to freedom. On that occasion, we had a better budget and satellite access. So our show had all the news the networks carried but a distinctly different twist.

Our coverage of the release stressed two points conspicuously absent in most network coverage.

First, that Mandela himself initiated the negotiations that resulted in his own release, and that he did so from behind bars. Later we reported on how he ended up in prison in the first place – a rather important dimension of the story the networks ignored – explaining the role played by the CIA in tipping off the South African police as to his whereabouts.

Funding for that special was hard to find. In 1989, with support from a top programming executive at PBS, we submitted a proposal to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) for a large grant. An independent panel evaluated our proposal and a reel that accompanied it. After the meeting was held, the excited PBS official, Gail Christian, called us from a pay phone at CPB after sitting in on the session.

“I'm not supposed to be telling you this but the panel loved your pitch, and gave both the reel and the proposal an “A.” That means you'll get the money, she said in hushed tones. “Wait for a call next Monday.”

We were thrilled. We had tried to get support from CPB and PBS for years with no success. Our calls were not even returned. So when the promised call finally came, Rory couldn't contain his excitement. And then I watched his smile slip away. The call lasted thirty seconds.

We were told our application had not been successful.

We were later told that there had been a political keboosh. The panel's recommendations were arbitrarily overruled.

Getting the story right

South Africa Now tried to get the story right rather than have it first. We wanted to explain how and why events occurred, and examine the forces behind the scenes. To do that, we had investigative reporters looking into many controversial stories including South Africa's nuclear weapons program, its chemical and biological research military efforts, sanctions busters and the like. Weekly we sought out analysis and background from leading experts, analysts and activists. We always tried to get the widest range of viewpoints as well, including that of the South African government. But its officials refused to cooperate, denying us interviews, comment, and even access to the country by turning down, without explanation, our requests for visas.

Perhaps they hoped that we would go away once we were spurned or that public television stations wouldn't carry the show because of an alleged lack of balance. Thanks to our association with CNN, as a contributor to a program to which South African Broadcasting also contributed, we were able to use material submitted to the CNN show by then Apartheid government-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC.)

'The sincerest form of flattery'

The South African government did more than show us its displeasure. They attempted to compete with us by covertly subsidizing their own show, cloned after ours but riddled with government propaganda. Called "Inside South Africa," it too was formatted as a half-hour news magazine with a black host

(who could easily pass for white!). The show drew on a wide range of reports from government-controlled television and was produced by a company called Global News, headed up a former SABC executive.

Despite the similarity of the names of the two producing companies, Global News and Globalvision, the shows were completely different. For one thing, “Inside South Africa” had a big budget for postproduction, special effects, and satellite transmission. When South Africa Now exposed this look-alike competitor, and tipped off a South African newspaper that confirmed that it was being covertly subsidized with government funds, it soon faded away. We were pleased that they had tried, and pleased also that it had failed since imitation is still the sincerest form of flattery

South Africa Now constantly sought to explain the character of apartheid itself since it was not well explained or understood by the American press and American TV viewers. We have presented apartheid as more than a system of legalized racial domination, viewing it as a framework of economic exploitation and ethnic division and manipulation. We covered apartheid as a labor system, a tool for preserving racial privilege through the exploitation of labor as well as dealing with questions of race.

The economic impact of apartheid – vast disparities between white wealth and black poverty – were as cruel as its racially discriminatory effects. Thus South Africa Now sought to provide an insiders view of a struggle for majority rule and economic transformation, not just for civil rights under a structurally inequitable system South Africa Now carried a “Labor Watch” segment because trade unions are at the center of the fight for economic justice.

That meant also covering the international dimensions of the

issue – the role transnational corporations played in propping up Apartheid and the impact of sanctions. In an increasingly global economy, South Africa couldn't be covered without also covering the countries that trade with South Africa. Thus, we ran many stories about how Pretoria worked to evade sanctions, and the support they've received from Israeli arms dealers, Arab oil suppliers, and the country's own monopoly corporations like Anglo-American and DeBeers. You couldn't cover apartheid without looking at its economic underpinnings.

We decided also that our focus would be regional because apartheid policies impacted on all of South Africa's neighbors in a devastating manner. As a result we featured reports from and about the frontline states. We carried reports from Angola television and an excerpt from a Cuban Film about the battle in Southern Angola at Cuito Carnivale that may have been the turning point in ending South African intervention and assuring Namibian independence.

At a time when no other regular reports were being aired on Namibia, we started a "Namibia Watch" segment hosted by Joseph Diescho, a black Namibian scholar, that ran every week from the implementation of UN resolution 435 to that country's independence. One of our Namibia stories aired charges of a massacre of SWAPO combatants by South African trained forces. It was given page one treatment in the South African press and led to a denunciation of the show by that country's defense minister in Parliament, a sign that our efforts were being taken very seriously indeed.

Finally, we covered news coverage itself through a regular "Covering the Coverage" segment. Since filling the void in coverage was our goal, we monitored gaps, omissions, distortions, and dis-information in other media as a regular part of our program.

This type of reporting was also unique because there is very little direct media criticism on the air, by one network of another.

How did we evaluate our work? For starters, we won recognition in our industry. An Emmy. A Gold Medal from a New York video festival. And a citation of “Excellence in Television from *Channels* magazine. We received kind endorsements from journalists we respected in South Africa and overseas, from Allister Sparks to Bill Moyers, Gwen Lister to Anthony Lewis, Les Payne to Peter Magubane.

Media attention and Oprahvision

We were called “indispensable” by the *Village Voice*, praised for “filling the void” in *Time*, called “hip and stunning television” by *Vanity Fair*, and featured on MTV and the Today Show. Television writers around the country sung our praises too, from the *Detroit Free Press* (“puts the networks to shame”) to the *Los Angeles Times* (“Remarkable”) to publications in Europe and Africa.

Stuart Sender, South Africa Now’s news editor for many years, and also our correspondent covering Nelson Mandela’s prison release, wrote about the show as we were ending out run.

“Three years is a pretty good run for any television program, but the unique experiment that has been this shoestring budget show should not be allowed to disappear without examining the serious issues that it has raised about the role of television in world events. And the timing of the program’s demise should be addressed as well.

“Since Nelson Mandela’s release from prison last year, the networks have been planning to close or reduce the staff of their bureaus in Johannesburg (the only permanent network bureaus on the entire African continent).

“As South Africa’s political dynamic moves from one of repres-

sion to the prospect of negotiation and reform, the TV cameras are leaving. It is unlikely that television viewers will receive more than sporadic information about the historic transition to black majority rule.

“While the program is over, the story is not – in South Africa and elsewhere.”

Perhaps our biggest media break came the day Oprah called.

Well it wasn't exactly Oprah herself. A forceful self-assured Oprahducer for America's most popular afternoon syndicated talk show had seen or heard about our program, and said he wanted to build a show around it. “It's going to be great. ... Send us your best stuff ... everything.”

And you can bet we did: everything, and then some.

Carolyn Craven, our anchorwoman, was thrilled. She literally checked out of a hospital stay to make it. Mweli Mzizzi, a South African reporter was psyched, pushing us to chip in towards a new suit: “Hey man, this is Oprah, the big time.”

22 million people – our biggest audience yet.

When we flew out of New York it was 90 degrees. By the time we arrived in Chicagoland, the temperature had dropped to 54. That should have warned us to cool our jets. They sent a limo driver to get us who almost ran the stretch into a wall on the highway into town.

This was going to be a more dangerous adventure than we knew.

Oprah's guests stay in the Hotel Nikko, a Japanese-owned chain. We didn't know as we checked in that all the local anti-apartheid folk had picketed the place when they put the South African Ambassador up some years back. Labor activists say the Nikko resists unions. Black groups say it's racist. They're all criticized Oprah for using the joint.

“Using” was to become the word of the day

The Oprah Show was then housed across from the big old Chicago Theater, one of those classic picture postcard Vaudeville Palaces turned movie houses, turned civic showplaces. The place was dark and empty. All the action was across State Street in front of the nondescript office building housing WLS, the local ABC station, where Oprah was the hottest ticket in town. Her audience has been lining up since 7 AM and must go through an airport style security check – with bags searched, and metal detectors buzzed around their bodies by heavy duty security types before being ushered onto the bright pink set where Oprah does her thing.

On our arrival, the night before, we learned that, sorry folks, the show, is not really quite all about us, after all. Oprah has invited the South African author Mark Mathabane, who has been on her show at least twice before, as well as a white South African doctor-activist, who we suggested, to join us.

We are now just part of the guest list.

It became clear that the show was to be about South Africa – not about South Africa Now.

Our first stop as guest in Oprahworld is the green room for make-up and bagels. Only this one is gray, and our attendant is young perky Producer, all in pink, who introduces herself: “My name is Mary Kay”. We joke about how she looks like one of those Mary Kay cosmetics nuts. It’s obviously not a new joke to her. She’s there to be helpful. This is the Mid-West.

On the table in front of us are the releases we are to sign. One of them has a clause faxed in by Oprah’s lawyer that calls on our little company to “indemnify” Oprah’s Harpo Productions against any lawsuits that may come their way from using our footage. I cross it out. Harpo is Oprah’s production company. It now owns

her show and develops other properties. Harpo is making bigger bucks than the Marx Brother she stole the name from.

With ten minutes to show time, I was ushered into a reserved seat on the aisle where I am told Oprah will come to me later, mike in hand, and give me my fifteen seconds of fame. But just in case she forgets, I'm to raise my hand and just "jump in." Right! I do get to wave my hand all right, looking like a fool, but that's about all. Oprah avoids me.

The recruited audience is filled with white South Africans, only most of them tell the Producer trying to warm up this crowd that they are just there to "observe." They don't want to be embarrassed on national TV. Nobody does.

Oprah comes flying in with just minutes to airtime. She's decided that Mark Mathabane will open the show alone on the set with her. A video "package" – using all of our hottest footage with no reference to our show or money for its use – is used to introduce him. She keeps him on for a second segment too. So now we're twenty minutes into the hour and no one has mentioned "South Africa Now." It becomes clear that there is another agenda at work.

Mark is there to promote his new book "Kaffir Boy in America." She tells the audience before the show to go out and buy it. Later on air, she repeats the plea a couple of times more. Oprah plugs the book more than the author who is far less self-promoting. Oprah admits for starters that she and Mark are friends.

What she doesn't say – and we, in our naivete only learn later, – is that she and Mark are actually in business together. She has bought the rights to his first book. She's planning to make a movie about it. It is a good book – and Oprah's enthusiasm and exposure for it had propelled it on to the best seller list. It's been proven that housewives buy the books that Oprah hypes.

But in this case, the book and the author really belong to Oprah ...literally.

Having us on – and we do get to score a few points later, although a clip from our show and its address is never shown despite the promises – is a pretty smart move. Our program gives Mark’s book a kind of contemporary South African relevance. From the footage, you’d think he was deeply involved in the South African anti-apartheid movement. Of course, he wasn’t.

Let us not knock the impact a show like this has. Mark is very articulate. And Oprah’s show itself has deeply moving moments. How many national programs even deal with the subject? Frankly I had expected that Oprah would only touch the subject if there were some exotic Zulu diet to reveal. Getting South Africa’s freedom struggle TV exposure I considered to be progress, although if words could slay apartheid, it would have been buried years ago.

Oprah did seem especially impassioned about apartheid, even with a bit more conviction than all of the other subjects she always seems so sincere about. At one point she reminds us that a survey taken in one of her audiences the week before showed that most of her fans had no idea what apartheid even is. One girl – “a black girl, can you believe” – she smirked sarcastically, told us she heard that “apartheid was a dance.” How few people laughed shocked me.

But in a way, the Oprah Show is the dance, a daily dance, around issues, ideas, and emotions. Oprah and Phil and now Geraldo et al. are there to titillate and boost ratings. The talk show is America’s classroom and confessional. It’s a formula within a format that ultimately covers everything the same way. The issue is always incidental. The host is not. Heat not light.

We had the illusion that we would use Oprah.

No way. She saw us coming.

At show's end, we were ushered out as the audience lined up to meet Ms. Winfrey. I snapped a picture of our anchors with Oprah. Everyone smiled.

In a second, an Oprah protector was there to advise. "You understand you can't use that photo for promotion. You do understand that!"

Understood.

(Years later, Oprah would become personally engaged in South Africa, creating a school for girls and appearing on many programs. I spoke to her in 2004 at a concert in Cape Town to raise money and support for victims of AIDS.)

Not everyone liked South Africa Now. There were criticisms of specific stories, and hostility from the right. There were also many debates about our "objectivity" within the public television system.

Ideological exclusion and political discrimination

In 1990, a programmer at KCET, the PBS station in Los Angeles called to challenge us on one story. The report in question investigated allegations of a "third force" in South Africa, what Nelson Mandela had branded the "hidden hand" behind the violence that had suddenly erupted in the form of massacres on commuter trains and a spate of political assassinations.

We were told KCET would be taking the show off the air because it considered the story "ANC propaganda" – in essence advocacy masquerading as journalism. The events that followed demonstrate the persistence of ideological exclusion and 1990's style political discrimination in American television.

Just after we heard that the show was to be dropped, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a front page that David Horowitz, a

long time leftist turned rightist and founder of “the Committee on Media Integrity,” (Acronym: Comi, pronounced Commie) “claimed credit.” We later learned that he had been lobbying KCET to persuade the station to dump a wide range of programming which violated his notion of political correctness. “South Africa Now” had been offered up to appease him.

That disclosure prompted viewer protests in LA, several articles in the *LA Times*, and a debate within the station that ultimately led KCET to put the show back on the air, albeit with a disclaimer warning the unsuspecting that “this program reflects the views of its producers,” a not so subtle attempt at further labeling our work politically. We called that decision a victory but knew that we had only won a small battle in a much more complicated war of images and legitimacy.

In the aftermath of this incident, virtually every press article about South Africa Now resuscitated this controversy, quoting Horowitz to the effect that we were ‘marxist’ propagandists and the like, as if he had any credibility as a media critic or expertise on South Africa. In the name of balanced journalism we were continually put in the position of defending ourselves against charges that were never proven, and were never true. There was no evidence but there was an odor – and it stuck. Many people believe that where there’s smoke, there’s fire or at least a flame.

Now, fast-forward four years to Friday, March 18th, 1994. A South African Judge charged with investigating the causes of violence in South Africa produced witnesses who, for the first time, conclusively implicated high level South African police and security personnel in a well orchestrated campaign of murder that claimed as many as 10,000 lives. Nelson Mandela was right: there was a “hidden hand!”

The mystery of the “third force” that we had been covering was

finally substantiated and solved! A furious former President F.W. DeKlerk, insisting he was not implicated, suspended the accused, sparking yet another major scandal.

South Africa Now's story, which had been confirmed in bits and pieces over the years, had now met the ultimate test of truth. According to a *New York Times* report: "The evidence indicated that the police network orchestrated massacres and systematic killings of ANC rivals."

The fact that our report, four years and 5000 lives earlier, pointed in this direction did not make us such great journalists. The same suspicions and more fragmentary reports were appearing in many South African newspapers even as the American mass media largely ignored them.

I have dwelled at length on this story for only one reason – it was used as the reason, or perhaps the pretext, for dropping our series, which in turn damaged our credibility and reputations throughout public television. WGBH in Boston took KCET's signal and moved to drop the show, too, wisely avoiding the same rationale but operating with the same spirit. Fortunately for us, in both cities, public pressure helped convince the stations to stay with the show.

That outcry was resented, and we were then blamed for orchestrating it, even though we had very little to do with it. It seemed like the last people "public TV" stations want is to hear from is their public!

That South Africa Now had been called into question on a story that was legitimate didn't seem to matter. The controversy took on a momentum of its own as the consequences began to ripple throughout the system where the details of the subject seemed to matter less than impressions and prejudices.

Many programmers soon became "uncomfortable" with the

show. Our funding problems became more intense. Despite winning major awards, the handwriting was on the wall. South Africa Now's run was ending. Politically motivated critics – who wouldn't let the truth get in the way of a good, smear campaign – prevailed not because they were right but because there was a perception that they may have been right. A Horowitz group publication later cited this campaign as their “defining moment.”

Many leading PBS producers stood on the sidelines, wishing us well but not speaking out publicly, that is until Horowitz and his new allies in Republican Senator Bob Dole's office began turning their guns on them. Soon PBS's Frontline series was being questioned. Bill Moyers was attacked. And then PBS itself stood accused of airing unbalanced programming. Suddenly a minor critic with a letterhead was able to orchestrate the Republican Majority leader's threat to cut the refunding of PBS. Ironic? Perhaps – but to us it was just new evidence of that old dictum: “when they came for the Jews, I did nothing because I was not a Jew...and then they came for me.”

It is worth revisiting this controversy only for what it implies for the present. We have learned the hard way that inaccurate labels can lead to smears that leave a permanent stain; that administrative bureaucracies have an aversion to controversy; that political criteria are utilized constantly in PBS program evaluation although it is very rare for public television programmers to openly admit that they are not carrying a show, or consigning it to an unwatched time period, for political reasons.

A red scare without reds

When one reads about the Hollywood red scare of the 1950's today, it seems so crude, so blatant, so pathetic to see how

powerful media corporations cowered before breast-beating political demagogues. While only a relatively small number of people may have been fired, the whole culture was diminished by the movies that were and could not be made in that climate of fear, and repression. Television was also ‘sanitized.’ A small town grocer with a mimeograph machine and press agent was able to turn a self-produced magazine called *Red Channels* into a widely utilized blacklist of TV writers and performers against which there was no appeal or even verifiable standards of proof. Accusation was conviction. People were labeled and suffered economic hardships.

The chilling effect then is easy to see now. The chilling effect today is subtler but just as real. Today’s political litmus tests in news or entertainment are not as blatant. There are no loyalty oaths to swear to, or Congressional investigators to placate. Yet a fusion of conservative political ideology and conventional market-driven wisdom continues to guide media gatekeepers in decisions about what to buy, fund, commission and broadcast. Only no one talks about the political effects of the process. It is largely invisible. In some circles, even being considered liberal – that “L Word” as President Bush put it – is still considered outside the pale of respectability. It is a red scare without the reds.

There must be a reason why conservative pundits like neo-con columnist Fred Barnes, who has never made films received hundreds of thousands in funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting while a human rights series like “Rights & Wrongs” with no less a PBS veteran news star than Charlayne Hunter Gault of the MacNeil Lehrer News Hour is repeatedly turned down. (I am having nothing personally against Fred; we were classmates at Harvard’s Nieman Fellowship program for journalists.)

Is it a coincidence that when a highly rated drama about gay

identity issues is withdrawn, former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan is readying a fully funded show? Or that conservative producer Michael Pack was first hired by CPB as a consultant, and then later funded by the same body to chronicle the success of the conservative takeover of Congress.

But it is hard not to wonder if the fact that Nancy Reagan's former press secretary Sharon Tate was CPB's chairman has anything to do with it? Or that Spiro T. Agnew's press secretary Vic Gold is also on that board. In politics, insiders have a way of staying in; outsiders are kept out. We now know there was a "hidden hand" in South Africa. Yet there was also a "hidden hand" at PBS!

That South Africa Now incident still hovers over us in an industry where perception is usually more important than reality. (ie. "The perception of imbalance," the perception of bias", the perception of perception etc. etc.)

Is this a political judgment? You bet. Does it reflect bias? No question. Are those issues ever raised and debated within public television in these terms. Rarely, if ever!

There seems to be a formula. Keep controversies safely in the past. Surround them with academic blather. Temper the tone, calm the waters ... "balance, balance, balance."

One friend suggested that the best way to understand the problem is to borrow terminology from the world of drugs.

"PBS," he quipped, "sees programming as heroin, a quiet high which you can only enjoy alone and in a pacified state. Globalvision on the other hand, wants to give the audience uppers, to arouse them, activate them, empower them. That's the fundamental conflict."

The battle for more TV coverage of Africa will be a long one despite the fact that millions of Americans turned out to welcome

Nelson Mandela during his American tour, and otherwise demonstrated interest in the issue. Not all American news executives got that message, even after coverage of the Mandela events proved ratings blockbusters for local TV stations that went live to Mandela events.

News by housewife

A month after the trip, The Wall Street Journal reported (8/8/90) that the executive producer of NBC Nightly News had decided to “axe” a story filed by their South African correspondent on apartheid and its effect on the education of South African children, “insisting that viewers were becoming bored with the South African story. The segment, which was all of two minutes long, seemingly considered “practically documentary length” was screened for staffers who were reportedly “enthusiastic” about it, and thought it should run.

The executive producer said he would broadcast it only if they could “prove it was a piece that would interest a housewife in Queens.”

Fortunately, one of the TV program’s interns had a mother in Queens who was actually invited in to screen the story without being told quite why. Incredibly, only after Mrs. Sonia Perez of Astoria Queens said she liked it, did NBC Nightly News run it.

Whither South Africa Now?

And as for “South Africa Now?” Our last program was produced entirely by our stringers in Johannesburg. They did a great job in a creating a distinctive look – but at that time, in 1991 , there were no outlets that would carry it. The series was “over,” although it may be re-airing for its historical value on a new cable network committed to programming about Africa, that is, if it gets off the ground.

One of our anchors, Tandeka Gqubule, a South African print journalist who received her on-air training on the show, became the first black anchor for South Africa's television main network during that country's historic elections, moving with pride into the mainstream. The person whose story we chronicled, often alone on television, week after week – Nelson Mandela – went from prison to the Presidency and made human rights the cornerstone of his foreign policy.

And while I was there covering the election with the rest of the world's press corps, many former viewers, mostly black South Africans but also fellow journalists told us we should be "proud" because "South Africa Now contributed to the coming of democracy" in that country.

Now, that's a feeling that makes media work worthwhile – a sense that your work matters and has had an impact. That's one label we don't mind wearing.

On the other hand, what about democracy in our country?

The Fallen

A FINAL NOTE, TO REMEMBER AND PAY TRIBUTE TO SOME FALLEN soldiers in our low profile media war. Two of my colleagues at Globalvision, who gave so much to our “South Africa Now” and other human rights programming left us: Rosko, the legendary New York radio announcer and voice-over artist, and Carolyn Craven, old friend and anchorwoman of the series died. I also mourned the passing in Mozambique of Carlos Cardoso, a friend and as brave a journalist as there was. We interviewed him. (The Mozambique President’s son would later be convicted for having a role in his killing)

FILMMAKING

Directing what South Africans call ‘doccies’

I WAS INVOLVED IN MAKING SIX DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT NELSON Mandela in the 1990’s and then returned to South Africa to document the making and meaning of “Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom”, the epic bio-pic made in 2012-13.

Many of these documentaries were co-produced with Anant Singh’s South African company, Videovision, requiring thousands of hours of effort. I did not and could not have done it alone.

“Free At Last,” about Mandela’s release “went out” in 1990, and then I played a role in his first hour-long American TV interview from Lusaka where he was visiting the ANC HQ in exile. Later, I traveled to Sweden when he reunited with his ailing law partner and then ANC president, Oliver Tambo, after three decades.

From there, it was back to London to help produce the huge all-star concert saluting him and Winnie at Wembley Stadium attended by 90.000 and shown live worldwide – but not in the USA. That was an indication of the challenge we had in getting South African issues into the US media with any regularity, even though the American people welcomed him and idolized him in their multitudes.

Months later, I was with him on his triumphant eight-city tour of the United States where he packed stadiums and inspired millions. I filmed it all for the documentary, “Mandela In America”.

Then, Madiba, as he’s known to his people, invited me to South Africa to document his run for the presidency in 1994. We called that film “Countdown to Freedom: Ten Days That Changed

South Africa”.

A year later, I was back in South Africa with filmmaker Barbara Koppel to document a moving reunion of ex-prisoners returning to the Robben Island prison that had been their home. How often does that happen in history? That resulted in the film, “Prisoners of Hope,” that we co-directed.

Next up: another chance to travel with him as his presidential term was ending in the US and Canada. I was filming when a deferential Bill Clinton hosted his visit to the White House. That led to “Hero For All,” a film that explored his global appeal. Finally, there was “Viva Madiba”, a documentary salute directed by Catherine Myburgh for his 90th birthday. I was a contributing director.

None of these films were big hits but I was always better at telling than selling. I persevered because I thought it mattered then and still matters today. Yet, documentaries need marketing budgets and media insiders to champion them. Alas, I mostly lacked both, perhaps because of my pro-liberation approach that always let South Africans tell their own stories, not to mention the insularity and parochial conservatism of much US TV.

I returned to South Africa every year or two, and produced a tribute to the late AIDS orphan, Nkosi Johnson, who became a symbol of inspiration for many South Africans and the international AIDS community, as well as another on a visit by the Dalai Lama.

I wrote countless reports, essays, blogs and commentaries. I had morphed as an American into a self-identified South African, often knowing more about what was going on in a country 10,000 miles away than I knew about my own, sometimes even knowing more than many South Africans.

And then, in 2012, I was back in the “beloved country,” sitting on a back lot of the vast Cape Town Film Studios in the summer of 2012, freezing my ass off while my fellow New Yorkers swelter in a summer heat wave.

I am on the set of a major movie telling some of the story as Mandela told it, making a film about how movies like the one being made here can often penetrate truths deeper than journalism.

While I am here as part of this effort to reprise his life, news colleagues have staked out a stakeout or “deathwatch”, waiting to report his passing. In the news business, ageing icons like Mandela are considered FBF’s: – Freelancers Best Friends – because news organizations put on temporary staff. There was a media orgy accompanying Mandela’s release, and now the media is mobilizing like vultures for his expected parting, complete with pre-produced obituaries.

Yes, the film is fiction, but based on “faction,” on Mandela’s autobiography, “Long Walk To Freedom”. It’s built around his recollections and experiences, hardly a journalistically objective approach, but one that can be brought to “life” by actors. Even by taking some artistic license, they can make you “feel” his story – pains and triumph – and not just read about it from afar.

(The movie was released in the Fall of 2013 to great reviews and an enthusiastic response. Many entertainment writers predicted it was destined for Oscar consideration. But then a familiar pattern reasserted itself: it was passed over by the Academy. Liberation does not seem to be a theme that plays well in Hollywood. Even as the nations of the world honored Mandela, Hollywood, to use their favorite term, “passed” with the exception of one nomination for an original song written by the Bono and U2 who was invited to play it at the awards ceremony, a clear bid by

the Motion Picture Academy more for higher TV ratings than to honor the movie or the man. I wrote an open letter of protest, but had no response. It was carried by a journal linked to the *Journal of African Cinema*. You can read it at this link: <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/weblog/view-Post,id=67325/>).

Personally, I feel that with or without a blessing from the Academy Awards, the movie is very well made and deserves to be seen. I chatted with Denis Goldberg, a part of the ANC's armed struggle and Rivonia trialist convicted with Mandela who initially complained about a few blatant historical inaccuracies, but told me that after seeing it four times, he changed his mind and thinks it is valuable. Thanks to producer Anant Singh, I was able to make documentaries about the issues in the movie and write a bio of Mandela based on my interviews. They touch on some of the history that was glossed over.

Even after all these years, knowing what I know, and as familiar as I am, with the history the film depicts, I find myself tearing up watching the dramatic recreations. It jogs my memories of all who sacrificed and suffered in the apartheid years that left a legacy of deep poverty and ethnic separation.

I realize how personal it is for me, how deeply I connect with passion and pathos of those years of struggle when the outcome so many now take for granted was so uncertain, so far off.

So, I have become, a "Long Walker", too, across the decades, steeped in the mythologies and the limits of a process here that has succumbed to division, disillusioning so many who need a Mandela to make them believe again.

Politics is so symbolic and, so, its not surprising that in much of the media, Mandela became a media substitute for the struggle even as his hopes of "a better life for all" ran up against trench warfare by the real economic powers here and in the larger world.

The world loves him more as a symbolic “brand” of peace and reconciliation than as a fighter for economic and racial justice on the barricades of an ongoing revolution.

Madiba may be at the end of his Long Walk but the real Long Walk is hardly over as poverty and exploitation grows and festers, not only here, but worldwide. His is a story that the 99% struggling for fairness worldwide can learn from.

What drove me, a boy from a working class family in the Bronx, to become so fascinated by and drawn to this African story? Why did I immerse myself in it for so long, long after the activist community I was part of turned to other issues? Was I a Mandela maniac, the equivalent of being in a kind of Beatles fan club?

Why do I also, at times, feel imprisoned by it?

Truth be told, I am not a worshipper; Madiba is not a friend. There are many who are much closer to him. I am very aware of his highly political persona and history of manipulating and acting autocratically. He himself has written a confession about his flaws and limitations.

His political gifts helped engineer what there has been of a transformation in South Africa but it was the movements he led that catapulted him into the iconic status he enjoys.

Yet, I also admired the way the ANC organized and believed in a cross-class approach, at least in theory – a democratic umbrella movement, with a clear set of principles as first articulated in the Freedom Charter, a dedication to non-racialism and a willingness to build alliances with labor and political groups to the left of their mass base. It offers a model that Americans and others could still learn from and emulate.

I documented the ANC’s transition from a banned and hunted movement to a dominant political party with all the factionalism

and compromises that involves. I began my own involvement as part of a small American solidarity movement that grew into a major force before its flow ebbed.

Now I feel like the last American post-apartheid activist just as years earlier I felt like the last banned person, barred from coming to South Africa by the old government even after the ANC was unbanned. As the beautiful South African hymn, *Senzenina*, asks: “What Have I Done?”

As someone with a company called Globalvision and a global outlook, I always saw the struggle here as a force for change beyond the borders of South Africa. I have been privileged to be welcomed here and encouraged to contribute what I can. Last Fall, I was delighted to connect with some visiting South African activists at Occupy Wall Street in New York. They recognized a struggle when they saw one!

Few Americans have had that opportunity to enlist in this Long Walk and to be part, albeit a small part, of a great human story and world-class force, and now on its way to being dramatized in a major movie. I do know that I have learned and received much more than I have been able to give.

Hopefully, if my efforts as a producer from outside South Africa can help tease out the meaning and, then, share it worldwide, I could be of some value.

(AFRICA REPORT)

Mandelomania: 11 days in June 1990

WHEN WE LEARNED THAT NELSON MANDELA WAS COMING TO America, we thought we should be the ones to produce a video documentary on the trip for history. We're part of it, the TV company behind the weekly PBS show, "South Africa Now." Who would be better qualified to do it? The ANC agreed to let us on board. The American organizers said whatever the ANC wants is fine. We said we'd only proceed if we had a guarantee of unique access. They all agreed. We should have known better.

It never happened the way we hoped it would. Mr. Mandela, as he's known formally, or "Madiba" as black South Africans call him reverentially (by his clan affiliation), was kind of busy *making* history. His coast-to-coast schedule left little time for ancillary activities of the video kind: eight cities in 11 days sounded initially like some undertaking that a group of malicious Afrikaner hit-squaders had dreamed up as a way of getting a 71-year-old man to self-destruct.

His trip was conceived as part of the international strategy that has worked well for the ANC over the years – mobilizing support to isolate South Africa and pressure its regime to abandon apartheid.

Now that Mandela had been released from prison, the organization wanted to activate its many supporters world-wide and so began sending him overseas, first through Africa, then Europe, and ultimately, America.

The goal was to keep the sanctions it fought so hard for in place worldwide as a lever with which to pressure the government at

the bargaining table. As Mandela put it, “You don’t take the kettle off the stove when the water is starting to boil.”

America’s anti-apartheid law had built a lot of that steam, and so the US was predictably high up on the itinerary. It is also a place to “go shopping” for the capital and resources the ANC needs to build its newly legalized movement.

We started out making our documentary about Mandela, but will end up with a film about America. The scale of the response – the emotional intensity and enthusiasm of the crowds – overwhelmed him and everyone who traveled with him.

We quickly became as interested in what the trip was staying about us and to us, as where Mandela went and what he said. In the end, we used the access we enjoyed to ordinary people to come to grips with the trip’s impact and larger meaning.

For starters, we could see that the vastness of the reception put to rest the idea – so often bandied about by the media people – that Americas are not interested in the South African issue. Nelson Mandela gave his people’s struggle a human face and heroic dimension. There’s no better way to tell or sell a story in our country.

What follows are some fragment from the diary I never had time to write during those 11 days in June when Mandela captured the American imagination.

I won’t pretend it’s “objective,” or filled with “sensitive” information. It isn’t It is written with tremendous respect for the difficulty the organizers faced in arranging a trip of this scale and complexity in less than two months. So much could have gone wrong that didn’t. It was historically unprecedented, and its success speaks for itself.

I do promise not to mention that stale, artificially hyped-up press “debate” around his support for Arafat, Gadaffi, and Castro.

(Journalism thrives on conflict, and will often invent it if it doesn't exist.) If you can't read an article about Mandela without reference to that media-demonized trio, pass this one by. You won't get it.

June 20: The arrival

The instructions were to be at the airport at 7am or don't bother, because after that, security will shut the place down. Mandela is supposed to touch down after nine, too late for a chance to say "Good Morning America." The local TV guys say they're going live no matter what.

At first, only the faithful are on hand. Harlem's Queen Mother Moore is among the first in line. She's over 90 now, her small bent body wrapped from head to toe in multi-colored African garb. She's been absorbed with Africa ever since the day that Marcus Garvey himself woke her up to "the Continent's" glorious past, more than 70 years ago. She's brought a scrapbook with her of photos she took with Nelson during a recent sojourn to Soweto. She wants him to see them.

These are the only photos I've seen in which Mandela looks like a youngster.

Soon the politicians come into sight. The tarmac behind Building 14 at JFK Airport is starting to fill up with them. Three states' worth! Jesse Jackson, perennially surrounded by a gaggle of cameras, is holding forth in one corner. Mario Cuomo, the governor of New York State, is there too, shaking hands with cronies and giving the first of several interviews over a supersized cellular phone.

Other celebrities slowly slide into view. First, Harry Belafonte, a key organizer of the welcome committee who would travel with the tour nationwide, snapping pictures with his new telephoto as

he went. He had a leadership role there. It's not clear that Dick Gregory does. It seems his principal interest is turning Mandela on to his company's Bahamian Diet health foods.

The plane from Canada is late. A loudspeaker attached to a mobile police command trailer is booming announcements. The plane is 20 minutes away. The plane is 10 minutes away. Five minutes later: The plane is 10 minutes away. Like that! Everything hereafter on this tour will run later. African time? Perhaps. The fun is just beginning.

Official airport arrival ceremonies have not yet become a tradition in the US the way they are in Africa. Red carpets are not really our thing. Getting out to Kennedy Airport in New York is usually hassle enough, but today, the Port Authority of New York is laying it on big time with a catered VIP tent and a bleacher for the press.

It's soon hard to know if this is a political event or a police convention. Cops of all kinds are everywhere, in all kinds of regalia from New York's finest (nearly 13,000 reportedly were pressed into service of some kind during Mandela's three-day stay) to the State Department's paramilitary ready-for-action, anti-terror squad, in jumpsuits with their Uzis never far away. When I asked one to move aside so our camera could "get a better shot," he cautioned me never, ever to use that word again.

The announcements continue. It seems that the N.Y. Fire Department is running an airplane crash response exercise on this day of all days on an unused runway nearby, and so clouds of smoke are soon billowing towards us. The loudspeaker seeks to reassure: "It is only an exercise."

Finally, a plane pulls in from Montreal, but, alas, it is not THE plane. It is just carrying the luggage. The "secure package" – to use security lingo for the object of this attention – is still in flight.

The power of state power

When he does arrive, he's greeted by the first Black Mayor of New York City, David Dinkins, who has personally ensured this larger-than-life welcome. The Mayor pins a gold apple to Mandela's lapel christening him an honorary New Yorker. The Mayor's omnipresence at all the Mandela events to come will underscore one important truth: It is resources and personnel from local governments that ensure that these events will come off smoothly.

The "official sanction" also guarantees media attention. Without Dinkins and his deep and longstanding personal involvement in the anti-apartheid cause, the Mandela trip would have been much more low-key because New York tends to set the tone nationally. The ANC is blessed that Mandela was not freed during Ed Koch's tenure in office.

Mandela's polished political skills quickly come into focus as he glad-hands his way down the reception line. "Hello, how are you," he booms to people who all swear that, for that second, he is thinking of no one but them, eyes locked, hearts in sync.

I first noticed this quality in the man when he arrived in Lusaka months earlier on his first trip outside of South Africa. There he greeted many known and unknown ANC comrades with personal queries about their families and their work as if he was drawing on a computer file of anecdotes and dossiers. In New York, he surprised Governor Cuomo with a question about his son's recent wedding.

It is this command of detail and personal charm that elevates Mandela in the eyes of those he meets. Our cameraman, Kevin Keating, positioned himself right behind him as he worked the crowd. Kevin's camera suddenly tilted down. Mandela was wearing simple work shoes. He's impeccably dressed for the job

he's come to do.

He has always been considered a sharp dresser and a handsome man. A New York businessman later described him as always having an “extra light” in his face. These good looks add to his presence and charisma, although he likes to joke with a self-effacing story about a young girl in Zimbabwe who confided to him that her classmates considered him ugly. He thought that was funny.

Mandela's physical well-being – despite his age and a bout with tuberculosis – is a tribute to his physical regimen which, in prison, included daily exercise and training. He used to be a prizefighter. In America, he will confine himself to early morning Harry Truman-like walks. Politics is the ring he fights in now.

Political campaign and rock tour

Once Mandela landed, the trip took off. It was organized like a presidential campaign, although it occasionally resembled a rock and roll tour. The drill would be the same in city after city. A welcoming committee. Quickie airport speeches. One or two questions from the line of TV cameras and shouting reporters, and then we're off and quite literally running to find the motorcade which, as we are reminded time and again, is going to be moving whether we're in it or not.

The motorcade also has its own technically designed formula and protocol logic. Police motorcyclists at the front, VIP limos next, with the “Mandelamobile” a few cars back, surrounded on either side by armored blue vans with D.C. plates and automatic weapon-toting security guys on all sides.

Next in line are more vehicles for officials, with vans for the press toward the back. Since our team was not really press – but the insider documentary unit – no one was quite sure where to

put us, and mostly forgot to provide any transport at all. So we would run from car to car looking for a place to sit, desperate not to be left behind. At one airport, our luck ran out. We had to take a cab to town, schlepping our equipment with us.

We usually ended up traveling with the ANC delegation, that was a whole lot friendlier than the press pool guys. I'm sure I was the only honorary ANC delegate from the Bronx.

At one point we started thinking about ourselves not as ANC but as NAC – the No Access Crew. We tried not to let that stop us, and learned alter than our frustrations paled when compared to the experience of others, including many long-time exiled South African ANC members whose opportunities to meet Mandela were short-circuited by last-minute schedule changes and their leader's needs to get some rest. Many were heartbroken.

The real fear

A few weeks before the arrival, some City Hall officials were privately having second thoughts about the wisdom of a ticker-tape parade. There were financial concerns because the overtime wages to clean up after such parades had cost a million dollars in the past – something which a city government cutting back on essential services would be hard put to rationalize. Also, they argued, Mandela was probably not exactly loved in the Lower Manhattan/Wall Street area where calls for divestment and sanctions were not popular.

Would the financial firms that showered confetti on a winning ball team or returning astronauts do the same for a released revolutionary who happened to be black? One quipped, “They’ll probably throw bricks!” Security was a big concern too. The State Department had ruled out an open car, or a “planned spontaneous” stop like the one Gorbachev had pulled off in

Washington. How could you have ticker-tape parade if no one could see him? The other problem was that in a digital age, ticker tape was no longer being used – so they had to literally import some from Connecticut.

Some of these problems would be solved, but they masked deeper uncertainties. No one knew for sure just how popular Mandela would prove to be. While the organizing committee had been flooded with requests for appearances and invitations to events, it was hard to know how deep the support ran.

Media coverage of South Africa had not exactly been high in the months since his release.

‘Stadium snafu’

One of America’s best-known concert promoters wanted to cancel the Mandela rally he was organizing in Yankee Stadium a few days before it was slated to occur because of doubts about filling the space in such a short time frame. He later withdrew his services, prompting a *Daily News* headline: “Stadium Snafu.” A proposal for a similar stadium event in Washington, D.C. was nixed earlier on because of a lack of confidence that even the 70 percent black “Chocolate City” would support it.

Organizers didn’t want Mandela’s trip to be embarrassed by a poor turnout, and so guarded against allowing their emotional enthusiasm to override their realist expectations. There was an optimism of the will, but a pessimism of the intelligence.

At the New York press conference on the eve of Mandela’s arrival, Jim Bell, the trade unionist in charge of the local preparations, was asked point-blank for a projection on crowd size. Some reporters know how disorganized the preparations were, how much in-fighting and to-be-expected turf battling there had been. Bell said he wouldn’t play the numbers game.

The truth, as he confided to me later, was that he had no idea and was simply running on faith. “Just look in the streets,” he assured the media skeptics. “You won’t be disappointed.”

Motorcade mayhem

They weren’t. As many as a million New Yorkers took to the streets in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Millions more watched the events on TV. As we raced through Brooklyn, it was clear that something big, big, big was happening. School kids with classroom-prepared signs lined the sidewalks; workers at factories along the route came out to wave. After a brief appearance at a high school, the streets literally erupted with jubilant, screaming, chanting youths, making Bedford-Stuyvesant look for that moment like Soweto during an uprising.

A year earlier, many of these same street kids or “homeboys” from the “townships” of New York had traded in their gold chains for African medallions. Now, they would have their own coming-out, and coming-home party. Africa had come to them.

If black Brooklyn took the Mandelas to its bosom, the rest of New York was not far behind. The ticker-tape parade had an enthusiastic and respectable turnout, with Nelson and Winnie transported in an awkwardly designed multi-ton, steel-lined, reinforced, glass-encased truck built to resemble a pope-mobile.

To a *Village Voice* writer, Nelson and Winnie looked from a distance “for all the world like two giant bottles of Absolut vodka in a plexiglass cube.” Judging by some of the radiant faces I saw on the street from inside the motorcade, many onlookers thought it was the Second Coming. The tee-shirt vendors were out in force, and the good will was catchy, creating a moment of interracial harmony in a city that needed one badly. Both black and white New Yorkers commented on that.

A store near City Hall advertised a “Mandela Day sale with free gifts.” On the steps of City Hall, Ed Koch stood on the far side of the platform with two other ex-mayors. I watched him wince as the singing of the African national anthem, “Nkosi Sikeleli Africa” and the black American anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing” preceded the national anthem. He would have needed a Heimlich maneuver had he understood that when Winnie Mandela chanted “Viva Umkhonto, Viva!” thousands of New Yorkers were cheering the ANC’s armed struggle.

Day 2: ‘Paralyzing’ Ted Koppel

The New York events had a marathon quality to them as if they were syncopated with the city’s own non-sleep, non-stop rhythms. Mandela was a man constantly on the move, and his entourage struggled to keep up. The rumors were always rife about schedule changes. “He’s doing Koppel, Koppel is being cancelled ... the meeting is on, the meeting is off.” And his appearance on Ted Koppel’s TV program almost was cancelled, even though Ted had convinced ABC to put Nelson on for an hour of prime-time discussion to be followed by another half-hour of “Nightline,” but only if he could have him first. Some laws of media competition are inexorable.

What many didn’t know was that Ted’s “exclusive” was produced in part as an entrepreneurial undertaking by his own company, Koppel Communications, that is also putting out a home video in the commercial market. The show was taped at City College after Harlem’s Apollo Theater was ruled out as an “inappropriate” venue. Koppel’s producers had lined up a who’s who of black politicians and anti-apartheid activists to fill the hall, but only a few ended up participating.

Many of the “heavies” who sat in rows on chairs on the stage

seemed like they were part of the set. Like a good TV is how out to stoke controversy, they ensured that a black Republicans and former Reagan administration officials would get their questions in. Mandela handled them all with a facility that made one think he had been a practiced Nightline regular for years. But unlike the news talk show professionals, he went beyond a sprinkle of sound bites. He insisted on completing his thoughts, employing a reasoned and legalistic style.

It did not appear that Mandela is one of Koppel's many adoring fans – judging by the sharpness and dismissive quality of his responses and by the fact that he hardly looked at his interviewer once. To ABC's disappointment, one of the most electric TV shows of all time, a program on which Koppel was occasionally speechless or “paralyzed,” to use Mandela's phrase, pulled down a low national rating. On day two of his trip, Mandela had hit it big on Broadway, but the fever hadn't reached the rest of the country yet.

Media coverage in New York was overwhelmingly positive. I'm told that the local TV stations that cut away for live coverage did extremely well in the ratings. He impressed the press corps, which after initially playing up stories about Jewish community protests, seems to fall in love. I never thought I'd live to see the day when the *New York Post*, so often accused of stirring the pot of racial divisiveness in the city, would run a picture with one word, “AMANDLA,” (Power) bannered across its cover.

The *New York Times* was, as one would expect, much more restrained. On the first day of Mandela's visit, a rather skeptical article ran below the fold with a sub-head calling him a “former inmate” on the jump page. The scope of the coverage improved after Mandela met with the paper's editorial board, although, reportedly, editor Max Frankel refused to attend the meeting when

Mandela requested that the editors visit him at Gracie Mansion, the Mayor's residence when he stayed, rather than his going to the Times building in midtown. Afterward, it was reported that Frankel sent out a memo urging his staff to cool their ardor.

The night in Harlem

There were other memorable events in New York. The rally in Harlem stands out as the most exciting. Thousands had crowded its streets to get a look at Mandela, waving furiously when our bus with its "ANC Staff" sign flew by. At 125th Street, in that intersection known as Africa Square, the crowds were huge – 200,000 is the police estimate. It may have been bigger. The real drama was on the reviewing stand where a combustible collection of confederates eyed each other suspiciously, and where the politics would get very heavy indeed. Anything could happen – and did.

The principal community organizer for the event considered himself as much of a revolutionary as the man Harlem had come to honor. Elombe Brath has for many years been the often lonely authority uptown on African issues. A TV graphic designer by trade, he has been a respected, untiring politically proselytizer, engaged in supporting liberation struggles for at least 30 years with a coalition named for the martyr of Congolese independence, Patrice Lumumba.

Unlike many of the black nationalists in Harlem who see African issues purely in racial terms, Brath has an internationalist ideology founded on political principles. He is a streetwise, well-read intellectual, a believer in the "correct analysis," not emotional paranoia or romantic cultural nationalism. For him, Mandela's visit was no pose or pretext to party. To him, Afrocentricity is not just fashion: it must have political content. He was determined

not to allow the Harlem event to be co-opted by politicians paying lip service to Mandela's ideas or out to insure that his charisma rub off on them.

This was Elcombe's big moment, his day to become the emcee of the biggest rally in Harlem history. A small man, his head barely visible over the podium with his voice cracking and hoarse from excitement and strain, Brath had ensured that "American political prisoners" would be present.

He also supported efforts to invite prominent Puerto Rican nationalists on the platform, an invitation that flared into a media controversy with the Mayor distancing himself from their politics, denouncing them as "assassins" because they served long sentences for firing into the US Congress in 1950. Revered in many parts of the Puerto Rican community, the "independistas" were invited by activists in the ranks of the reception committee to meet the man they thought of as a fellow political prisoner. Brath made sure they were recognized from the stage.

More directly, he invited another ex-prisoner, former Black Panther Dharuba Moore, to speak without clearing his presence with any of the officials. The speech was one high point of the rally, as Moore, with great oratorical flourish, read a statement to Mandela from black radicals "in the joint" and spoke of the "liberation struggle" in America. Mandela watched impassively as Moore closed by chanting, "We will not give up the fight" over and over.

From my vantage point right in front of the podium, I could see Rep. Charlie Rangel and Mayor Dinkins shift uncomfortably. Perhaps their discomfort stemmed from the desire to try to protect Mandela from being swept up in American domestic issues.

The ANC wanted to keep the focus on apartheid, downplaying denunciation of racial injustice in America. Also on the stage – without official sanction – were two well-known stars of Public

Enemy, the controversial, outspoken, racially conscious rap group. Uninvited, they “bum-rushed the show.” When Mandela left, rapper “Flavor Flav” took a bow to cheers from the brothers on the block.

The moment of moments came later when Betty Shabazz began introducing herself in order to bring Winnie on. When she used her married name, Winnie stood by politely. But when she explained that she was Mrs. Malcolm X, Winnie went nuts, grabbing her, and kissing her wildly. A black film producer told me that he got goose bumps just watching them embrace on TV. A well-known community businessman said he’d never forget it. Winnie told me later that she had always admired Malcolm and was overcome with joy at meeting his widow. In her talk she won applause by calling Harlem the “Soweto of America.” It was time for heritage and history to fuse.

Unity in the community

The Mandelas presence in Harlem was electrifying, underscoring the emotional linkage that this trip was cementing between the ANC and black America. And it did something else: unite, at least for the night, on one platform, warring factions in black America, congressmen and consciousness-raisers, public enemies and public servants. It was to be a night of genuine unity in the community. It was a night when many expressed their longing for a leader of Mandela’s stature here at home.

The event had a larger, longer-run political significance because of its size and scope: It portends the emergence of African-Americans as an active constituency on African issues, something that has been missing in our politics until now.

If black Americans become “Africa-aware” in political as well as cultural terms, their political clout is certain to become a major

factor in influencing US Africa policy-making. For years, Randall Robinson and his lobbying group TransAfrica have been speaking in the name of that constituency. It took Nelson Mandela to bring it to life.

The ANC's commitment to a multi-racial movement didn't seem to register with some black community boosters who feel that a bond of the blood is the only real basis of solidarity. There is no doubt that the ANC catered to the feelings of racial pride, too. Even though the ANC spoke openly of its nonracial policy and commitment to coalition-building across racial lines, there were no whites in its delegation.

Its US organizing network was also impressively led entirely by African-Americans, a matter of great pride, but not always a basis of outreach to Americans of other races or political interests.

Many of the people hired to advance and organize the tour were drawn from the ranks of mainstream black political professionals. Many were political operatives with little or no ideological interest in the movement or knowledge about its politics. Racial identity, not liberation politics, seemed a principal motivator, something the ANC in principle usually disavows.

From Harlem, Mandela went further uptown, to a packed Yankee Stadium where he would capture the attention of sports fans everywhere by donning an official cap and jacket and proclaiming himself a Yankee. I'll never forget the flashing highway sign that read: "The N.Y. Yankees Welcome Nelson Mandela and the ANC."

Thanks to singer Billy Joel, who had allowed the organizers the use of the stage he would perform from the next night, Mandela became the first political activist in history to play the home of the Bronx Bombers. At his first time at bat, he hit a grand slam.

Day 3: The high and mighty

If the Bronx is up, the World Trade Center is down, and that was Mandela's first stop the next morning. In a conference room literally surrounded by clouds, he addressed a group of specially invited business leaders outlining the ANC's goals and economic concerns. His speech – closed to the press – struck a pragmatic note that resonated in the room, dealing easily and effectively with questioners expressing alarm about the prospects for nationalization. He asked those present to suggest alternative polities that could accomplish the ANC's goal of redistributing the country's wealth to benefit the poor majority. At least one suggestion for the post-apartheid southern African development bank came out of the meeting, and is now being explored.

(No one then imagined the events to come eleven years later when the towers would disintegrate!)

Afterward, a few businessmen told us that his effect was strangely personal in that he has led them to think about how they might do something more meaningful with their own lives, something they could really believe in.

There was one amusing mishap involving Winnie, who took the limo downtown with her husband to the Trade Center when she was supposed to be going midtown to the "Phil Donahue Show." Phil had a full-house audience, but his main guest was missing, the kind of no-show that drives TV bookers to drink and distraction. The walkie-talkies were blazing as Winnie was finally located and cajoled into going down the 107 floors she had just gone up, to be taken to a waiting car and motorcade escort to keep her television appointment with America's housewives.

Later that day, at a TV taping for PBS, this time at the Council for Foreign Relations, home of the foreign policy elite, Mandela was interviewed in the David Rockefeller Room. In 1964, when

David ran the Chase Manhattan Bank and Mandela's prison sentence was just beginning, I participated in my first anti-apartheid protest against the bank's investments in South Africa. Chase has since divested, and today Mandela speaks under the former chairman's portrait. A strange historical reversal: Rather than being co-opted by the rich and famous, Mandela appears to be co-opting them. (It was David's daughter Peggy who pressured and lobbied for Chase to disinvest.)

And speaking of the rich and famous, I can't forget the last New York event, because in many ways it was the best.

Startime

It took place at the TriBeca Grill, actor Robert DeNiro's trendy new downtown restaurant, the scene of the second fundraiser of the night. The first had been hosted by Arthur and Mathilde Krim, he of Orion Pictures, she of the war against AIDS.

The idea of a TriBeca affair was resisted initially, perhaps because it was put forward by Little Steven, the musician who organized the "Sun City" anti-apartheid record. Steven is known for his somewhat outlandish clothes and babushka-like, multi-colored cloth head pieces. One of America's most political rock musicians and a brilliant anti-apartheid activist-strategist, it was he who coined the trip's slogan, "Keep The Pressure On," arguing the importance of a political theme for a tour which initially lacked one. Some of his ideas were accepted, but initially he was kept at a polite distance. Too weird? Too rock and roll? Maybe too white?

Although his proposal for a Wembley-style superstar fundraising concert was rebuffed, Steven stayed focused on the ANC's need for money, and decided to raise some. At first, the committee financiers didn't think he could, and tried to discourage him

by refusing to commit Mandela to “his” event. “It was too far downtown, it was too late, it was too much, it was too risky,” were some of the excuses. But Steven and his Artists United Against Apartheid organization pushed ahead, lining up DeNiro, Eddie Murphy, and Spike Lee as co-invited. Suddenly, eyebrows went up. So did the amount raised. A cool half-million was the take.

With the press outside clamoring for celebrity access, inside the whole meaning of celebrity was turned upside down. When everyone’s a celebrity, no one is – well, except Mandela who made many of these big stars look like just ordinary folks. I watched as Spike and Eddie nervously awaited Mandela’s arrival, rushing to peer through the window when the motorcade sirens first signaled his presence in the neighborhood. Mandela recognized Eddie at once, telling him he used to watch his pictures in prison. (So much for the cultural boycott!) Murphy’s smile couldn’t conceal his pride.

We asked many of the celebrities there why they thought Mandela had received the reception he had in New York. Some responded by talking about our national need for heroes, for political leaders that put principle and sacrifice above posturing and opportunism. It was as if Mandela had all their style and class and yet transcended those parochial concerns that make it hard for us to imagine real social change in America.

He challenged their materialism with his morality, their status-seeking with his humility. Sure, he had been projected as larger than life, but he gave his audience a sense of new possibilities in a period of so much confusion. For them, here was a symbol with substance. The speech Mandela gave that night was intensely personal, and briefly interrupted when he recognized ex-heavyweight champ, “Smoking” Joe Frazier in the crowd.

Nelson, the ex-boxer, turned to Joe and invited him to stand

next to him which he did, beaming. Now that's security!

Perhaps because this was the last event in New York, perhaps because the crowd was so charged, Mandela seemed almost relaxed as he threw out one-liners and spoke about how culture had been able to penetrate his prison walls even when the news couldn't get through. He spoke of his admiration for those artists who stood with his people, and supported the cultural boycott. No one left the room unmoved. He later told his colleagues he enjoyed Tribeca – the event that almost never happened – the most.

They say that if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. In the next week, Nelson Mandela would do just that.

On to Boston

When we hit Boston, it nearly hit us back. We had spent several days convincing the security squad that our documentary unit was a bone fide part of the trip. But no one told the Massachusetts State Police, who nearly wrestled our camera to the ground when we refused to be herded into the press pen at Logan airport. A group of spirited toi-toi-ing South Africans was on hand, singing and chanting to welcome Nelson Mandela to the Bay State. After reviewing his “troops,” he thanked the Commonwealth for providing a home for his children.

From the airport, we were taken to Roxbury, Boston's black community, which has a strong self-determination-oriented movement seeking to secede from Boston-proper and rename itself “Mandela, Massachusetts.” It was ironic because opponents of this effort committed to community self-determination charged that had Mandela, Mass., come into being, it would, in effect, become the American equivalent of a South African homeland – a black enclave in a white city.

The issue that emerged there – and it was Mandela who raised it – was the question of a community’s responsibility to solve its own problems. He called on the children he met to stay in school and take responsibility for their education – a theme that the ANC leader had also sounded at his first giant post-release rally in Soweto, putting himself squarely at odds with a student boycott campaign there that had been championing “liberation before education” because of the frustrations students felt with a decrepit school system that flunks the overwhelming majority of its black students. The kids in Boston were beside themselves, chanting, dancing, singing, and patiently entertaining themselves as they waited for their hero’s arrival. “It was a roar that started somewhere deep within the souls of the people crowded into Madison Park High School and burst forth into a torrent of emotion,” was how one *Boston Globe* front-page article began.

As usual, Mandela was running late. His remarks were short. He announced to a crowd of more than a thousand, sweltering in a steaming, wood-floored gymnasium for hours, that he couldn’t spend as much time with them as he wanted. “My bosses,” he explained, “say I have other appointments to keep.” Everyone laughed at that line – but in a sense it’s true, and not fully appreciated by Americans who think that Mandela is a US-style “personality” who just does his own thing.

Organization man

In fact, Mandela is an organization man, always has been. In many of his speeches, he has referred to himself as a “loyal and disciplined member of the ANC.” That means that he is accountable to the organization’s decision-making structure, especially to its elected National Executive Committee that appointed him deputy president at a meeting in Lusaka last

March. The NEC sets down the organization's marching orders, and Mandela, who is very much a part of the process now, falls in line.

The ANC practices a form of collective leadership, with often-heated internal debate. It is democratic in spirit, but sometimes top-down in practice. Often, that means that it is hard to get a decision from individual officials who frequently must "consult" with their colleagues first. When the ANC talks about democracy, it does so in the context of a participatory bottom-up movement that knows about discipline from years of underground activity.

Yet it also does not believe in the cult of personality. Mandela has said on many occasions that he is not a messiah, but a servant of the people. People may worship him, but he is not the last word on everything. Young people in the movement call him "Tata" (Father or "grandfather,") and sometimes snicker behind his back in the kind of generational one-upmanship that so often separates the young and the hip from the old and the traditional. Winnie has said in the past that Nelson has still to be educated about feminism, and holds out-of-date ideas in that area. (He would later admit it.)

Yet, despite his age – and all that he must have missed about the nuances of popular culture in his 27 years behind bars – he is remarkably "with it." He is following an extraordinary schedule and doing so with good humor and characteristic humility. Unlike many jet-setting politicians or political celebrities – like some who traveled with him in the tour entourage – he does not come off as an opportunist or self-promoter.

Power lunch with the Kennedys

Boston was really "the Kennedy stop," centering around the ultimate power lunch at the Kennedy Library. There, America's

best-known dynasty greeted South Africa's first family. Jackie and all the Kennedy kids were on hand for the ceremonies and a lunch. Mandela broke up the house by introducing himself as "an Irishman from Soweto," while standing in front of the largest ANC flag we saw anywhere in America.

Politely, he did not make references to the recent news stories that implicated President John F. Kennedy's CIA in Mandela's original arrest back in 1962. In fact, as in most events like this, symbolism overwhelmed substance – although there were some emotional high points, as when Ted Kennedy recounted a story of visiting Winnie Mandela during her period of banishment. Winnie, he recalled, asked for advice of how you raise children without a father present – "something the Kennedys know about." Ted then thundered that "the man who could not father his own children is now the father of a new South Africa." He brought the house down.

Bigger than the bicentennial

Boston had pulled together an impressive series of events culminating in a concert at the Esplanade Hatch Shell on the Charles River, usually the place where the famous Boston Pops kicks off the summer with a July 4 concert-cum-fireworks. South Africa's "white Zulu" rock and roller Johnny Clegg and Savuka had everyone on their feet. Jesse Jackson was there too, providing live color commentary for one of the local TV stations, for a fee reportedly in the five figures for an afternoon's work.

Crowd estimates were as high as 500,000, with one Irish cop admitting to me it was "bigger than the Bicentennial," until then the biggest 'revolutionary commemoration' in Beantown. The crowd was thoroughly interracial – a way, in Boston, of saying mostly white – since Boston has the smallest percentage of blacks

of any major city in the country. A local black ANC organizer would tell me later that the multi-racial character at the rally was probably more important for Boston than South Africa, given the temperature of the city's race relations.

The highlight of the concert was less what Mandela said than what he did. Quite spontaneously, after surveying the huge crowd, and as a recording of Hugh Masekela's bouncy tune, "Bring Back Nelson Mandela," played in the background, he started dancing, right there on the stage, his right hand punching the air in his own funky rendition of Saturday Night Fever. The crowd was ecstatic.

We always knew when Mandela was about to move whenever he came to some stock phrases in his speech, phrases that always left the audience in tears. They also signaled security and the traveling party that it was time to split. He would work up to these lines but always deliver them with an understated sincerity that was hard to become cynical about. "We admire you," he would begin. "We respect you," he'd add. And then came the clincher: "But, most of all, we love you." As he waved to the always-cheering crowd, we were already on our way to the exit.

That night, hundreds waited for over two hours for the man of the hour to make an appearance at a hotel fund-raiser. Among them were several local corporate execs, although I didn't remember seeing the one American businessman who was really been trying to make a difference on the apartheid issue. A former Rebook president, Joe LaBonte was the man who first engaged that company with the South African issue. He had gone to South Africa in the spring on a personal fact-finding visit after being personally moved by his encounters with religious leaders like Bishop Tutu and Allan Boesak.

LaBonte then started a quiet campaign to reach out to American

CEOs. He calls it ABISA – the American Business Initiative for South Africa. It now has the ANC’s blessings because of their interest in getting US corporations committed in the fight to end apartheid and promote economic development in a democratic South Africa. LaBonte had met Mandela when he was in South Africa, and has been helpful behind the scenes in organizing the Boston visit and tour.

Washington, D.C.: Politics in command

As Washington, D.C. Police Chief Isaac Fulwood explained to us, “Folks here don’t get too excited. They see important foreign visitors all the time.” But then, he qualified his own remarks, admitting, “This is different. People want to see this man.”

It was different. Who was the last black foreign visitor – or even American – to speak before a joint session of Congress? To lecture the president of the United States on the White House lawn about the reasons his movement turned to violence to achieve change?

The answer: No one.

In the weeks before Mandela’s arrival, Bush administration officials were floating suggestions about weakening sanctions to give some encouragement to President de Klerk. They had even scheduled a visit by the South African president to precede Mandela’s. It was postponed after trip organizers filed protests. But for all the focus on what the White House was saying or doing, apartheid policy is not an issue over which the president has currently much say.

The congressional legislation of 1986 was passed over a presidential veto and written in such a way as to limit what any president could unilaterally change or even modify. The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act is very specific on just what the de Klerk government must do to trigger the lifting of

sanctions – that the process toward ending apartheid must be certified as “irreversible.” This clearly wasn’t the case when the ANC delegation motorcaded into D.C. on a sleepy Sunday in late June.

The Rose Garden joust

In welcoming Mandela, President Bush denounced violence as a means of change, expressing the hope that the ANC’s armed struggle would end soon. The ANC leader replied that the president’s comments showed that he has not yet been “briefed” by the ANC. He “briefed” him with a short historical explanation of why violent revolution is made necessary when peaceful change is made impossible. As it turned out, though, the ANC suspended the armed struggle a month later as a bargaining chip, but without demobilizing its 15,000+- guerrilla army known as “MK” or “the Spear of the Nation.”

On Capital Hill, we got our camera into Congress to record Mandela’s speech to both houses. He was only the fourth private citizen in our history to have this privilege. Lech Walesa was his only counterpart in this century. The Marquis de Lafayette of Revolutionary War fame was the one before him. We watched as Mandela entered with members on both sides of the aisle reaching out to touch him, to pat him on the back, to get his attention, to have a picture snapped, preferably one useful for later campaigning. His speech to the joint session was nicely crafted for the American sensibility, with references to Jefferson and Lincoln and the ideals of democracy. He received a standing ovation.

For me, the most memorable moment occurred during a Congressional Black Caucus breakfast. Before Mandela was introduced, a spit and polish color guard of US Marines marched in,

carrying two flags side by side: the stars and stripes and the black, green, and gold standard of the ANC. Just last year, a Pentagon report was still labeling the ANC a terrorist organization. Until last February, you could go to jail in South Africa for brandishing an ANC flag. But here it was, in the Capitol, being presented with full military honors.

As we motorcaded off Capitol Hill, I spoke with Lennox Hines, the ANC's distinguished-looking lawyer, who was riding in our van. He was stunned by the enthusiastic congressional embrace, and dug a pamphlet out of his briefcase – a 1985 appeal issued by lawyers and legislators calling for Mandela's release. Only a handful of congressmen had signed it. "I can't believe," he told me, "that all of this happened in just five years."

Mitch's last interview

Also impressed, but for different reasons, was a man who would later blaze into the headlines himself: Mitch Snyder a high profile advocate for the homeless. Mitch ran a shelter for the homeless in Washington, not far from the Capitol. He saw Mandela as a fellow organizer and compared the non-person status of homeless Americans to black South Africans under apartheid. "Their condition is the same," he said. "It's just their location that's not." Mitch's eyes seemed almost vacant as he spoke very movingly about how Mandela was a symbol for all who fight for justice. A week later, he was dead – a suicide. Ours was probably his last interview.

Mandela never visited with Mitch Snyder and his shelter-mates. In fact, the tour avoided placing him in the easy-to-find photo opportunities that might evoke any hint of South Africa in America. There were no visits to crack-filled streets, ghetto housing projects, or pockets of rural poverty. Mandela never saw

Washington's substandard housing, home to 53,000 families, or the town's health facilities with an infant mortality rate that tops the national average twice over.

His only opportunity to meet Washingtonians was a hastily conceived rally at the Convention Center. One stirring moment came when the chairperson, Mary Berry, asked those who had gone to jail at the South African Embassy to stand. A handful did and won a massive ovation. Then she called on those who picketed the embassy to take a bow. Thousands more stood to even more acclaim from their neighbors. And then she asked those who supported their actions to stand too. Soon the whole hall was on its feet.

Jesse Jackson explained how the histories of the ANC and the civil rights struggle in our country were intertwined, how the South African ANC was formed in the same year as our own. NAACP, how the two movements turned to nonviolent bus boycotts and defiance campaigns at about the same time, and how ideas between these two black communities cross-pollinated across the oceans over the years. It was instructive, and precisely the type of contextual information that was missing in most media accounts.

Atlanta: Civil rights and righteousness

Hosting tourists and boosterism is one of Atlanta's biggest hometown enterprises. Its legendary southern hospitality has become the cornerstone of a large convention and tourist business. In town for the day, Nelson Mandela would take the Civil Rights Tour, and pay his respects to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The first stop was the King Center in the Atlanta neighborhood they call Sweet Auburn. It was here that King was born, and

where his dream is kept institutionally alive. Harry Belafonte was especially moved at the symbolism of being there, having worked with Dr. King, and now with Nelson Mandela. If the two only could have met, was the essence of his rumination. “Dr. King would have been 62,” he noted, with some real melancholy in that gravelly voice of his. Dexter King, one of Martin’s sons who carries a strong physical resemblance to his dad, echoed the same theme as we walked to MLK’s final resting place.

After the King Center, in another part of town, there was a convocation of black colleges to honor Mandela with a collective honorary degree. Some artisan had worked the colors of all 40 schools into a beautifully crafted quilt that was offered as a present. That night, there was a mass rally at the Georgia Tech stadium. Hugh Masekela held forth on the stage. Standing with me on the speaking platform was his sister Barbara, a member of the delegation, and the head of the Zambia-based ANC Cultural Department. She hadn’t seen her brother in a while and talked about the way life in exile has divided South African families.

Mandela quoted heavily from Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech that these audiences have heard many times. The crowd was attentive and responsive. There were shouts of “teach, teach” even though his speech was not to the high standards of boisterous Southern Baptist eloquence. Mandela speaks in full sentences, full of dependent clauses and substantial arguments. He seeks to persuade and explain, not to inspire or impress. His speeches can be long and complex. It’s a style from another time.

Miami: Protests in the sun

“I still don’t know why we are going to Miami,” one of the ANC delegates was worrying aloud to another as the plane took off into a night in which real danger might be lurking. The press was

reporting that Mandela would be the target of protests by right-wing Cubans, angry with his refusal to condemn Fidel Castro. Some local mayors called a press conference to withdraw a resolution of welcome for Mandela, a resolution they had passed at the request of black community leaders even though he had no plans to visit their neighborhoods.

What few media outlets reported was that we were going south only for Mandela to speak at the convention of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Union that had made a substantial donation to help finance his visit. It was a union that had actually mobilized its members to fight apartheid. It was expected that he would make an appearance there.

We landed late at night in a remote and dark corner of the airport. Police units in flak jackets, brandishing M16s, were on hand along with their bomb truck. When a loud raucous demonstration greeted us at the hotel, we thought we'd have to run through a gauntlet of angry Cubans. In fact, it was a few hundred Miami blacks with picket signs all welcoming Mandela. One said: "Mandela Si, Castro Si, Fascistas No."

As we began talking to black community activists, we learned how bitter their feelings towards the Cubans were. There have been, in fact, several riots in the Liberty City ghetto in Miami, fueled by hostility toward perceptions of Cubans getting all the city jobs and the economic breaks.

The next day, the pro-Mandela demonstrators would outnumber the anti-Castro zealots 7-1, but that was only reported in Miami. In the rest of the country, the news centered around the Cuban protest, that was pictured as much bigger than it was. Incidentally, Mandela never saw it. He was whisked around the back of the Convention Center and out again.

One media account that I saw, by Joe Davidson in the *Wall Street*

Journal, explained why Mandela was unwilling to disassociate himself from Castro. He was one of the few journalists to mention the history of Cuba's role in southern Africa, and its 30-year record of support for the ANC when the US government wouldn't even give the movement an appointment.

We walked into the huge Miami Convention Hall with Chris Dlamini, a member of the ANC delegation and a vice president of COSATU, the million-member black South African trade union federation that is allied with the ANC. Chris and Cosatu's presence was barely noticed by the press even though he is an important leader of his country's workers.

I have always wondered why our media, which had such a long love affair with Poland's Solidarity trade union, has never educated Americans about COSATU. Maybe it's because North-South or black-white issues don't have the same ideological appeal to the mainstream media as East-West confrontations. On the convention floor, the enthusiasm of these American workers for Mandela was deafening.

'Can't forget the Motor City'

If working class solidarity was the thrust of the Miami visit, working class reality was the discovery in Detroit. The first stop was Ford's giant River Rouge Plant, the scene of one of the first pitched battles in the history of auto organizing. Today, the United Auto Workers has "joint" cooperation programs with management, that also welcomed Mandela to its factory. Bedlam is the only word I can think to characterize his reception.

Lines of workers, black and white, cheered wildly as he walked down the end of the assembly line. There he mounted a platform and was introduced by the UAW's beefy international president, Owen Bieber, one of the few men of his own height. Some clever

genius in the UAW public relations department had come up with the idea of giving Nelson and Winnie a life membership card, and two blue satin UAW jackets, with their names sewn on. They promptly put them on and became walking advertisements for the Union.

In a speech that stressed the contribution that working people made to the industrial wealth of America, Mandela reminded the ecstatic workforce that he, too, was now a member of the UAW. Working class allegiances and politics plays a big role in the ANC, that is allied with COSATU. Celebrating working class solidarity in the United States was seen as evidence of the correctness of the ANC's political outlook.

That night, Mandela blitzed the fund-raising events being held at the Renaissance Center where Mayor Coleman Young was holding forth. Young, whose recent administrations have been plagued by scandal, glommed on to the credibility of the Mandela visit, and sought to outdo New York's reception in whatever way he could. He put the squeeze on city employees to donate to the ANC and the welcome, and ensured that his city's motorcade was the biggest and the best. This is Motown!

The rally at Tigers Stadium was the most spirited of the tour, complete with songs from Aretha Franklin backed by a 2,000-voice choir. Black Detroit was there – from basketball star, Isiah Thomas of the Pistons, to Rosa Parks, the woman who launched the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955.

Stevie Wonder showed up later to embrace Mandela and sing to those who stayed in the stadium after he had left. Mandela's speech was the most political up to that point – and the most meaningful to his audience. It outlined the politics of the ANC, and spoke of its close link with labor. It emphasized that class, not color, is a crucial factor in the struggle, and that economic

power is as important as political power. In his speech, Mandela also quoted Motown music great Marvin Gaye.

L.A. is L.A.

Los Angeles was as contrived as Detroit was real. The welcome ceremony at City Hall was a rather stale affair, even with a distinguished Gregory Peck at the podium and an overly dramatic Cicely Tyson reading highly rhetorical poems on the mike. The ANC delegation wanted nothing more than to have its picture taken with a man in the back seats, Muhammad Ali, who smiled politely and let everyone take his turn standing next to him for a snap. His heart was in the right place.

I'm not sure if the same can be said of all the industry execs who chipped in \$1.6 million at the big fund-raising dinner later that night in a local museum. Thousands had been spent on a Disney set designer who gave the room a graffiti-style motif. The organizers had worked hard to attract one of the most racially mixed crowds at an event of this type in recent memory. One well-known record company honcho had insisted that the seating plan be faxed over before he would release his check. He wanted a guarantee that his table would be next to Mandela's.

Our camera was stationed behind Jane Fonda on the line at the big givers reception when Nelson and Winnie stopped to say hello and exchange some hugs. She turned to us just as the Mandelas moved on, motioning to her chest, showing us how her heart was pounding.

Ron Kovic remembered everything he said to Mandela. The disabled Vietnam vet, whose book, "Born on the Fourth of July", was made into a major motion picture, had wheeled out to have a smoke and found himself in Mandela's entrance path. He told us how the ANC leader saw him and made a beeline to

his wheelchair. Kovic introduced himself and told Mandela who he was, full expecting him to shake hands and move on. But he didn't. He stood there, asking him about Vietnam. "It was extraordinary," he told us.

Oakland: The last stop

The stop in Oakland was almost cancelled. It had originally been added as an afterthought when northern Californians complained that they were being overlooked. After all, they argued, it was the activists in Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco who had helped put the apartheid issue on the national agenda – and fought to keep it there. So L.A. ended up losing a day out of its schedule in deference to the call from the North.

The schedule was tight and getting tighter. In Los Angeles, the ANC people learned that their organizers in Ireland had locked Mandela into a series of immediate appearances there, including a key speech to the Irish Parliament. The timing was awful. Perhaps someone there wasn't briefed on the US schedule or hadn't thought about the time zones.

It was decided that Mandela would go to Oakland, but just for a few hours. Dublin was more important politically. From the Oakland Airport, we went directly to the nearby Coliseum, which was jammed to the rafters on this sunny Saturday afternoon. Promoter Bill Graham had booked the affair in keeping with his new philosophy of showcasing Third World and funkier acts. When we arrived, Bonnie Raitt was sitting in on a blues set, with a large interdenominational gospel choir about to go on. Until that day, all the rallies had been at night, but here it was, still early afternoon, and this crowd was ready to get down and party against apartheid.

Congressman Ron Dellums, introduced Mandela, in good form,

praising his constituents for “standing up” against apartheid. “Berkeley stood up,” he shouted. Applause. “Oakland stood up.” More applause. “San Francisco stood up.” Even more. And then he looked out at the vast crowd and told them to “stand up.” Every last one of them did.

The man who had led the fight in Congress for sanctions was not finished. He went on to praise “this beautiful African man... who makes us all feel a bit taller and a lot stronger...” his voice rising and dipping like the instrument it is, and then brought him on to the strains of the song, “Free Nelson Mandela.”

Mandela had saved his best smile for this crowd, and they returned the favor. He started delivering his stump speech, thanking those who supported the struggle, calling for a continuation of sanctions, explaining the ANC’s need for funds. But then, as an aide held an umbrella over his head to protect him from the heat of the mid-day sun, he deviated from the speech, and surprised the crowd with a story.

It was a story of a letter that a group of Native Americans had brought to the airport earlier that day, appealing to him to support their cause. He had tried, he said, to find them but failed, and was now anxious to assure them that he was “very disturbed” by what he read. He promised to return to America to visit Indian areas and learn more about their struggle. He then stunned us all by announcing he would be coming back in October. He didn’t.

‘I will return’

At the airport, just as Mandela boarded, after posing for pictures with staffers and the ever-present police contingent, I asked him if he’s really coming back. “I will return,” he told me, sounding just like Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines.

And then he was off. He had “done America” in 11 days, blowing

many a mind, not really changing the country, but not leaving it the same either. He came. He saw. He conquered.

For a short time he had forced us all not only to confront South Africa, but also ourselves. His visit to Harlem reminded us of persisting racial separateness – the apartheid that lives on in our own society.

- In Washington, he tasted the pomp, the power, and the hypocrisy of a government which believes in enforcing sanctions against Iraq, but won't really take similar action against apartheid.
- In Atlanta, he reminded us of Dr. King and his dream and unfulfilled legacy. In Miami, the sickness of virulent anti-communism contrasted with the passion of trade union commitment.
- In Detroit, he brought us face to face with working people as he raised the kinds of questions about social change that need to be asked here at home.
- In L.A., he reminded Hollywood that the films they produced affected the way people saw themselves and each other. (Hollywood's brightest lights cheered. 24 years later, they would deny any Academy Award nomination to the critically acclaimed movie made by a South African producer based on Mandela's autobiography, "Long Walk To Freedom." Only a song in the film was nominated. Nevertheless, the whole audience rose to cheer his memory afterwards with a spontaneous and unscripted ovation, testifying to the respect he enjoyed in the movie world)
- And finally, in Oakland, he brought us back to our own roots, to the plight of the American Indian whose reservations resemble South Africa's homelands. Mandela

brought us face to face with America's unfinished agenda.

The ANC leader had accomplished his mission and more: Sanctions were secure, money had been raised, and new friends had been made. Eleven days later on an unprecedented historical roll, Mandela was on his way back to Europe, and, then, on to South Africa where new upsurges of violence and more painful struggle await. His work was not yet done.

*The original version of this report appeared in as a two-parter in **Africa Report** magazine in 1990.*

1994

Countdown to freedom: A challenge to network journalism

DURING SOUTH AFRICA'S HISTORIC 1994 ELECTIONS, AS I BEGAN directing a behind-the-scenes film at President Mandela's invitation, I ran into a friend who produces specials for one of the best known TV anchors in the United States.

He was interested in what I was doing, but was dismissive because "everyone knows what the outcome will be."

"The real story," he told me, "will start after the election as the new government tries to make change. That's the story we will be documenting." He then outlined plans to undertake a year-long documentary look at the transformation of South Africa.

It sounded great, and led me to marvel at the resources such a project would take. Here I was making a low-budget film as an independent on a budget that amounted to less than the room service bill of CNN's staff, and, here they were, willing to commit to a year's worth of work.

Eight months later, I ran into my friend in New York. "How's it going," I asked, but he looked perplexed. "You know the South Africa Special?"

"Oh that? We dropped it." He told me he was off to Bosnia.

Bosnia needs all the attention it can get these days, but South Africa bit the dust, at least in his shop. "Been there! Done that!"

Frankly, I wasn't surprised. The building of democracy is a complex undertaking. To show and explain it requires explanatory journalism, with enough airtime to contextualize events and explore the process of political change. It is precisely this type of story that the networks have little time for.

The networks also seem to have little time for South Africa these days either, that is unless some violent incident takes place, like right wing whites trying to stop black school kids from being bussed into their community.

Over the years, I have documented the ways the South Africa story has been reported and distorted on television in the United States, I have commented on one-dimensional sound bite coverage that did little to convey the texture of the struggle against apartheid or the role the West played in propping the system up so long.

Over the years I have also tried to do something more on television with coverage of a different stripe, most recently with, *Countdown To Freedom: Ten Days That Changed South Africa*,” a 97 minute film inside the Mandela campaign. The story of the making of the film illustrates some of the problems that independent journalists have in challenging the superficial network news take.

In April 1994, the world media descended on South Africa in force, with armadas of cameras and correspondents. And their coverage did give us a glimpse. We saw the long lines of voters. We saw threats of civil war dissolve as peace broke out. The elections was presented as one more news event, marred by a few snags to be sure, with Mandela the predictable winner. Much of this coverage was one long photo-op – smiles, sentiment, and sophistry. The voices of the people who made the change – and an analysis of how they did it, after years of war, protest, imprisonment, international lobbying, and exile, was conspicuous by its absence.

The ANC asked me to make a film, promising entree and editorial independence. Nelson Mandela followed up with a personal invitation to our New York based company, Globalvision

guaranteeing behind the scenes access. “While the events will be covered in the mass media,” he wrote on February 22, “we believe that the inside story itself deserves coverage by independent journalists for the public worldwide and for future generations. Daily news reporting is invariably superficial, focusing only on the statements of leaders. An in-depth documentary film can bring out the story of how the people themselves, white and black, are participating in the larger process of democratization.”

With the blessings of “the man” himself, I thought for sure, that this time, some TV outlet would pre-buy the film and the inside track into one of the turning points of our century that it promised. I thought wrong.

Not one TV network responded positively to our pitch, all for virtually the same reasons: they were either going to cover it themselves (all in the same way) and/or, they had no available slots for “long-forms”, much less independently produced documentaries. (South African broadcasting, sensitive to reversing a history of government control under apartheid, feared it would be too pro-ANC and thus violate election media rules).

An American news magazine show or two thought our story might make for a good segment, but only if we could deliver “hot” footage or some revelation. They wanted “the interview.” (“Can you get us ‘the exclusive’ with Mandela?”) Clearly for them, he was just one more “big name” on a booker’s list to be snagged, the journalistic equivalent of big game in Africa. The competition “to get” Mandela was fierce. Few gave much thought to what to ask him if and when they “got” him. Most of the interviews were the same. Predictable questions. Obvious answers.

Our task was different. We “had” Mandela. What we didn’t have was the money to make a movie. And we were running out of time. Our own countdown had begun. The rejection letters

started rolling in as the momentum of tabloid journalism on TV kept rolling on.

That was strike #1. No pre-sale. A second strike followed when public television America demurred and all the philanthropic foundations with an interest in South Africa also turned us down for funding. We had erroneously assumed that after three years of producing 156 editions of the award-winning series, “South Africa Now,” the world’s only TV news series on the struggle for change in that country, we might be considered “uniquely qualified” to take on the subject. Sorry.

So, after weeks of “development” and “pre-production,” we were all dressed up – with the promise of the best seats in the house to the a drama marking the end of white rule in Africa – but with no means to go.

At that point, a friend in Hollywood suggested I team up with a clever self-promoter, an English born, L.A. based, documentary director (initials M.C.) who boasted that he would have no problem raising a million dollars to “do it right,” on film, with several crews. He dropped lots of names with one of those Oxford accents that inspire confidence. He had ‘credentials’ up the yin-yang – which I stupidly didn’t check.

You guessed it: at the end of the day, our “deal” turned into one more Hollywood horror story when he not only couldn’t raise a million but then attempted to hi-jack the project, and turn me into his errand boy – liaison with the ANC.

When I balked, he abruptly, and without even talking to me, pulled out of the whole project, a day before we were to start shooting. Not content with letting us proceed without him, he went behind our backs to Showtime, a pay TV cable channel that had, at the last minute, agreed to put up modest financing (at the behest of a black executive who went out on a limb.)

My production “partner” reportedly told them he now couldn’t “guarantee the quality of the project.” Without checking with us, our one outlet then pulled out! Greed, betrayal and ego had won another one.

By now, I was, in South Africa, with less than one week to the election. I had one hi-8 camera and no budget. My former network colleagues and the international news army, of which they were part, had already rented virtually every camera, crew, hotel room, cell phone, beeper and rent-a-car to be had in Johannesburg. During my eight years at ABC News, I had learned an adage that this incident seemed to illustrate: “when you care the very least to spend the very most.”

Now I was about to see this economy of TV News waste in practice. (At one ANC rally at FNB stadium, almost 50 Betacams trained on the platform. Many of the cameramen there that I chatted with agreed that all their shooting would eventually only rate about 20 seconds of air time, or at the most, a sound-bite or two, unless there was an eruption of serious violence.)

Soon I was spending more on exasperated phone calls to New York than Nelson Mandela probably spent in 27 years at his prisoner commissary. It looked and felt – like “three strikes and I’m out:” No Money. No Outlet. No Film.

But then, a last minute reprieve, a personal miracle in the way that the elections became somewhat of a political miracle for this ‘beloved country.’

I contacted Anant Singh, South Africa’s leading film producer. Responsible for “Sarafina!” and other before-their-time anti-apartheid films, he was known for being gutsy. He was my last hope. I wasn’t sure if a documentary project would be appealing because he is primarily in the feature move business. I asked to meet him. He had a few minutes after an edit session for his latest

project, a Stephen King story, “The Mangler.”

Having just had my own project mugged and mangled, I felt right at home.

We spoke in his car, as he rushed to the airport and a flight to his home in Durban.

It took Singh about a nanosecond to recognize the importance of documenting the unprecedented events underway in his own country. I disclosed the history of the project and the attitude of the TV networks. And also, the knife in the back from the twit I had, like a moron, hired to direct the film because I couldn't finance it. I revealed all while barely holding back the tears and anger.

Finally I showed him a crinkled Xerox of the signed invite from Nelson Mandela. I was depressed, and he could sense my total frustration.

His response: “Fine, let's do it.” We shook hands. That was it. No contracts, no deal memos. No long months of high priced lawyers negotiating miles of boilerplate. Singh said he'd pay for a crew and ten days of shooting. And then we'd see what we had – and where to go next.

We would be partners, the first international co-production of its kind in the “new” South Africa. I wasn't sure if we could do it, but there it was – a green light, and a not yet fully committed, “low budget” which is always better than no budget. I now had a dare: ‘show me what you can do.’

I was lucky to find a South African with faith in me, faith in his country's history, and the bucks to get the film going. Race never entered into it. Our project was now back on track – a narrower track to be sure, but at least, at this late hour, we would finally be able to do something.

That “something” turned into a non-stop around the clock

shooting spree. The ANC's Video Unit agreed to share their own exclusive footage. A few friends with home video cameras volunteered to shoot on spec all around the country. We were off and running, a rag tag production with a lot of heart but not much infrastructure. Anant hooked me up with SCY Productions, an efficient Joburg based Production Company that booked a camera crew, a car and a production manager.

My plan was to cover as many events as I could, while focusing on the behind the scenes process, the stuff nobody knew. For an American, I knew the ANC well. I first visited South Africa in 1967 when I was a student at the London School of Economics where a number of ANC members studied in exile. I've followed the anti-apartheid movement closely ever since, first as a print journalist, then a radio broadcaster, and finally as TV producer. Having been active in the civil rights movement in America in the 1960's, I found South Africa's freedom struggle equally inspiring and worthy of solidarity.

It was in this context, that my new company, Globalvision, launched "South Africa Now" and began covering events there from "the inside-out," focusing on the aspirations and voices of the disenfranchised black majority. As the struggle intensified, the world media finally woke up. Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 would be given coverage of Olympic proportions. But after that, the story dropped away, virtually from sight.

By 1994, Americans saw Mandela through celebrity-coated glasses. His rock star like tour of America had been triumphant, but back in South Africa he seemed mired in negotiations and chaos. The media pounded away at "black on black" violence without explaining its origins in a shadowy "third force" of white security policemen, right wing fanatics, and tribal extremists.

Coverage remained superficial, fixated on symbols, not

substance. I was interested in the process. World TV viewers were given little background or historical context. The violent eruptions preceding the elections then whetted world TV interest but, as it subsided, so did the coverage. “When a story bleeds, it leads” remains an “organizing principle” for TV news managers worldwide.

The press is drawn to confrontation. I was interested in process, how this election happened and was organized. The ANC were political neophytes. They never ran an election campaign before. They were not known for super-efficiency either. And that’s an understatement.

In contrast, De Klerk’s National Party had 40 years of practice in electoral politics. They were master manipulators, aided by the global advertising firm of Saachi and Saachi. “The Nats” had controlled the media in South Africa. They had controlled the schools, the police, and the army. They ruled with an iron fist. For years, they pictured the ANC as terrorists and worse.

Most of the western journalists treated this white minority regime as “legitimate,” even though the majority had never voted for it. As practitioners of “balanced” journalism, they believed, almost religiously, in guaranteeing “equal time” for the candidates, as if the oppressor and the oppressed, the small white ruling elite and the black majority, had equal claim to the world’s attention. There were some, even within the ANC, who bought into this “logic” believing that a film that focused just on them would be considered “biased.”

I wanted my film to serve as an alternative and antidote to such mechanistic news thinking without being sycophantic or propaganda. The deeper truths about change in South Africa have rarely been illuminated by mainstream television that shows so much but explains so little.

Reality tends to escape the wide but superficial frame of most TV journalism, especially on programs that call themselves “reality” shows. Like the country’s gold, the truth about South Africa has to be mined by people who understand the nuances, as many great writers and artists have done for years. A deadline driven, bottom-line oriented, headline-hustling news mentality is usually not up to the task.

I wanted to get at the texture of the politics and character of the movement that had fought for over 80 years for racial justice. I sought to show their concept of bottom-up grass roots democracy – built around a culture of participation in civic, community, labor, and political groups, the so-called democratic “structures” through which issues are discussed and debated.

“For us, democracy is not just about elections, it’s about day to day accountability,” is the way one labor leader explains it in the film. I set out to profile some of the less well known but key people who made change happen. Despite appearances, there was nothing inevitable about the outcome.

Some within the ANC were camera shy. One, a campaign manager, had seen the American documentary “The War Room” on Bill Clinton’s campaign and appeared intimidated by it. He didn’t think he could compete in cleverness with that film’s “star,” political spinster James Carville. He also liked wearing shorts to work, and didn’t think that would look good on camera. It was small conceits like this that blocked some promised access to key ANC meetings. Even the “comrades” were conscious of looking their best. In theory, they welcomed my presence. In practice, I realized I could be perceived as a pain in the ass..

At the same time, the ANC campaign was to my surprise, well organized along US lines. “Countdown” reveals the role played by Stan Greenberg, one of President Clinton’s advisors, and

shows how the ANC created a modern political machine utilizing the latest technology. (We also reveal the claim that a computer hacker, allegedly from inside the Election Commission attempted to tamper with the vote counting computer, probably to alter the results!) There's a great deal in the film that no one has reported, although it is not primarily an investigative film.

"Countdown" presents an action-packed account because I happened to be on the scene in the aftermath of a bomb blast in the center of Johannesburg. Paced with South African rhythms – and music from artists long concerned with South Africa like Peter Gabriel, Jackson Browne, and Miles Davis, these days of change now have a soundtrack that includes songs written for the occasion.

Ordinary people also surfaced in the commentary, while such ANC leaders as the late Joe Slovo, Pallo Jordan, Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale express the passion for change most eloquently. Nelson Mandela is naturally "the star," if a documentary can be said to have one, sharing his analysis, commentary and private moments.

"Countdown" also documents how people of all races and ethnic backgrounds worked together to insure free and fair elections. It looks at the themes of ANC political practice – internal democracy including decision making by consensus, non-racialism, negotiations, coalition building, and a long-term view powered by a faith in the possibility of justice.

The real drama in the film is not expressed through individual story telling, but rather, through group action. You can see it on election day when we traveled from township to township as South Africans lined up for hours to cast their ballots.

At one point, as I was shooting my own camcorder, I realized that it wasn't focusing. And then I realized why. I was crying. My

eyes teared uncontrollably as my lens zoomed on the faces of people erupting with joy, the same people that the world had viewed for so many decades as victims to be pitied, rather than as empowered actors in their own history.

After the film was completed with narration by James Earl Jones and Alfre Woodard, our task became to place the film, to sell it. Before the election, that proved impossible because everyone was “doing the election.” In its immediate aftermath, there was little interest because “it has already been done.”

Hopefully, now with the distance of some months, a more in-depth filmic treatment will stir interest. Third world people have long claimed that the world’s media is stacked against them, that the information flow only moves one way, from North to South. Yet at a time when our media seems mesmerized by the travails of one black man – OJ Simpson – we have had a tough time finding airtime for the triumphs of another – Nelson Mandela.

In America, a movie channel, Cinemax, did buy it, and in 1996 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences chose it as one of the “outstanding” films of 1994 to screen in LA under its auspices.

It was my hope that “Countdown to Freedom” would challenge us all to think again about the meaning of freedom. It was a film that had to be made, and despite incredible obstacles, was. Now we are continuing to fight to get it seen worldwide, if only to honor all that struggle and sacrifice that climaxed with the rebirth of a nation on May 10 1994 in the cradle of apartheid – Pretoria.

Update: *Happily, it was shown in the South African media in April, 2014, to mark the 20th anniversary of “freedom.”*

1996

Media war inside South Africa

WHILE I WAS ENGAGED IN VARIOUS MEDIA PROJECTS OUTSIDE the country, I was hoping that once apartheid ended, the “new South Africa” would create a better media system than it had, and perhaps we have. It didn’t quite work out that way.

As a media professional I watched as outside consultants were brought in, old staffers were retained and market pressures asserted themselves to insure continuity more than change. In 1995, I turned up at a media event along with Nelson Mandela, an event celebrating the media itself. It was at the much ballyhooed and multi-million dollar “relaunch” of the South African Broadcasting Corporation or SABC that runs the country’s principal TV and radio stations.

From its inception, the SABC had been an arm of the apartheid system and reflected its values, not only in what it broadcast but also in how it was structured. There were black stations and white stations, and even newsrooms that had walls separating people along racial lines. I was told that the black radio station was built so that it could be sealed off. Security guards with dogs patrolled the grounds.

It was also an enormous institution and larger than life bureaucracy – with studios galore, giant overheads, and layers of executives that made it seem like what it was: an Afrikaner employment and political patronage project. Fully 36% of the staff was administrative. In the “old days,” the Prime Minister had a direct line to the news chief, and virtually dictated what could and could not be covered. Censorship was the order of the day.

One example: after singer Stevie Wonder dedicated his Oscar for the song “I Just Called To Say I Love You” to the then incarcerated Nelson Mandela, all of his records were banned in South Africa. The SABC edited out his acceptance speech when they carried a delayed broadcast of the ceremony, an entire music program was killed because it carried a Wonder video, and his records in the “black music” library were all deliberately scratched while ones in the “white” music library had stickers affixed that said “AVOID.”

Censoring songs was a minor preoccupation; sugarcoating reality was the priority. In that area, the SABC was modeled on the old RCA slogan, “His Master’s Voice.” Unrest and human rights abuses, police brutality and death squad activity in South Africa was not news on South African TV.

Independent study after independent study offered evidence for how the TV system was used systematically to mobilize a consensus behind the government line, providing disproportionate access to the ruling party and its apologists for apartheid while totally shutting the ANC out.

In writing about the SABC in 1986, John Phelan, a communications scholar, noted, “SABC Television is both the past and the possible future of American television. It is not up to American speed in terms of video editing and remote intercutting with studio anchoring, which gives it an amateurish and nostalgic look. But it is certainly beyond the current dreams of broadcasting conglomerates in this country in concocting its own mediaworld of images and stereotypes that make attention to the real world of events unnecessary.” (Apartheid Media, 1987)

Today there may be a convergence underway, with the SABC slowly Americanizing while American Television in times of crisis – as during the Gulf War of 1991 – turns into a mini old-style SABC,

functioning as a megaphone for the military and Washington's policy goals. No one here phones it in – but then they don't have to.

The ANC said it was committed to an independent press, not just taking over the media and remaking it in its image. They disclaimed any intent to turn the SABC into a propaganda outlet. Secondly, apartheid's legacy had left few blacks with the training and experience to run a broadcasting operation.

Finally, there were concerns about how to finance the "new SABC since it had always depended on advertiser revenues for its survival. The ANC feared that a heavy-handed takeover would drive advertisers away and make the Broadcaster not economically viable.

So, the new government started out slowly – replacing some key decision makers and restructuring the bureaucracy. Zwelhake Sisulu, the son of ANC veteran Walter Sisulu and then editor of the weekly *New Nation*, an anti-apartheid weekly was picked to head up the operation. It was an enormous and intimidating challenge, and he moved cautiously at first, building a team and developing his plan. On February 4, 1996, the public was to be let in on what the "new SABC" would look like.

I knew Zwelhake from his days as a Nieman Fellow in Journalism at Harvard. The TV series I produced, "South Africa Now," covered his many detentions and interviewed him about the declining state of the free press during the height of the anti-apartheid struggle. I visited him in South Africa during earlier trips and had always been received cordially. Sisulu had been thinking about getting into TV with a private venture before getting the top job at the SABC. At that time, he had invited me to help. It was an initiative that would soon become unnecessary when he was named to a key post at the SABC, and then later took the top job.

In 1984, of 85 employees in the news service serving blacks, all but six were whites.

Sisulu's rise to power was part of a major desegregation of the suites of media power. Barney Mthomboti, a fellow Nieman fellow, explained what was happening at the SABC in *Nieman Reports*, a journalism review, in 1996, "Its role and its culture have changed; even the faces at the top have changed. Two years ago, there was not a single black face in the upper echelon of the SABC. Today there is only one white male left...The changes have been so dramatic the SABC is unrecognizable from the organization of two years ago."

Behind the scenes, new change-oriented policy makers took over. A feisty black woman, Dr. Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburri, a fighter for women's rights, became the Chairperson of the corporation's board.

Meanwhile, a government appointed but independent broadcasting authority, the IBA, began developing a framework for the regulation and the development for a new communications order. It is that body that is attempting to chart the future, in part, by ordering the SABC to divest itself of commercial radio stations and focus more narrowly on its public service role. This would theoretically open the market to more competition, but the SABC resisted, seeking to hold on to three channels while the IBA wants to cut them back to two to make room for newcomers, (ie. black owned business)

Thus, the forces of free market liberalization are at work at the same time that the government is seeking to promote a reconstruction and development plan as its nation building strategy.

But will privatization undermine that strategy or strengthen it? What about the "logic" of the marketplace that invariably

insists that citizens be treated largely as consumers? In this world of the so-called “free market”, commercial values always rule, and nothing is free. Can you transform a society by relying on institutions that reinforce the status quo?

And lurking not too far way in the background are all the international broadcast players, the goliaths of globalization, who want to get a foothold in a market that had long been closed to them thanks to apartheid laws and sanctions. They want in at the very same time that South Africa itself wants to control its own TV agenda. This makes for a complicated situation filled with players with a variety of conflicting goals.

- What do you say to a Rupert Murdoch who wants your sports rights and may be willing to ante up \$300 million for access while your budgets are strained?
- What do you say to the BBC and to MTV whose lobbyists are swarming about with attractive proposals?
- What do you say to black businessmen who just want to make money and find themselves shut out at a time that black economic empowerment is supposedly in?
- Does the market really have an answer that can meet the needs of the millions who have been pushed out, remain poor and undesirable to advertisers?

Anant Singh had told me that all of these changes would crystallize at an event I must attend – the SABC’s “re-launch.” It was slated to be held at the Waterkloof Air Force base outside of Pretoria, the country’s capital and a bastion of Afrikanerdom. Unfortunately, by the time I heard about it, there were no more tickets to be had.

I phoned the organizer and was told that all names of invitees had to have been handed over to the military by midnight the

night before for security reasons. Sorry.

Another friend who worked for the SABC was equally apologetic, explaining that “security would be tight” and that he was only given a limited number of invites. “It is impossible,” he told me.

So did the Deputy Minister of Defense whom I reached by phone in Cape Town. I thought surely he would have some influence with the Air Force, and could get me on the base. “Sorry, Danny,” he replied, “can’t do it because this is an SABC event, not a military function.”

I confided this disappointing news to my new chauffeur, a feisty and resourceful Afrikaner who had been bragging to me about all the big wigs he had driven around including Ronald Reagan’s former Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Chester Crocker, the man who coined the policy of “constructive engagement,” that I spent years criticizing.

Eddie was nonplussed, suggesting “we have a go at it anyway.” So that night, we did. He whisked “our” shiny Merc, now outfitted with a sign in Afrikaans that said “On Diplomatic Service,” up to Pretoria.

He found the base – and, much to my surprise, we were waved right through by a cordon of men in uniform. The limo then sailed through six more checkpoints even though we didn’t have an invitation. Finally, we were stopped and asked for our pass. Ever quick with a retort, the driver said in his most authoritative tone that we had forgotten it at the Embassy, and that I was an Ambassador.

“From the Bronx,” I chimed in.

The last security man saluted and it was now clear that we had made it. We had arrived in more ways than one. As soon as I walked into the cocktail party that preceded the event, I ran

into Anton Harber, editor of the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, and, fresh with a sense of high chutzpah, I boasted about my little act of infiltration. He later ran an item about my caper in his paper, which ended by questioning the security of South Africa's Air Force bases. I wondered if I had inadvertently become a threat to the new regime.

Anyway, I was in – but also in for an event of the type one rarely encounters outside of Las Vegas. We were ushered into a VIP seating area in a large hanger. I was sitting next to the Director of Marketing of England's SKY News, Rupert Murdoch's personal emissary. Sitting just behind us was a former boss of mine, Ed Turner, the Vice President of CNN and the man who runs that show. (I joked that it was just a meeting of media moguls – Murdoch, CNN and Globalvision.). Prominent South Africans were all around us including members of the Cabinet and well known officials. This was a big deal.

I was quickly briefed on what was really going on. The SABC had restructured and re-oriented its three channels. They were imaginatively called "SABC 1" "SABC 2," and "SABC 3." They were now mandated to expand the number of African languages on the air – to reflect the country's 11 official languages. That meant cutting back on the amount of Afrikaans which once dominated the airwaves, a decision that infuriated conservative whites.

Politically, the TV corporation had declared itself a Public Service Broadcaster, roughly on the model of England's Channel Four, but with a pro-nation building mission. From now on, we were told, the SABC would be a cheerleader of the new democracy, with slogans like "Your Vision, Your Voice." And no amount of glitz would be spared to bring the message home.

This gala launch was organized so that the SABC could preview its new programming line-up, while at the same time reassure

advertisers that there would be no compromise in its standards, production values, or commercial appeal.

The event sought to impress ad buyers, many of whom were on hand. The press reported a mixed reaction. One agency person told me over lobster at the dinner afterwards that it won't work. Doug Maritz of Young & Rubican was blunter calling it a "complete waste of money."

The extravaganza actually reflected a kind of schizophrenia and insecurity, revealing the anxiety that pervades the SABC brass. Its essence: the SABC would now try to be everything to everyone – a channel that served the black poor and the white elite.

I was sympathetic to the goals but the way its was "sold" showcased every contradiction in the "new" South Africa. What became clear was that the new SABC had not sold out so much as sold in. And it cost them a reported 3.8 million rand to stage this high tech, feel-good, patriotic rally for 2000 VIP guests and the viewers at home. It was more like an overdone Superbowl half-time show than a Nuremberg Rally.

The launch started with a disco-style laser light show paced by state of the art visual effects and dancers, 1400 performers in all. One of South African Airway's jumbo jets, ironically sporting the colors of the old regime was then actually wheeled into the giant hanger to serve as a staging area from which broadcast executives, invited stars and celebrities, and even President Mandela descended. Some newspaper columnists quipped that it was an appropriate symbol because it had two wings – a left and a right.

There was music, dancing and speechifying aplenty. Stevie Wonder sang a song, OJ Simpson's lawyer Johnnie Cochran, also an investor in the country's new (and soon to fail) Pepsi franchise waved to the crowd, and a small group of invited Hollywood stars

and celebrities acted as MC's along with the vice president, of the airline company. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle, who doubles as a TV talk show host, South Africa's Oprah Winfrey wannabe, was on hand to MC. (She later moved to Atlanta where she has her own TV company.)

The woman who organized the Hollywood delegation, Sharon Gelman, was from LA's Artists for a Free South Africa. She told me that they had to change the script radically because the earlier draft was embarrassingly devoid of any social mission.

The *Weekly Mail and Guardian* joked that the appearance of so many Hollywood stars "reveal that we are now accepted in America, the spiritual home of commercial TV. The coded message here is we are now moral and pure enough as a culture to watch soap operas, sitcoms, and talk shows."

This was a ceremony complete with commercial breaks, break dancing and bizarre moments, like when a sanitized film saluting the early all white days of the SABC boasted how the TV company had managed to defy sanctions by covertly obtaining shows whose artists didn't want them shown in South Africa.

The promo tape actually celebrated defying world opinion, yet it was being shown at an event ultimately made possible, in part, by the success of sanctions. Bizarre!. Did anyone in authority, I wondered, preview this self-congratulatory presentation? (I don't think so.)

"Is this what the ANC fought and died for?" one disgusted onlooker asked me. The ceremony went on for hours.

The biggest applause of the evening was reserved for South Africa's victorious sports units – its champion soccer, cricket and rugby teams who turned out in force. President Mandela, flanked on all sides by children representing all of South Africa's ethnic group led by a young tribal praise singer, was also warmly

received and spoke briefly about the importance of TV as a tool of democracy, and why the SABC was changing “to better reflect the reality of our lives together.”

He was introduced by my old friend, Pallo Jordan, the Minister of Broadcasting, who I had never seen wearing a tuxedo before. He was as upbeat as everyone else, celebrating what he called a “feel good time for South Africa” in the aftermath of all the sports victories and the coming of rain after years of drought.

“Today,” he intoned with eloquence, “the SABC unveils a new program, a new page in its history and hopefully a new day in South African broadcasting, this is one more step in building a democratic South Africa.”

Unfortunately, Pallo split before the endless spectacle got underway. I am sure he would have been as distressed by it as I was. He would become even more distressed two months later when he was abruptly fired from his Cabinet post by Mandela. The newspapers reported that one of the reasons might have been his hands-off attitude towards the SABC and allowing it too much independence. For him – and for his friends – that was a real ‘feel bad’ time.

After the politicians and Zwelhake spoke, a new shortened version of the National Anthem was sung. I was surprised that no one, including Mandela, put his or her fist in the air any longer while it was being sung. The singing of Nkosi Sikeleli !Afrika has always, in my experience over 30 years, been accompanied by upraised fists, as a symbol of a determination to be free, and respect for those lost in the struggle. This long banned freedom song has now become a paean to patriotism but remains one of the most beautiful anthems in the world.

Was another worrisome sign – an abandonment of the symbols of the freedom movement? The *Mail and Guardian* ticked off

some of the other contradictions one by one:

- “The SABC was proclaiming its commitment to local content, on which it plans to spend the bulk of its budget and over 50% of its screen time. So how does it mark a new commitment to South African talent?

By bringing in American television stars, and allowing them to take center stage.

- “And how did the SABC choose to symbolize the fact it has a new found independence? By getting two members of the Cabinet to proclaim it.

- The nation’s broadcaster also wanted to demonstrate its “new values” and commitment to public service television. How did it do that? By selling its soul to South African Airways that seemed to get more publicity from the event than the broadcaster”

Before the hours long event ended, President Mandela took his leave. Murdoch’s man had been telling me all night how much he wanted to meet Mandela.

I told him to stick with me. Having been with the President at many functions, I developed a sense of how his arrivals and departures are handled. I guessed where he would leave. And sure enough, his route to the exit took him right by my strategically located seat on the aisle. Soon, our eyes locked, when Madiba recognized me. He walked right over.

“How are you?,” he boomed, offering his hand, as many of the people around us probably wondered who is that guy and why is the President talking to him?

Mandela is great at pressing the flesh – I’ve watched him do it scores of times. And once again, it was my turn to press his. I seized the moment, and said: “Mr. President, I want you to meet a close friend of mine from England”, motioning to my right.

Murdoch’s main man reached over, a big smile on his face. His

hand was shaking. Afterwards, he told me he wouldn't wash for a week. I had made a friend for life.

Celebrity has that power on people. (Two months later, I was walking next to Rupert Murdoch himself at a New York media conference. Just for fun, I reached my hand over to say hello and shake his. He didn't stop or reciprocate, and just kept walking.)

The next morning, the local talk station, Radio 702, was filled with callers criticizing the SABC, while newspaper columnists raged on about how an event staged to bring about unity had instead promoted so much disunity.

Afrikaners were particularly distressed. The right-wing *Citizen* newspaper blasted the function, reporting "hundreds of calls from irate viewers" who were quoted as calling the event "A waste of money," "political billboarding," and a "blatant black is beautiful and better victory parade." There were many protests.

Ultimately, of course, any broadcaster has to be judged on its programming, not its promotions. And there were some good initial notices for some of the new shows.

South Africa's Media Monitoring Project, the country's oldest media watch group said "The next months will be crucial for the SABC's success... Having promise so much, they will need to deliver or face the wrath of not just vociferous but small protest groups but large losses in viewership and reputation." This organization noted a central problem: changing the languages on the air doesn't necessarily change the programs. To do so, may further alienate viewers.

The SABC claimed the public was positive about its relaunch. The country's largest black newspaper, the *Sowetan*, called the launch a "big success" and supported the new SABC editorially. You had the feeling that most opinion leaders wanted this new configuration for the "new nation" to work.

I wanted to be more impressed. I wasn't.

I found the whole celebration depressing in its commercial slickness and lack of soulfulness. Naively, I had hoped that a country that was "starting over," and literally reinventing its institutions, might be able to take the lead in producing progressive television programming that reflects the values of the revolution that brought down apartheid. Perhaps I was asking too much.

Instead, there seemed to be a desire to clone western broadcasting models. Trainers from Canada and Australia had left some imprint on staffers, but the whole range of American style programming that I have been spending so much time critiquing back home had now become embedded in South Africa. No doubt that's because, it is cheaper to import expensive to make shows than produce them in-country.

As a result, the airwaves are inundated with soap operas like "Santa Barbara," "The Young and the Restless," and "The Bold and the Beautiful" and some local variants with black actors following the same old formulas, although it is hard to achieve the same production values overnight.

According to *Text*, a publication of the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, black South Africans are "entranced" by these soaps and "and are not keen to see local television productions on their screens.... as one viewer put it, "South African actors are still sort of trying to learn, and we don't want to pay TV licenses and watch them trying to act on TV."

"Our" Oprah, the real Oprah Winfrey, has also just arrived on SABC's airwaves via syndication. The station also carries 12 hours a day of CNN International. Last year, many South Africans complained to me about all the O.J. Simpson trial coverage, wondering what it had to do with them, and why Americans are hooked on so much trivia. Unfortunately, these programs tend to brainwash viewers in

the sense that they define what “real TV” is or should be.

I can’t believe that the South African audience wouldn’t respond to something different and more relevant, but it is rarely being given the chance.

Perhaps I am being unfair, expecting a country that has for years been conditioned by Hollywood hype to break the habit over night. Yet what seemed clearer and clearer, that with the exception of some local programming in a variety of African languages, the SABC was emulating American style TV.

This same trend is also evident on the commercial pay cable outlet. I appeared as a guest on “Front Row,” MNET’s version of Entertainment Tonight, a well-packaged program where I was to be given a chance to promote my forthcoming documentary. Instead the host, a beautiful English educated daughter of a former Inkatha official, kept asking me to be more upbeat and humorous.

“Right, I said facetiously on the air, “I have always looked at torture and abuse as funny.” She didn’t get the irony. The American commercial influence is all over MNET, which has renamed its conference room to honor former Dynasty superbitch Joan Collins who wrote a nice note to the staff after visiting the facility, at the height of sanctions no doubt.

MNET is controlled by an Afrikaner media conglomerate, which has as its junior partners, the white-owned English language newspaper monopolies. Incredibly profitable, the company has actually exported its technologies and cable businesses into Europe through a company called Film Net. MNET also has a direct broadcast satellite that is seen throughout Africa.

In a sense it has electronically colonized the emerging TV market throughout the continent. Now, to compete, the SABC has announced plans to launch a “bouquet” of satellite pay TV

services including an Afrikaans language channel. I was told that Rupert Murdoch is on the verge of buying into the marketplace, probably through MNET, although the SABC is courting him, too even as the ANC blanches at the thought.

As I spoke with old colleagues and new friends at the SABC, I came to hear the same litanies and disappointments that I am used to from my friends in New York. "I am being underutilized. They don't want investigative reporting," one of South Africa's top investigative journalists told me. Another producer says she is short staffed and that there is little support for more in-depth stories. There seemed to be as many intrigues there as in the corridors that I toiled within at ABC News.

Even the ANC itself has been upset. Deputy President Thabo Mbeki complained that the party that had won 63% of the vote and liberated the country was being given short shrift on the air. He asked for a half-hour a week so that viewers could be informed about what their government was doing, and how the nation's reconstruction and development plan was unfolding.

This suggestion prompted a storm of protest, including disdain from Broadcasting Minister Jordan who argued that such a move would undercut a public perception of independence and impartiality. The implication was that the government was trying to assert control over the media, again. Mbeki backed off, but the problem remains. Coverage of the transformation of South Africa in South Africa is episodic and superficial.

Unfortunately, most free speech advocates tend to define censorship almost exclusively in terms of government intervention, ignoring the more insidious and covert role played by advertisers and businesses in shaping the broadcast agenda.

Perhaps that is because reporters tend to have an adversarial relationship with governments and so get crazy whenever public

officials criticize them. They resent their criticisms and priorities. In a country like South Africa where the government does speak for the majority's desire for change, that adversarial relationship needs a second look or a broader definition.

Government abuses should be reported – but so should malfeasance in the corporate sector. The former is closely monitored; the latter is not.

A producer of the SABC launch told me that the principal advertiser of the TV ceremony, South Africa Airlines controlled the content, and micromanaged the show. I couldn't confirm the claim.

New York Times editor Joseph Lelyveld, who wrote a Pulitzer prize winning book on South Africa some years later recently returned to visit and shared his impressions with a magazine published by the Institute of Advanced Journalism at Wits University in Johannesburg:

“...The mood of the South African press ought to be buoyant... bubbling with excitement and new found possibilities...Instead... the mood seems to be anxious, perhaps a little sour. The new leadership...isn't happy with its coverage in the press. It thinks its accomplishments are being played down, even overlooked; its problems magnified; its serious ambitions for social justice underdeveloped.”

He is right – they do feel that way. And they are right to feel it. Except that the government's own lack of leadership and clarity about its strategy, or candor about articulating it, often compounds the problem.

There seems to be a lack of consciousness and vision on this question. What's wrong does need to be examined, even when it takes place within the media itself. At the SABC and other outlets, there is a kind of a “gravy train”, with some blacks, not

always with the most experience being pushed into high paid jobs with lots of perks. In many case they are replacing equally incompetent whites.

The American freelance investigative journalist Jeff Stein who recently visited newsrooms in South Africa toured the SABC and concluded afterwards that there was very little investigative reporting going on. He says that the journalists he met were satisfied to get information via the fax machine and showed little desire to look for alternative angles and more in-depth explanations. He blamed it on the legacy of apartheid.

But there may be a deeper corruption of the spirit going on as South Africans who want more fundamental change begin recognizing that they are trapped in a world economic system that favors the rich countries over the poor, and is, despite it Western rhetoric and praise, investing very little in the country's new democracy and economy.

These shortages of new capital affects broadcasting, too, since there are shrinking resources to finance all the needs. If you to chose to pour those resources into party giving, perks, buyouts and baloney, there is little left for the kind of substantive programming that might motivate the audience to become engaged in process of change and reconciliation.

Already there are complaints that the SABC launch cost so much that already commissioned documentaries are being cut back, and new ones are not being greenlighted. I came hoping to find an environment bristling with enthusiasm and excitement but instead I encountered lots of negativity about how slow the pace of change is on the ground.

Increasingly, what unity exists between whites and blacks seems to be fraying too. Black journalists have their own organizations; whites theirs. Old comrades are sticking together, but it is not

clear how far the spirit of real non-racialism trickles down.

When I try to sell my old South Africa Now programs, which have never been seen in the country, to TV programmers at the SABC. I am told, “we don’t want to dwell on the past.”

So our shows, banned under apartheid, are deemed just not appropriate now that apartheid is gone, even as historical programming. Or is what they are really saying also influenced by what they are not saying – that I am an American and white? At bottom I don’t think so. It is more serious than that.

PART 4

Dispatches & Commentaries



**Covering Africa: At the United Nations, New
York, 2003**

1999

Visiting the new South Africa

WHEN I WAS FINALLY PERMITTED TO REVISIT SOUTH AFRICA in November 1990, I was only allowed to stay for ten days with the proviso that I did no reporting. When I handed over my passport for inspection at the airport, little men, all white, came running to question my motives for being there. My name must have been on some list that demanded closer scrutiny. I was relieved to be let in after an exhausting 16 hour flight.

In February, 1996, I breezed right through. No one in authority seemed at all interested in my history of hostility to the old regime. All the immigration officers, black and white, wanted to talk about was the victory of “Bafana, Bafana,” the national football team that has just won the all-Africa soccer cup.

I was met at the airport by a white driver with a white Mercedes, a status symbol, no doubt, and welcomed to the country in a manner to which I had never been accustomed. I was back at the invitation of MNet, the pay cable TV station, to promote a documentary I had directed on a reunion a year earlier on Robben Island, the prison where Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners had spent so many years. That event was probably unprecedented – 1,250 former convicts returning to the place of their incarceration for a reunion and gesture of reconciliation. Even the victims of apartheid wanted to confront their past and move beyond it.

The film “Prisoners of Hope” was shot in just three days on a slim budget as an Anant Singh production. Anant, the country’s

leading film producer with such credits as *Sarafina*, and *Cry The Beloved Country*, wanted to document the event. Barbara Kopple, who had won two Academy Awards for documentaries, came with me and directed one camera. MNET had agreed to screen the “doccie,” as South Africans call documentaries, on the sixth anniversary of Mandela’s historic release from prison.

As we traveled to the prison, I could sense the spirit of the struggle, of a wave of liberation, a force of history that had overthrown an evil system. The victims had become victors. The New South Africa had arrived, and was destined to succeed in a world where the miracle of a peaceful transformation had turned the country into a successful global model.

I wanted desperately for that to be true, but as I looked around, and spoke with graduates of the long anti-apartheid struggle, new questions and concerns emerged.

In 1998, I also covered Mandela’s farewell visit to the United States, traveling with him to the White House and Capitol Hill where he was lionized as a real lion king by American institutions that for years ignored and demonized him.

But even though I have made several films with and about him, I know that he had by then become a titular head of state, an icon on the top of a society that was trapped in a vise of forces larger than itself. Mandela spoke often of the need to transform South Africa – but transformation is easier said than done, especially in a global economy in which all “emerging markets” play a secondary and subordinate role.

I haven’t studied all the economic issues closely, but the people who have are not optimistic. The gap between the rich and the poor inside South Africa has broadened, not narrowed. We documented that in a film about globalization and human

rights that reported on speculators in Europe who drove down the price of gold in hopes of making a quick profit, leading to massive unemployment in the mining industry. One hundred and fifty thousand workers were affected.

These are not the issues that most American journalists write about. South Africa tends to get in the news these days with stories about crime and violence or the drama of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one of whose hearings I attended. Yet the post-apartheid system is ushering in a deeper conflict that demands attention.

Hein Marais, a respected political journalist, writes about this in his sophisticated analysis of the structural issues in his book, *South Africa: The Limits to Change* (Zed Books). “The key objective of the liberation struggle became the seizure of state power in order to work its levers in the interests of the majority,” he explains. “Of course, this did not happen. Instead of seizing power, the democratic movement negotiated its partial transfer. Instead of taking over and transforming the state, the movement found itself assimilated into it.”

“What has changed,” complains the Australian-born, British-based journalist John Pilger in his book *Hidden Agendas*, “is the inclusion of a small group of blacks into this masonry, a process of co-optation that was well underway during the latter, ‘reformist’ years of apartheid. This has allowed foreign and South African companies to use black faces to gain access to the new political establishment.” This is called black empowerment – but it is not clear if black people as a whole are benefiting or only a tiny upwardly mobile elite. Pilger, who spent years covering the struggle, says the government’s neo-liberal macroeconomic policies are betraying the poor.

Larger forces of free market “liberalization” are at work at the

same time, undercutting the government's reconstruction and development plan that had been, until it was dropped, central to its nation-building strategy. The question is: will privatization advance that strategy or cripple it?

The "logic" of the marketplace invariably insists that citizens be treated as consumers. And when you are living in desperate poverty, even that status is not within reach. In this world of the so-called "free market," commercial values tend to rule, and nothing is free. Can you transform a society by relying on institutions that reinforce the status quo? Lurking in the background are the international players, who want to get a foothold in a market long closed to them, thanks to apartheid laws and sanctions.

Economic realities do need to be examined more openly, with more debate and disclosure by the ANC and the larger movement it created.

And the truth is, these issues don't get discussed fully in the local media.

For all South Africans, the past is still present, or as James Baldwin once put it: "people are trapped in history and history is trapped in them."

There may be a deeper demoralization of the spirit going on as South Africans who want more fundamental change begin recognizing that they are also trapped in a world economic system that favors the rich countries over the poor, and is, despite Western rhetoric and occasional praise, investing relatively little in the country's new democracy and economy.

I was told that in 1998 when South Africa's Finance Minister visited the IMF-World Bank conference in Washington, there was little interest in his delegation's proposals for reforms that might promote more equity in the financial relationships between emerging economies and the more developed ones. When told

about the legacy of apartheid, a prominent international financial official reportedly said dismissively, “that was a long time ago.”

What I see as a “consciousness gap” may also be reflection of a much deeper gap that is reinforcing a battle between two economic visions of the country’s future – one pushed by business, the other by labor. That debate is central to South Africa’s future.

In April 1996, two months after the South African Broadcasting Corporation relaunch, the organizations representing the country’s workers released a study arguing that two years after the arrival of majority rule, gross inequalities remain with economic power and high incomes favoring whites by a large margin.

“As the white population had to give up its monopoly of political power in order to usher in the new democracy, so the economic elite should now be challenged to share the wealth and resources of our country to the benefit of all,” argues a report on “Social Equity and Job Creation.”

An independent study by Pretoria’s Human Services Research Council confirmed the problem, revealing that the gap between the total income of the 13 percent of the population who are white and the 87 percent of the country’s 41 million people who are not white is the largest in the world. Sam Shilowa, then leader of the Confederation of South African Trade Union (COSATU) said, “under the captains of capital our economic ship is sinking. We need to shift the emphasis.” He was referring to an unemployment rate that hovers around 40 percent.

Business is trying to shift the emphasis, too, with demands for a two-tiered system which would create a deregulated, essentially union-free, labor intensive market to function alongside the present “high wage, low employment sector.”

COSATU rejects this, arguing that already there is an enormous difference between salaries received by workers – the average was

\$73 dollars a week – while directors at the Stock Exchange take home \$17,000 a month. Top executives in South Africa receive giant salary hikes while workers are being cut back or laid off.

So the South Africa that burst on to the world stage as a racial clash is rapidly becoming a class and economic conflict.

The business community is pushing for a “well-handled privatization program that would serve as a performance catalyst for the economy and help government escape the looming debt trap.” The unions want to go slow and oppose total privatization. This issue has surfaced in the telecommunications area where the country’s main phone company, Telkom, is being privatized.

Industry wanted it done quickly while the former Minister Pallo Jordan, still an independent Marxist, wanted the process to move more slowly. Newspapers reported that President Mandela was unhappy with his inclination to placate the unions more than the companies. Jordan was later fired from his post – for a number of reasons – but then re-appointed to the cabinet as environment minister.

For many who worked in and for the struggle, there is an inevitable sense of disillusion, even disorientation. When that happens, some get cynical, and others turn on their past and themselves. That’s what produces defections and conversions to the other side. Many more stay the course, still believing, but in a way that is more understanding of the need for compromises and deferred gratification. Others just tune out and turn off to all politics.

Perhaps expectations, including my own, are too high. Maybe it is just not realistic to expect everything to change in a few short years. This is also an age of cynicism, and, alas, of retrenchment, when “winning” may mean just being able to get up to fight another day.

Multi-national corporate power seems resurgent in so many parts of the world, so perhaps it is enough that the “New” South Africa is even there, keeping hope alive in its own way, even surprising us again and again. When one sees all the other conflicts tearing African states apart, South Africa looks very advanced.

In April 1996, the weekly *Namibian* carried an article about an autobiographical novel by Pepetela, the nom de guerre of an Angolan freedom fighter. It’s about the liberation war and its discontents. It includes a fictionalized but well-imagined exchange between a guerrilla commander and a commissar of the new revolutionary government.

The guerrilla is speaking: “We don’t share the same ideas. You are the machine type. I am the type who can never belong to the machine ... what I want you to understand is that the revolution we are making is half the revolution I want. But is it all that is possible? I know my limits and the country’s limits. My role is to contribute to this half-revolution. So I go to the end in the knowledge that in relation to the ideal I have set for myself, my action is half useless, or rather half useful.”

For many years, I considered myself a mole in another machine, the media machine. I tried to use it to bring these kinds of issues to public attention. In relation to the ideal I have set for myself, I realize I, as well, may not even be half way there.

On some days I feel I am getting around the contradictions of change; on others, they are constraining and overwhelming me, as I traveled 10,000 miles, half way around the world, to visit the new South Africa. What I found an echo of the questions I keep asking myself and struggling to answer right here, even though the journalist in me tells me there are no answers, only more questions.

In the end I have to agree with my Angolan colleague: a “half

a revolution” is probably better than none.

Being “half useful” does have some satisfactions.

Z magazine July/August, 1999

2004

The new South Africa turns ten

THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA IS TEN, MARKING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY of democracy that is often confused with freedom. In world terms, it is an impressive achievement with 73% of registered voters taking part in the third free and fair national vote (with only 45% plus of eligible voters, but who's quibbling?

Someone has wrangled me an invite from President Thabo Mbeki's office to the inauguration, as an "old friend" of South Africa. I am trying not to act my age in the sense that I know that the more you have been around any culture or society the more you hear about its shortcomings. And I have heard a lot.

The positives are obvious and Nelson Mandela, as usual, makes the case for what's happened as a "human achievement that in its impact and magnitude transcends and belies the brevity of its years...We were expected by the world to self-destruct in the bloodiest civil war along racial lines. Not only did we avert such a racial conflagration, we created among ourselves one of the most exemplary and progressive non racial and non-sexist democratic orders in the contemporary world."

Hear! Hear! Viva!

'We count our votes'

The non-stopable Desmond Tutu seconds the emotion. "Here we are celebrating our third free and fair election (and we can actually count our votes.)"

And then, there is Thabo Mbeki, now beginning his third term in the eyes of many South Africans in the sense that while Mandela ruled, in his first and only term, it was Mbeki as deputy president who actually administered the first democratically elected government.

He ran and won in 1999, with a healthy margin, and then his country returned him to power with a bigger vote than Mandela received in what was called a “liberation election” in 1994. A 70% margin is almost unique in our polarized political climate, but bear in mind that in South Africa voters elect parties and party lists, not individual representatives except when it comes to the president. It is the African National Congress (ANC) that triumphed. The ANC has always been a “broad church” movement with backing from labor, churches, community groups and, oddly, communists and capitalists.

To his admirers, Mbeki, the son of a legendary ANC stalwart, and political prisoner is a pragmatist and brilliant strategist who is also a theorist, manager and wily politician. He is the ANC man who has fused a moderate social democratic agenda with Africanist identity politics. To his critics, he “talks left and walks right,” and is characterized as an autocrat who chills dissent in the ranks, holds bizarre theories about AIDS and has betrayed the autonomy and democratic character of the movement that brought him to power.

Radical academician Patrick Bond critiques what he calls his “neo-liberal agenda” in a new book that argues that the ANC has sold out to big business. This view has clearly yet to spark a mass debate in South Africa, although many feel that the next time around, the ANC will be challenged on the left as well as the right. (Mbeki’s mother, who died in 2014, was a leftist, not a centrist.)

This year for example, Thabo has championed more women in politics – a clearly progressive stand – but many of the women he has chosen are either unknown or known as compliant and not expected to challenge his priorities. He has, for example also dumped the long time Speaker of Parliament, Frene Ginewala, who was not reappointed, perhaps because she was too feisty and independent for the ANC’s top-down policrats.

The enigma

“President Thabo Mbeki remains an enigma to many of his people appearing variously as deal maker, power broker, statesman and social democrat,” opines the *Sunday Times* in a profile. “Ten years on we are still trying to define the man. Which is a great pity because, as future historians will say, he defined our founding decade.”

“Look at the election results, “one of his closest Ministers, Essop Pahad, told me in front of the stage on the grounds of the Union Building in Pretoria, the site of the inauguration and loth anniversary celebration to be attended by 45,000 people, nine foreign Presidents, mostly from Africa, and one News Dissector. He recited a litany of the numbers of houses built and other achievements of Mbeki’s administration.

“We’ve realized our dream. We’ve evolved as leaders.” He was in a celebratory mood looking in on the progress of the concert, shouting instructions to musicians Jonas Gwanga and Mbogeni Ngema, giants of South African music, who had been rehearsing in the hot sun. They bantered back and forth with him, knowing he was there micromanaging the show on the President’s behalf. Mbeki would later come on stage for a cheering reception. Mbeki was honoring their contributions

and legacy by having them perform along with Hugh Masekela, Letta Mbulu and Caiphus Semenya, Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), actor John Kani and poet Don Mattera. They were all part of what they called “the creative coalition.”

Their show was not just entertainment. They were offering a didactic and inspired program that mixed in theater, poetry, praise singers, story telling and traditional dancing to showcase the history of the South African struggle and the progress of the last ten years.

And, yes, there were Indian dancers, tribal troupes and white singers to bring out the rainbow of this self-styled “Rainbow Nation.” The show went on for nine hours as a free concert and later as a more sedate but stirring performance at the State Theater. Both shows were televised, even as the TV reporting on the inauguration was largely uninformed and wide-eyed, focusing more on the fashion and the ritual that included military flyovers and a parade that one newspaper compared to Moscow in the 1950’s. (No, it was not that bad!)

Media mediocrity

Before traveling to Pretoria. I stopped into the offices of a top weekly newspaper in Johannesburg and met with an editor who was expressing remorse about the lack of critical edge in South African journalism. We had begun speaking about his distress with the Bush press conferences that he felt lacked tough questioning. But he quickly segued into expressing disdain for his own countrymen who he also felt were compliant and even servile, lacking a critical culture of adversarial reporting and investigative journalism. I was surprised by the degree of his impatience with South African journalism.

Human rights activist Rhoda Kadalie was contemptuous in

the pages of *Business Day* in indicting media collaboration in “electoral cynicism. “Elections expose journalists for what they are – the very scum they write about,” she writes about the lack of depth in the election coverage. Instead of giving elections the seriousness they deserve, little investigative reporting takes place.” She quotes Gandhi, who is said to have said: “I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers.” She point blank says she is “pissed off,” the kind of personal anger in print we need more of.

The essence of her well-documented complaint is, “Very few really analyzed what incumbent politicians were promising voters in the light of their poor performances in their provinces.”

The real political issues were not all that was missing in the political coverage. A Media Tenor study found that HIV/AIDS and education were missing on the political media agenda. The lack of ongoing media focus on AIDS perhaps reflects the relatively low priority fighting AID has in the government.

The international Media Tenor company, with a strong media monitoring operation in Pretoria, also analyzes international coverage of South Africa and finds it wanting. “South Africa is barely getting covered overseas, especially in the United States and the UK,” Wadim Schreiner, their local director told me. “Our studies find far more attention paid to sporting events than our realities, especially the progress made over the last ten years.”

Few reporters, he says on the basis of detailed examination of hundreds of articles and TV broadcasts, get out and talk to people who have benefited; most stay in the cities and talk to people like themselves who share their concerns about crime and government incompetence.

I did visit with John Mattison, a former NPR correspondent and now editorial director of an impressive new Johannesburg daily called *This Day*, owned by a bold Nigerian Nduka Obaigbena, which fuses strong reporting and editorial commentary. Its coverage called attention to the “Tattered symbols” of the day, and the fact that unemployment is up as is dissatisfaction with the delivery of services. John says his paper is getting a fantastic reception as it seeks to add quality and depth to local journalism.

(*The Day* closed shortly after our meeting)

Not only were some of the symbols tattered. There was certainly plenty of incompetence to knock as anyone who went through the chaotic accreditation process and other cock-ups during inauguration day can attest. There was almost a disaster when crews rushed the stage in a melee that resembled an incident that claimed scores of lives a while back at a soccer match. Fortunately, all that was lost were the lunches of TV crews and police units.

Enough bitching!

You can't let small time bitching distort an obvious achievement – that this country has not degenerated into chaos but has a government that looks very good compared to others in Africa, and I dare say, our own in the United States where promises are unfulfilled, treasure squandered and war overseas makes South Africa seem positively nirvana-ish.

The inauguration ceremony itself ran like clockwork in the veranda of the regal Union Building that housed the overlords of Apartheid for years. (I learned from visiting British director Tom Hooper, who went on to direct the Academy Award winning film, *The King's Speech*, that it was the Afrikaner Jan

Smuts who first proposed to the UN that the word “human rights” be part of its official language.)

Perhaps that’s why Mbeki’s inaugural speech dealt as much with an “ugly past” as it did with the future. (I was told he is saving his plans for the next five years for a State of the Nation speech in two weeks’ time). His speech was flowery and passionate focusing on the need to end poverty that is key to all the progress he hopes to make. “The struggle to eradicate poverty will continue to be a central part of the effort to build the new South Africa,” he said.

He knocked the UN, celebrated the unity of African nations but did not use the word AIDS once, an upsetting omission in a country that is at the epicenter of the pandemic.

Mbeki sees AIDS as a disease of poverty although he did not repeat his earlier suspicions that the HIV does not cause AIDS. He seems to have dropped that speculation that brought him into so much international derision. His government has announced, but not yet implemented, an ambitious plan to give ARV anti Aids drugs out widely and for free.

The new isolation

What was striking about this year’s inauguration compared to the two earlier ones I covered was the lack of real international attendance. Only 25 heads of state and governments showed. Biggies like Cuba’s Castro and Libya’s Gadaffi were absent. Most European countries, except Norway, sent low-level delegations.

The United States dispatched an undersecretary I never heard of, a sign of Bush Administration contempt, no doubt connected to its dislike of South African criticism of the Iraq War. Nelson Mandela scolded President Bush to talk to his

father about the war; Bishop Tutu was prominent at anti-war rallies and South Africa's UN Ambassador organized countries against the US position.

In his one trip to South Africa, President Bush never strayed off of a military base outside of Pretoria. (I flew back with Congresswoman Maxine Waters who told me the White House knocked her off the official delegation. When I sneered, she responded with a what-did-you-expect look.)

You would think that President Bush, who brags of his commitment to democracy every chance he gets, would support South Africa in its democratic achievement. But no, as usual, his stance is selective, preferring client states to those that show any independence.

Speaking of US policy vis a vis South Africa, I was fascinated to find it mentioned by former anti-terror chief Richard Clarke in his new book "Against All Enemies." In it, he discusses how a trip he took to Israel to enforce the Anti-Apartheid Act passed to impose sanctions led to a step up of US military collaboration with Israel. In short, a law seeking erosion of apartheid in one country may have contributed to reinforcing it in another.

For years under apartheid, South Africa was isolated from the world. Then, as the world's peoples rallied to its fight for democracy, their governments followed. Now, as the country strikes out on its own, and stands on its own feet fighting an economic battle much harder than the fight against apartheid, the world is pulling back.

Some inauguration-goers like myself were surprised at the exuberant reception that Robert Mugabe, of neighboring Zimbabwe received from the crowd. Many see him here as a symbol of someone who fought for independence and is still battling to give land back to Africans. They have bought his hype.

The reality of life in Zimbabwe is very different, and going downhill fast, and Mbeki's so called "quiet diplomacy" to influence the political, human rights and economic disaster there is not working. Even Mbeki's brother Moletsisi went on TV the day after the inauguration to call on South Africa to get tougher on Mugabe even as many in the ANC still feel a debt to him for his help during their painful years in exile. I saw Mugabe face to face at the Presidential lunch and to me, he had the steely look of an "evil doer," to borrow a Bushism.

A part of a tribe

Returning to South Africa was like going home. I saw old friends and comrades; I reconnected with a people, culture and struggle that consumed my passions for thirty years. I can still feel part of this tribe of ageing warriors (even if I am not). It is a tribe that still can't believe it is a winner in a world where many who struggle the way they did are still on the outside looking in, or in jail looking out.

I was especially pleased when my old friend Pallo Jordan was reappointed to the Cabinet to head up Arts and Culture after many years in the political wilderness of Parliament. That was good sign because he is known for his independent thinking and ethical values. He knows that the long walk to freedom is hardly done.

Even as I am disappointed with failures on the ground and the limits of the political vision, I am reminded that politics is the art of the possible and South Africa is coming of age in an era when the deck is stacked by powerful forces against the revolution that many thought they/we were fighting.

It is hard to rationalize many of the shortcomings I see and

hear about, including corruptions of the pocket, heart and spirit. The black elite is every bit as bourgeoisified as their white counterparts in a country that sells more Mercedes than Germany. Greed thrives in South Africa as it does all over the world.

I am hardly in a position to lecture even though I wouldn't say no to the opportunity. Even though I am by no means in the in-crowd, Thabo Mbeki found a second on "his day" to reach out and shake the hand and say hello by name to someone who has known him since the 1960s. Thabo may not be a Madiba (Nelson Mandela) but he would be an improvement on the President I have a problem calling my own.

More than meets the eye

There are very few places like South Africa with its great diversity, determination and democratic bottom-up energy. A talk with a leader of the union federation COSATU convinced me that there is more happening on the ground, in the factories and civic groups, to push for a more progressive agenda than meets the eye.

There is also a fledging left opposition that is certain to emerge by the next election. Amidst all the suits at the ceremony, there were still participants arriving in red South African Communist Party tee-shirts. (I saw a brilliant documentary on South African public TV about two members of that party who disappeared into the Soviet Gulag only to be re-embraced years later when Stalin's crimes were exposed.)

The new South Africa is no longer so new, and "Ten Years of Freedom" sounds here like a brand. TV advertisements sell the slogan like a product. I guess that's better than most of the crap we are being sold. Another slogan I saw called for "Deepening

democracy and the transformation.”

At least transformation here is on the agenda. At least this government opposes war and speaks of justice in the world. At a depressing moment in world history, that felt good. I only had to travel ten thousand miles, from Spring to Autumn, from North to South, to feel it. Many South Africans know their battle is not won, and may never be.”

And yet I interviewed a young Afrikaner performer who nervously entertained the mostly black crowd. They cheered her on in all of her bloneness and folk style. Afterwards she told me, she was surprised to be have been invited and very pleased by the reaction.

“The last government was all white – this time we must not have all black. We are all South Africans,” she said with a smile, clearly thrilled to be welcomed the way she was.

The poet Don Mattera gives voice to the contradictions of South Africa, to the deep pains that persist in all the tenth anniversary euphoria. In “Poetic Voices Celebrating a Decade of Freedom,” he writes of:

*This broken land this wounded place
bleeding rains of earth
crying a justice not done
dying a peace not won
this nation of pallbearers
not always mourners shall be
but gather fruit of the free
knowing true justice
living true peace
This land, the whole land
will be healed, must be healed.*

One last note: When I went through US, customs on my return, past lines of Muslim men being held for questioning in our land of the free, I was wearing a freebee “Ten Years of Freedom” T-Shirt. The inspector asked me what it meant. He said he thought it might be referring to my marital status. I laughed and wondered how he knew.

I was here ten years ago to film South Africa’s first democratic election. The world media was then out in force. Today, as veteran journalist Allister Sparks notes, “what is remarkable is how unremarkable” this latest election was. It was almost routine, as if democracy has been around forever.

How strange and refreshing to escape the hothouse of American politics, the war news from Iraq, and the latest media outrages. Traveling overseas is a way of letting some new “air” and imafes in my brain, especially here in the sumptuous sunshine and dynamism of South Africa.

America is not far away, of course, not by a long shot. American culture has implanted itself on the cultural front here in Johannesburg as CNN brings news and shopping malls show off the latest brands and while McDonalds pumps out its burgers without pause. Hip hop is here to stay and the familiar catches the eye although as someone who has been here many times, the familiar is changing too, with new construction, new government programs, and a heady optimism even as poverty and joblessness remains intractable.

As this country takes a day off to celebrate ten years of democracy/freedom, one senses a great spirit of relief that at least part of the racist legacy of apartheid is being eroded, and that South Africa did not succumb to the civil war and bloodletting that many of the wise men of the media predicted.

Themba Versus Tina

There is an economic debate here but it seems caught up in slogans like one articulated by Margaret Thatcher's famous retort to critics of her free market economic strategy. When pressed about economic injustice, the Iron Lady was dismissive, insisting, "There is no alternative." This defense of the status quo was soon translated into the catchy phrase "TINA," meaning "There Is No Alternative" to capitalism.

In South Africa recently, a counterslogan was coined in the campaign to get the debt burden canceled: "THEMBA" stands for "There Must Be an Alternative." In Zulu, the word "themba" means hope.

JULY 11, 2011

Cancer of corruption and 'Culture of Concealment'

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA: TWENTY-ONE YEARS AFTER NELSON Mandela walked free, corruption has become the issue du jour in South Africa.

Even president Jacob Zuma, who narrowly slithered out of a corruption trial before his election, is blasting corruption in the ranks of the African National Congress, which came to power as the morally superior alternative to an apartheid regime that shamelessly used the wealth it controlled to benefit Afrikaners and deprive the black majority of services.

“Let’s make a plan,” were the code words members of the all-white National Party used to scheme ways of stealing state resources to benefit themselves, a cozy reality overshadowed by the vicious racial policies that outraged the world.

As the ANC prepared to win power democratically, there was concern among leaders that a deprived black majority might feel it was “their turn” and thus, their right to cash in on their political victory. Some of their leaders would soon be adopting the deceptive language of making “plans” as well.

On election day in 1994, while millions were at the polls, I sat in the empty ANC Headquarters board room, in a building once owned by Shell Oil, and interviewed the late Joe Slovo, an ANC leader, a lead negotiator, and former head of the movement’s military wing, who worried even then about the dangers of his comrades seeking to profit personally.

“If we are seduced by the fleshpots,” he told me for the film *Countdown to Freedom*, that I was making on the election, “we

will be finished.”

Fast forward to 2011, in the post-Mandela and Mbeki era, and Slovo’s fears are now an acknowledged problem turning into a crisis that is splitting the ANC into factions and adding tensions to its long-term alliance with COSATU and the Communist Party.

While the ANC’s Youth League is demanding nationalization, its leaders, like Julius “Juju” Malema, have reportedly been on the take, profiting from what Archbishop Desmond Tutu called “the gravy train.” While they play the blame game, seeking nationalization of the mines, youth unemployment skyrockets with youth leaders not making that a priority. Malema was later suspended by the ANC for inappropriate language and conduct. (He now has his own party, The Electronic Freedom Fighters, that won 6.2% of the votes in the election of 2014.)

COSATU’s chief, Zwelinzima Vavi, has been speaking out against a “predatory state on its way to becoming a banana republic.” He denounces those who use the “levers of the state” to enrich themselves with high salaries, fancy cars and juicy government tenders/contracts that has led them to be ridiculed as “tenderpreneurs.”

Later, Vavi, who was being targeted for his independent stance often critical of the ANC, would be suspended from his job after having sex with a subordinate in the office, outraging supporters and his wife. His financial records on the job that he claims were fudged were later leaked by his political enemies to the press. He was planning to sue and has won one of his cases as this book went to press. He will remain a factor in labor politics.

In several high profile cases, top ANC leaders moved smoothly from politics to the private sector without flinching an eye. (In some cases, the ANC blessed and encouraged the moves, calling it “redeployment.” These newly minted CEOs took care of their

needs and their comrade cronies. Upward class mobility displaced racial justice as their key concern.

Cyril Ramaphosa, once a leader of the mine workers in the fight against apartheid, now runs McDonald's and other ventures even as he was co-opted (or in ANC parlance "deployed") into a high Party office. Others became CEOs of conglomerates and investment groups.

While individual corruption or, at least, conflicts of interest are pervasive, with a former national police chief found guilty of having been in business with a gangster, and a former ANC defense minister implicated in a multi-billion dollar arms deal with lots of illegal commissions and payoffs that have yet to be prosecuted, there are deeper institutional issues that are even more worrying because of what South Africa's great writer, Njabulo S. Ndebele, calls a "culture of concealment," the antithesis of transparency and accountability.

The desire for wealth and power and their concomitant cultures or concealment is now spreading throughout the body politic, partly through proposed secrecy legislation, partly through a militarized and brutal police force, partly through the patronage of cadre deployment, partly through the willingness of the voter to keep hoping, and partly through official self-righteousness in which truth is equated with government pronouncement.

Mamphela Ramphele, a black power activist and doctor in her youth turned respected academic and World Bank official, fears that "South Africa's young democracy is much more vulnerable and at greater risk than established Middle Eastern countries." She blames the failure to transform South Africa's educational system that has "left our young people at the mercy of those promising quick fixes."

The youth culture here – as in other countries – showcases

affluent life styles and blatant materialism that lead many to take corrupt and criminal shortcuts to finance fancy and unsustainable life styles. Young people take on unsustainable levels of debt to drive fancy cars or live in ritzy homes. Many of these loans lead to repossessions.

Inequality has deepened. Johannesburg's *Sunday Times* reports, "Despite being one of the poorest regions in the world, the number of super-wealthy individuals in Africa grew faster in 2010 than in any other region."

Egging all of this on are several big scandals in which the government is directly implicated as a key player, barely enforcing conflict of interest rules:

- The Black Empowerment scams through which white-run companies co-opt a few blacks who get shares to advance their own agendas in the name of a phony racial balance and reparations. While some in the new black middle and upper class benefit, inequality is blatant. This has led to great cynicism and encourages greed. Money, not morality, is the driver in ANC- sanctioned race to get rich quick.
- Big spectacles like the World Cup, subsidized by South Africa's taxpayers, made for a big party that left the country with a huge debt that requires cutbacks in public services. The soccer body FIFA called the World Cup in South Africa their most profitable ever, but they are the ones who got the most, along with the local companies they favored. The games benefited corporate marketers, with FIFA keeping TV rights money and paying no taxes. The press mostly covered the games, not the insidious wheeling and dealing behind them. TV stations refused to

show a critical documentary.

- The biggest scandal, bigger than the corrupt arms deal and “Oilgate,” in which funds from oil sales were siphoned into ANC party coffers, is happening now with the construction of two multi-billion dollar coal fire plants that will not only increase pollution, but benefit the ANC directly through a supposedly independent investment trust partnering with Hitachi of Japan.
- South Africa, which gave up its Israeli-supplied nuclear weapons in the apartheid days, is also now planning a huge new nuclear power plant, despite Fukushima and the risks. According to the *Financial Mail*, the leading business magazine, there are already “rumors of corruption and cronyism.”

Of course, corruption is rife in other countries, too, some born of revolutions like China, whose President recently sounded like Jacob Zuma in denouncing crimes by officials. In China, they shoot many corrupt bureaucrats; in South Africa, they are largely ignored, if not rewarded. In fact, anti-corruption police units and public prosecutors have been downsized and sidelined.

The US certainly can't lecture South Africa. I made a film, *Plunder, The Crime of Our Time*, showing how our financial crisis was sparked by Wall Street crime, in which US banksters illegally transferred more wealth to themselves than the kleptocrats here could even conceive. The US now has more high net worth individuals than any other country.

I never imagined that the “new” South Africa, a country that I, and so many millions around the world, fought for would succumb so quickly to deep and blatant corruption. Much of it had its origins in the private sector's “helping”/bribing willing

politicians. This part of the corruption equation is often ignored – the role of the corruptor as well as the corruptee!

It's painful for me to write about this because I have been a believer in South Africa's potential as a "Rainbow Nation" that has a lot to teach the world. It has improved the lot of millions even as poverty remains pervasive. There are great people here who sacrificed for their freedom and still struggle for the values and goals they believe in. They know right from wrong.

An indictment of the corrupt few should not take our eyes off a majority that is conscious of where they have been and work hard to survive and prosper where possible.

At the same time, they, too, are being put in jeopardy by what veteran journalist Allister Sparks calls, "a corrupt game of greed." If it is not combated, he warns, "it will be all downhill for the promising new South Africa."

The faith in the promises of Nelson Mandela for a "better life for all" is running up against an avaricious and secretive clique in a party that operates like a "family" in the Cosa Nostra sense, putting its own interests ahead of the public interest. The line between party and government is often blurred.

Mandela himself spoke to this shameful situation, "The symptoms of our spiritual malaise are only too familiar. They include the extent of corruption in both the public and private sector where office and positions of responsibility are treated as opportunities for self-enrichment . . . We have learned now that even those people with whom we fought the struggle against apartheid's corrupt can themselves become corrupted."

In South Africa, some activists have put their own twist on the slogan, "A luta continua" (The struggle continues) used by the liberation movement in neighboring Mozambique. They say here, "The looting continues." The situation is, if anything

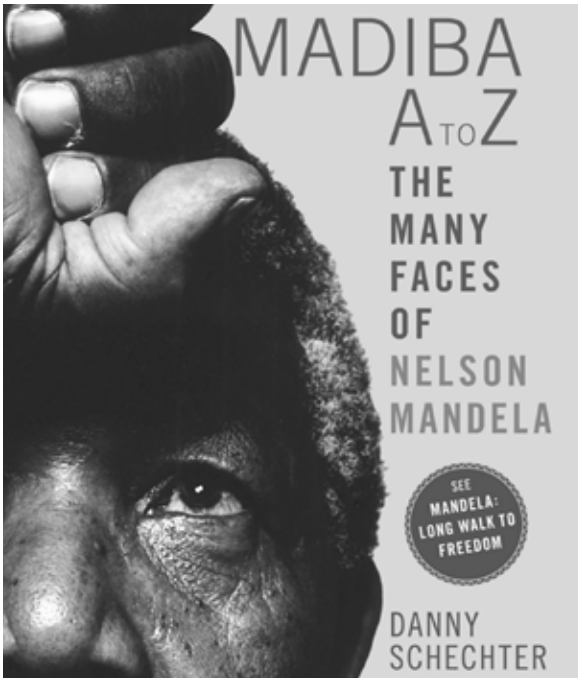
worse, in “revolutionary Angola” where the President’s family is a principal beneficiary.

At least in South Africa, leaders and the press recognize the problem and speak out. There is a Corruption Watch. Perhaps that’s something that politicians and financial leaders in the West, especially the United States, can emulate.

Media take note.

PART 5

Memorializing Mandela



Cover of my book, Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela, 2013 (Seven Stories Press)

THE NATION, JANUARY 2014

Nelson Mandela in retrospect

I once quipped that even after he was freed, I became a “Prisoner of Mandela,” still committed to his story as if I was incarcerated in his world, producing documentaries about him and, then, films about the movie made about him.

The documentaries and TV stories are there for all to see. In 2013, I wrote a book based on more than 150 interviews with people who knew him well, “Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela”.

We had a book party for him on a Monday. A few days later, on the Thursday, he died at age 95. The world media jumped on the story covering the funeral and memorial services as well as showing highlights of their earlier coverage.

I wrote about his death as I had covered his life. Here is some of the ‘coverage’ that appeared on many websites and publications.

AT LEAST NOW, NELSON MANDELA WON'T HAVE ANY SLEEPLESS nights coping with an unseemly family feud over money and property.

The tribal chiefs of his branch of the Xhosa people have urged the family to follow the lead of Graca Machel, his widely respected third wife of 18 years, the only member of the extended family never accused of seeking publicity or self-promotion. She took loving care of him as he aged until his diseased body gave out after he turned 95.

Also, now, he doesn't have to listen to the woulda, coulda, shoulda brigade of know-it-alls who were not part of the

liberation, but who now invoke his memory, only to accuse him simplistically of selling out and other betrayals.

Yes, there is a debate to be had on what was and was not achieved in the first twenty years of South Africa's hard fought struggle for democracy, but to be dismissive of his courage does history a disservice.

South Africans didn't vote for neo-liberalism but appear to have accepted it when it was foisted on them because they needed help from the West. The ANC focused on winning political power but corporate power there was, as it is here, resistant to deeper change and remains a corrupting force.

Mandela's iconic image has survived all of this noise on the left, the right and in the opportunistic center. Ninety-one heads of state paid respects at his memorial service, and then the United Nations General Assembly staged an unprecedented tribute that brought nations of all orientations together to sing his praises. Some in the ANC supported the strategy for personal material reasons.

What African leader has ever enjoyed such adulation and admiration? No, what modern political leader sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorism ever went from a most wanted man in his country to the most loved man in the world?

You can count the well-known personalities that live up to his reputation on one finger of one hand.

At the same time, as I explain in my new book, "Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela" (Seven Stories Press), it is inaccurate to sanctify or stereotype him as a revolutionary saint, or South African Santa Claus, or as the man who waved a magic wand to free his country.

His funeral was probably the very type of spectacle he would have hated, focusing just on him and not the collective leadership

of the movement that, he insisted, deserved all the credit.

Those of us who watched the memorial on TV were upset by all the media distractions, the attention given to that mentally ill self-styled sign language interpreter who now boasts of being a “fake,” and the amount of airtime devoted to President Obama’s “selfie” photo.

Most Americans don’t know there was a similar criticism in Johannesburg’s *Mail & Guardian* of South African kids who got caught up in the media frenzy and were endlessly snapping photos of themselves at his home for posting to their Facebook and for their Twitter networks.

There was more discussion of what being there felt like, than what Madiba’s passing meant for the country and the world. The kids reveled in their ‘fifteen seconds’ of fame by tagging a leader who has been in the spotlight for decades.

Don’t get me wrong. Mandela liked adulation, playing a charismatic chief-like role. But he was, at the same time, uncomfortable with the cult of the personality that portrayed him in politics and the media.

He was extremely self-aware. His last book detailed his own confessions of flaws and weaknesses.

Mandela’s lawyer and long time friend, George Bizos, who fled to South Africa as a refugee from Greece told me that Madiba hated being worshipped, for reasons connected to his sense of personal humility, his political convictions, and loyalty to his closest comrades

“Hardly ever, in jail or outside, did he take any major decision without saying ‘I have a view of the matter but let me discuss it with Walter,’ Walter Sisulu, who was in my view, the wise man of the struggle.”

Bizos said his friend never spoke in terms of “I,” only we.

And what about all the statues honoring him?

“As his friend I was approached earlier on after his release ‘What can we do to please Mr. Mandela?’ and I discussed that with him and he said, ‘I don’t want things to be named after me, I don’t want statues put up. If they want to please me [and] they have money let them build a school or a clinic and, if they have enough money for both, let them do both.’”

Mandela’s legendary magnanimity did not mean that he couldn’t be tough, even stubborn. In the early days, some activists saw him as a bully with “wild branches” that had to be tamed.

I write about that now sanitized history only to show that he was always a work in progress, the angry young African Nationalist known for womanizing and being a bit of a demagogue who turned into a sober and thoughtful movement leader. He claimed prison “matured” him and made him more willing to speak with and understand the fears of his enemies.

I was never his friend, but my own immersion in struggle politics, filmmaking and running the South Africa Now public television series allowed me to enjoy a certain access as I directed six documentaries about him, and, more recently, covered the making and meaning of the new Mandela mega-movie, “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom”.

I was close enough to observe his leadership style and see some of the contradictions between the power of an individual and the demands of the collective. In the course of that project, I interviewed members of the original cast of the film and those involved in the fight for freedom, including former presidents, prison comrades and guards, activists who have become officials at the top and other who have to survive the deep poverty in township shacks. I was looking for what we don’t know about his life and role.

His ANC comrade Pallo Jordan praised his willingness to change with the times, “Nelson Mandela was the radical, the militant, the lawyer, the MK commander, and the initiator of negotiations and reconciliation. Reducing him to any one of these diminishes the man and his stature.”

Former ANC leader Raymond Suttner recalled, “He changed a lot over the years as his conditions altered; he changed as a human being. We are not dealing with a person whose identity as a man can be reduced to one single, enduring quality.”

These are the shifts I examine in “Madiba A to Z”.

It became clear that different people had their own views of Mandela, stressing character traits that they admired, and overlooking others, identifying with political decisions they liked and ignoring the ones they didn't.

His smile and style provided a comfort factor as if he was a member of their own family. Perhaps that's why so many South Africans called him “Tata” – Father.

For the people of South Africa, Mandela was a leader with whom they could identify. He was one of them, and had suffered alongside them. They could relate to his story in personal terms, but many recognized that just as they adored him, they needed him. They needed a Mandela to bring them together, to help them find a future together, and to symbolize a positive outcome that was anything but clear.

He understood that too – and played that role even when it was in conflict with his more political instincts to promote the collective rather than take a personal position. To believe in themselves, many South Africans needed to believe in him, someone who validated their suffering, and had support and recognition from the world beyond the boundaries of South Africa.

Yes, Mandela's life has been a heroic story lived over decades,

some in conditions of secrecy, others as a wanted fugitive and then as a very public figure. He never lost his personal signature – whether by dancing/shuffling at rallies, evading his body guards, wearing Indonesian-style “Madiba shirts” or phoning world leaders such as Tony Blair or George Bush to scold them about the war in Iraq.

And, yet, as we remember him in the largely pre-internet era, we also have to recognize how mass struggle and global solidarity changed South Africa.

His was a non-racial movement that also stands for a non-sexist society. In his touching tribute on the day of the burial, his closest prison comrade, Ahmed “Kathy” Kathrada championed the contributions of all of South Africa’s peoples from many races, cultures and backgrounds.

He often said Mandela did not lead a black revolution but a people’s movement.

After the funeral, the former Archbishop Desmond Tutu gave the ANC a well deserved reprimand for not including more representatives from the Afrikaner and White communities.

As I discovered in my years of going to South Africa – dating back to the 1960’s at age 25 – the country has an infectious spirit that, even with all its problems, can teach us about people working together, struggling and winning.

TRUTHOUT

Mandela was unable to dismantle the white oligarchy keeping South Africa in economic chains

THE LATE NELSON MANDELA BECAME AN ICON OF A FEARLESS leader on behalf of equality. He fought oppression, but in winning the battle of justice in South Africa, he did not pursue a path of vengeance. Instead, he sought reconciliation and compromise.

In Schechter's new book, accessibly organized into alphabetical sections about Mandela's life, a passage on Mandela the negotiator exposes how much the majority population in South Africa had to give to achieve a democracy.

The following excerpt from "Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela" offers insight into how while the nation changed in terms of who politically ruled it, the economic power remained concentrated in white and western economic hands. It is from the section entitled, "Negotiator".

In their 2012 book, "Who Rules South Africa?" journalists Martin Plaut and Paul Holden wrote that the ANC had little grasp on how to transform the economy. International investors opposed nationalization on principle. Nationalization was viewed as "socialistic" at a time that the socialist countries were collapsing.

When Mandela visited the World Economic Forum in 1991, and again a year later, he was advised – not just by capitalists but by leaders of socialist countries like China and Vietnam, as well, to promote a mixed economy. His original speech was promptly

modified to appease that sentiment.

I asked historian Verne Harris of the Mandela Centre of Memory about this. I expected he would dismiss it. He didn't. Here's part of our exchange:

"I think there's an element of truth in that. . . . I think that under Madiba's leadership the ANC embraced a neoliberal agenda with unseemly haste and we're paying a terrible price for that now. . . . We're only beginning to understand the nature of this phenomenon. From the late 1980s, a huge seduction was underway, of the liberation movement by capital, and it's playing out in all kinds of destructive ways now, from arms deals to corruption. We're having it at all levels of our society."

In his biography of Mandela, Anthony Sampson acknowledged, "Mandela had no experience in economics, but he accepted the imperatives of the global marketplace." In furtherance of this market logic, he appointed Derek Keys, de Klerk's pro-market finance minister as his own, and then, when he stepped down, replaced him with Chris Liebenberg, a banker. He kept Chris Stals, a conservative former member of the Broederbond, on the Reserve Bank. In essence, he said, "the old guard was running what to all the world looked like a new show."

Ronnie Kasrils, the MK commander turned government minister, looked back on this history and wondered whether compromises that were made then sealed the country's fate, in effect, blocking deeper social change. Twenty years later, in a new 2013 introduction to his autobiography, "Armed and Dangerous", Kasrils wrote:

"What I call our Faustian moment came when we took an IMF loan on the eve of our first democratic election. That loan, with strings attached that precluded a radical economic agenda,

was considered a necessary evil, as were concessions to keep negotiations on track and take delivery of the promised land for our people. Doubt had come to reign supreme: We believed, wrongly, there was no other option, that we had to be cautious, since by 1991 our once powerful ally, the Soviet Union, bankrupted by the arms race, had collapsed. Inexcusably, we had lost faith in the ability of our own revolutionary masses to overcome all obstacles. Whatever the threats to isolate a radicalizing South Africa, the world could not have done without our vast reserves of minerals.

To lose our nerve was not necessary or inevitable. The ANC leadership needed to remain determined, united and free of corruption – and, above all, to hold on to its revolutionary will. Instead, we chickened out. The ANC leadership needed to remain true to its commitment of serving the people. This would have given it the hegemony it required not only over the entrenched capitalist class but over emergent elites, many of whom would seek wealth through black economic empowerment, corrupt practices and selling political influence.”

Kasrils had hoped the West would commit to a “new Marshall Plan,” – like the one that led to the reconstruction of Europe after World War II - to rebuild South Africa’s apartheid-ravaged economy, but the West did not respond.

Instead, Western financial agencies counseled more privatization and fewer jobs in the face of dramatic unemployment. South Africa’s needs and the hopes of its people were not persuasive to a self-interested US-dominated economic order, he said.

Later, in a conversation with Richard Stengel for his last book, “Conversations with Myself”, Mandela revealed that American businessmen put a lot of pressure on the ANC to drop its

initial commitment to nationalization. Mandela recounted meeting many leaders at the World Economic Forum who advised against it and he admits, “We had to remove the fear of business that . . . their assets will be nationalized.”

Jay Naidoo has agreed that many of South Africa’s current problems go back to what was resolved or not resolved in the negotiations, but he doesn’t blame Nelson Mandela:

“These were our decisions. The decision to replace the RDP with a macroeconomic program that just focused on the financial industries was our decision. No one made it for us. We have to hold ourselves accountable for that. And that document was drafted in secret. Not even the ANC office bearer saw it. Not even the national executive committee of the ANC saw it. We saw it on the day it was published. So there was a conspiracy in our own ranks which obviously had interacted with very powerful economic forces in the country, and felt that the RDP was too radical.”

Naidoo’s conclusion is hard to argue with as he adds: “We have created a Molotov cocktail in this country. And all that we see today, the violence that we see, the anger that we see, is a consequence of those decisions that we made then. I don’t hold Mandela responsible for it. Sometimes I hold myself responsible. It’s my generation that has failed the country.”

These problems were not caused simply by personal failures. South Africa was never in the driver’s seat when it came to its economy. It was subject to decisions about trade and investment made elsewhere. Also, the ANC government never controlled the economic levers that were dominated domestically by a small number of banks and companies that may have praised Nelson Mandela as a leader, but didn’t necessarily listen to him in terms of his government’s priorities.

In interviews with key decision makers in the ANC and in the ANC-led government that took place over a period of years, scholar Pdraig O'Malley kept asking ANC leaders about these issues. Often the responses were overly optimistic or indicated a lack of knowledge about who was calling the shots in economic terms.

Here is an interview from May 17, 1996, between O'Malley and Pallo Jordan:

Pdraig: Unemployment. Stuck. No improvement being made at all. At the same time we pick up *Business Day* every other day and you see that corporate profits are soaring. Where are the corporate profits going? Are they being ploughed back into technology that eliminates jobs or are they being distributed to shareholders or are they being siphoned off into other investments that are essentially non-productive in terms of creating jobs?

Pallo: What I think we're stuck with is limited growth, but growth without job creation. And perhaps we need much more rapid growth, to increase the growth rate to something like 6% to make that sort of impact. But of course one of the problems, I think, is that new technologies tend to be more capital – than labor-intensive. One is going to have to look much more at your public works programs for the immediate, for your job creation programs, and one is also going to have to look to your small- and medium-size enterprises and encouraging those as job creators. They tend to be much more effective job creators than your large corporations. Perhaps not sufficient attention has been paid to encouraging that sector because I think you will note also that even with your black economic empowerment programs lots of those are targeting the big corporate giants rather than seeing the emergence of small- and medium-size enterprises.”

And around and around the discourse went but, perhaps

because of the government's pro-market neoliberal direction, as well as pressure from top elites and fear of alienating local and global business, reforming the economy wasn't given the attention it deserved.

Politicians tended to rule over politics, while big business, in South Africa like elsewhere in the world, have mostly demanded a free hand to run the economy. I asked Thabo Mbeki for his perspective on what went wrong. He was Mandela's deputy president before serving as president for nine years himself. His take: "I think that the fundamental problems of South Africa have remained unchanged since the transition in 1994. The fundamental problems of poverty, inequality ...

"One of the problems, one of the challenges that we have never been able to solve in all these years since our liberation, is the attitude of white capital. Even today, I promise you as we're talking now, there are large volumes of investable money that South African companies are holding in cash, and not investing in the economy."

TRUTHDIG

Blurring Mandela and neo-liberalism

WHAT IS WORTH CONSIDERING IS THAT MANDELA'S FAME GREW in the very years that the South African government blocked his image from being shown or his being quoted in the press. His legend blossomed in the absence of press coverage, even as now it may be diminished by the media oversaturation that followed his death.

I have been covering the South African story for many years and recall, with disgust, the many calls I received from TV program bookers who knew I had made films with Mandela and thought I could get them what is known in the trade as “the big get” – an exclusive interview.

When I pressed the callers on what they wanted to learn, I was told, just having him on was as important as anything he might have to say. They were like the big white game hunters who saw him as prey, there to buttress their wannabe credibility.

Who knows, bagging such big game could lead to a pay raise, or promotion and bragging rights

Meanwhile, the TV networks have to staff their stakeouts. That's why Nelson Mandela became known among local journos as an “FBR,” the freelancers best friend. Many feared that once Mandela is gone, so will international media interest in South Africa.

There was anger amidst the apprehension in South Africa as the numbers of “journalists” on the Mandela death watch grew, members of his family had about had it, comparing what even the *New York Times* called a “media swarm” to African vultures

that wait to pounce on the carcasses of dead animals.

(That swarm then temporarily moved to the UK to stake out the birth of a “Royal Baby” when Mandela defied the odds and surprised onlookers by reportedly “doing better,” what ever that meant. He seemed assured to live, at least, until July 18th, his 95th birthday marked worldwide as a day of national service known as “Mandela Day.”)

President Obama was soon in South Africa, carrying a message that he called one of “profound gratitude” to Nelson Mandela. The *Times* reported, “Mr. Obama said the main message he intended to deliver to Mr. Mandela, “if not directly to him but to his family, is simply our profound gratitude for his leadership all these years and that the thoughts and prayers of the American people are with him, and his family, and his country.”

It didn't seem as if the South African's grieving for their former president's imminent demise were too impressed with Obama seeking the spotlight. Some groups including top unions protested his receiving an honorary degree from a university in Johannesburg.

Interestingly, NBC with its team buttressed by former US South African correspondent (PBS/NPR/CNN) Charlayne Hunter-Gault, did not bother to cover the protest but relied on Reuters reporting “nearly 1,000 trade unionists, Muslim activists, South African Communist Party members and others marched to the US Embassy where they burned a US flag, calling Obama's foreign policy “arrogant and oppressive.”

“We had expectations of America's first black president. Knowing Africa's history, we expected more,” Khomotso Makola, a 19-year-old law student, told Reuters. He said Obama was a “disappointment, I think Mandela, too, would be disappointed and feel let down.”

South African critics of Obama have focused in particular on his support for US drone strikes overseas, which they say have killed hundreds of innocent civilians, and his failure to deliver on a pledge to close the US military detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba housing terrorism suspects.” (Oddly, The South African police detained a local cameraman who used his own drone to photograph “Madiba’s hospital” from above. He was stopped for “security” reasons.)

For symbolic reasons, as well as because of his larger-than-life global popularity, Nelson Mandela seems to be of special interest to the American media with the networks, nominally in an austerity mode, busting their budgets to have a dominant presence.

South African skeptic Rian Malan writes in the *Spectator*, “Every time Mandela goes into hospital, large numbers of Americans (up to 50) are flown here to take up their positions, and the South African network is similarly activated. Colin, a cameraman who works for a US network, for instance, travels to Johannesburg, hires a car and checks into a hotel, all on the network’s ticket. Since last December, he’s probably spent close to 30 days (at \$2000 a day, expenses included) cooling his heels at various poolsides. And he has yet to shoot a single frame.

As Colin says, this could be the worst disaster in American media history, inter alia because all these delays are destroying the story. When the old man finally dies, a lot of punters are going to yawn and say, Mandela died? Didn’t that already happen a year ago?” Hostility to the this media is satirized in an “open letter from the foreign media to South Africa,” written by Richard Poplak in the *Daily Maverick*.

“As you may have noted, we’re back! It’s been four long months since the Oscar Pistorius bail hearing thing, and just as

we were forgetting just how crappy the Internet connections are in Johannesburg, the Mandela story breaks.

We feel that it is vital locals understand just how big a deal this is for us. In the real world – far away from your sleepy backwater – news works on a 24-hour cycle. That single shot of a hospital with people occasionally going into and out of the front door, while a reporter describes exactly what is happening – at length and in detail? That’s our bread and butter. It’s what we do.

And you need to get out of the way while we do it.”

Why all the fanatical interest? The US media loves larger than life personalities, often creating them when they don’t exist. Mandela has assumed the heroic mantle for them of Martin Luther King Jr. whose memory enjoys iconic status even as his achievements like the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act was just picked apart by right-wing judicial buzzards in black robes. (King’s image was also sanitized with his international outlook often muzzled).

It wasn’t always like this. It was worse. For many years, The US media treated Mandela as a communist and terrorist, respecting South African censorship laws that kept his image secret. Reports about the CIA’s role in capturing him were few and far between. Ditto for evidence of US spying documented in cables released by Wikileaks.

In the Reagan years, his law partner Oliver Tambo, then the leader of the ANC while he was in prison, was barred from coming to the US and then, when he did, with meeting top officials. Later, Dick Cheney refused to support a Congressional call for Mandela’s release from jail.

In 1988, I, among other TV producers, launched the TV series South Africa Now to cover the unrest the networks were largely ignoring as stories shot by US crews ended up on “the shelf,” not

on the air.

A 1988 concert to free Mandela was shown by the Fox Network as a “freedom fest” with artists told not to mention his name, lest they “politicize” all the fun. When he was released in 2000, a jammed all-star celebration at London’s Wembley Stadium was shown everywhere in the world, except by the American networks.

Once he adopted reconciliation as his principal political tenet and dropped demands for nationalization anchored in the ANC’s “Freedom Charter,” his image in the US was quickly rehabilitated. He was elevated into a symbolic hero for all praised by the people and the global elite alike. Little mention was made of his role as the creator of an Armed Struggle.

US networks also did not cover the role played by the US dominated IMF and World Bank in steering the economy in a market-oriented neo-liberal direction, assuring the new government could not erase deep inequality and massive poverty and that the whites would retain privileges.

The American press shaped how Mandela was portrayed in the US. The lawyer and anti-nuclear campaigner, Alice Slater, tells a story of her efforts to win Mandela’s support for nuclear disarmament. “(When)... Nelson Mandela announced that he would be retiring from the presidency of South Africa, we organized a world-wide letter writing campaign, urging him to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons at his farewell address to the United Nations. The gambit worked. At the UN, Nelson Mandela called for the elimination of nuclear weapons, saying, “these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction –why do they need them anyway?”

The London Guardian had a picture of Mandela on its front page, with the headline, “Nelson Mandela Calls for the Elimination

of Nuclear Weapons.” The New York Times had a story buried on page 46, announcing Mandela’s retirement from the Presidency of South Africa and speculating on who might succeed him, reporting that he gave his last speech as President to the UN, while omitting to mention the content of his speech.”

And so it goes, with his death seeming to be imminent, he has become reduced to a symbolic mythic figure, a moral voice, not the politician he always was. He became an adorable grandfather praised for his charities with his political ideas and values often buried in the ether of his celebrity. He insisted that he not be treated as a saint or a savior. Tell that to the media.

As ANC veteran Pallo Jordan told me, “To call him a celebrity is to treat him like Madonna. And that’s not what he is. At the same time, he deserves to be celebrated as the freedom fighter he was.”

Actually, Obama did credit Mandela’s military role in an eloquent address that also took twice as much air time as other heads of state.

CONFRONTING THE TENTACLES OF COVERT POWER

Mandela and Snowden: Two heroes with more in common than we know

IT'S HAS BEEN CALLED "THE LONG GOODBYE" WITH THE WORLD press updating their updates hourly on Nelson Mandela's health status with lots of speculation about when he would pass on.

The massive media interest in Mandela is a remarkable tribute to a very special man who helped undo apartheid while thrilling the world with his courage as the prisoner who became a President.

Its been said that Mandela had become, after Coca-Cola, the second best known brand in the world so perhaps the positive media focus is understandable given his high approval numbers and status in the pantheon of liberators. What other ailing political leader gets this kind of sustained attention? (Ironically, for many years, newspaper there could not mention his name or show his image. The censorship was total. Media outlets there became an arm of government repression.)

Widely accepted heroes in the world are in short supply these days as we can see also from the current media treatment of whistleblower Edward Snowden who many also view as a hero – a majority of those surveyed – while, curiously, a majority of the media punditocracy takes a more cynical and negative view echoing government secrecy rationales – the same way most of the White press did in South Africa for decades.

Many of our "thought leaders" ask if he isn't really a traitor to be prosecuted rather than an information liberator to be hailed. The host of NBC's "Meet The Press" program even asked Glenn Greenwald who has been reporting on the story, "Why shouldn't

you be in jail.” He couldn’t conceal his hostility.

All too often, media insiders in high places tend to be deferential and protective of government officials in high places – and detest rebels unless they can milk them for ratings and revenues. They uphold establishment values and often cover for government crimes. This is why outsiders are needed to blow the whistle.

Clearly these two stories are very different, but there are some parallels that almost no one in the media commented on.

Both men are heroes to those who believe in freedom – the right to be free from racist laws in one case, and onerous spying in another.

Both men stood up against the powers to be. One was prosecuted and jailed; the other soon may be.

One was a leader of a radical movement and political liberation fighter. The other, more the loner and electronic liberation libertarian, seen as part of a loose anarchistic affinity network that includes Bradley Manning, Wikileaks, Anonymous and many politically-conscious hactivists.

We can’t forget that Mandela was branded a terrorist for years, and hidden from media view. He was tried for treason in South Africa’s famous treason trial of the fifties during which 156 leaders of the freedom fight were charged with violating the Suppression of Communism Act. Informers and “experts” on communism were used to make the case until one of them blew his credibility by labeling an article that he himself had written as “communist.”

After four years of grueling testimony, they were all acquitted in a widely condemned trial in an apartheid-era Court that, in retrospect, may have been fairer than the ones Manning and his band of brothers face.

Later, in the 60’s after Mandela had gone underground to lead an armed struggle, he was arrested again and charged, this time

with sabotage. He and his high-profile comrades faced the death penalty but got off with life sentences that led to his 27 abusive years behind bars. It was at that trial that he gave his memorable, “I am prepared to die” speech.

Snowden has now been repeatedly denounced for treason, and charged with espionage, an accusation that much of the big media literally seemed to have endorsed. Top politicians from both parties have pronounced his guilt while the media sycophants that take them seriously question his motives and impact.

The often liberal Daily Beast turned to a Romney advisor to call for draconian penalties for him and Wikileaks. This conjures up the memory of Alice in Wonderland: “First the verdict, then the trial.”

The courage of Mandela and Snowden also excites admirers who shower them with praise for their gutsy defense of liberty. What many in the media chose not to remind us is that South Africa’s “real father of democracy” was actually caught and incarcerated thanks to a tip from the very forces Snowden is fighting.

It was the CIA that had been tracking Mandela – with the less sophisticated surveillance technologies available then – and who tipped South Africa’s secret policy as to his whereabouts.

A June 10th 1990, *New York Times* report quoted an unidentified retired official who said that a senior CIA officer told him shortly after Mr. Mandela’s arrest, “We have turned Mandela over to the South African security branch. We gave them every detail, what he would be wearing, the time of day, just where he would be.”

AP quoted Paul Eckel, then a senior CIA operative, as boasting that Mandela’s capture “was one of our greatest coups.” There were some earlier press reports in the 80’s about this CIA role, too, but they never triggered the scandal they should have.

Somehow, it was considered acceptable then that a secret US

agency was in collusion with a white racist state battling freedom fighters.

This is a connection between Snowden and Mandela that may explain why American “intelligence” tends so often to be on the wrong side, or maybe just is the wrong side. Clearly our intelligence overlords had as their priority then what they do today: the protection of the global status quo.

More recently, cables released by Wikileaks published by five leading newspapers worldwide, exposed private conversations with Mandela about his desire to meet Margaret Thatcher and correct her attitudes towards the South African struggle.

Another released secret cable earlier exposed plans by then State President F.W. de Klerk to free Mandela – before those plans were made public.

Clearly we were spying on them, but again, the US seems to have been protecting the guardians of white power. (As they protected Mubarak until he was a political goner in another part of Africa.)

Now the tables seem to have turned – at least in some respects, because of the courage of the whistleblowers that took on a government committed to massive spying.

Despite his many detractors in the intelligence ‘business,’ and its supporters in Congress or rationalizers in the press, Snowden’s actions seems to have turned him into a popular figure, writes Gary Stamper:

“Edward Snowden...is coming across as the all-American hero, according to a poll today that showed 70% support for him and his actions with the American public. Compare that with the popularity of Congress which is mostly calling for Snowden’s Bradley Manning moment. If he continues to elude the CIA and America’s security apparatus can’t catch him soon, his stock will

soar as Americans pretty much love a heroic underdog.

“One of the reporters from the *Guardian* newspaper who arranged with Snowden to meet in Hong Kong for interviews told the Associated Press that he had been contacted by “countless people” offering to pay for “anything [Snowden] might need.”

The 94-year-old Mandela and the 29 year old Snowden come from different parts of the world and fought differently in different eras.

Already, Congressman Ron Paul, the libertarian who Snowden supported with a campaign donation is fearing for his life, saying, “I’m worried about, somebody in our government might kill him with a cruise missile or a drone missile... we live in a bad time where American citizens don’t even have rights and that they can be killed, but the gentlemen is trying to tell the truth about what’s going on.”

The whole world is watching as Snowden so far eludes capture; Mandela, when underground, had been branded the “Black Pimpernel” when he, too, avoided capture on many occasions by a blundering secret police – until the CIA turned him in.

Today, millions of Mandela’s supporters are bracing for the announcement of his death because of his age and an infirmity he contacted in prison.

The man his country calls “Madiba” – his clan name – is a political genius, who lived long enough to complete what he called his ‘long walk to freedom.’ He has written that that journey is not over for South Africa, even though it may be ending for him.

Snowden knows his travails may just be starting as he becomes an international outlaw, but one with access to secrets that the powerful want to keep secret. He faces many challenges, especially to stay one step ahead of his pursuers who are indignant because he has so far outmaneuvered them and made them a laughing stock.

Mandela not only has health issues but also a family revolt on his hands with two daughters suing his lawyer and close friend who are administering a trust that he set up, looking for money for their families.

What is widely perceived as their greed is evidence of how the values Mandela fought for have been corrupted in the new South Africa. When he was more politically active, Mandela spoke out against this betrayal of the struggle that was his life.

Snowden's stance grew out of his discovery that the American public was being abused by the rise of a technocratic and out of control surveillance leviathan.

In their own ways, and in their own times, both and Snowden have seized the public imagination.

Both are rebels of our times. Both were hunted, denounced and denigrated for opposing governmental abuse, and, yet, remain widely respected and admired,

Mandela helped free a nation. Snowden, with the help of friends is trying to free himself.

Update: Snowden was finally interviewed by an American network a full year after he publically admitted leaking secrets. Mandela had to wait 27 years for a similar interview.

PART 6

Look Back To Look Forward



**Giving Mandela a copy of my documentary,
Mandela in America, Cape Flats, South
Africa, 2002**

AFTERWORD

Reflecting on the challenges ahead

AS I WRITE, DREDGING UP OLD STORIES AND DOCUMENTING my own involvement over so many decades I often feel like I am one of the few American journalists who still cares about developments in South Africa. For most of the media, it's "been there, done that." It's yesterday's news.

When Nelson Mandela seemed on the verge of death, there was much interest in the story, not about the country or its situation, but only about one revered personality.

I was asked by a few TV programs to make myself available to comment as an around-the-clock death watch was being mounted. If he lived, there would be no coverage and no interest. There didn't even be any interest in why so many people in the world remember him and care about him with so much passion.

Media analysts like Robb Nixon wrote about South Africa in the American press and specifically about the cultural and media impact of Mandela mania. Nixon's writings on Mandela were discussed by Jeanne M. Collier in *Modern Fiction Studies*:

"Part of the appeal of South African cultural products internationally, and part of the reason for much of the uncritical reception extended them has to do with what Nixon rightly sees as a unique feature of South Africa's anti-colonialist struggle: the extent to which the struggle became 'so fully globalized.'"

Nixon saw, she added, "Nelson Mandela as an American media icon, [recognizing] the widening gulf between spectacular media politics and the more ambiguous realm of actual political work. His description of the relentless American desire to appropriate Mandela's radical politics and transform them into

a more benign Martin-not-Malcolm version of race relations is a second persuasive example of the refusal of American cultural conglomerates to view the players involved in any political drama in anything but binary terms.”

At the same time, on the day of his release, as Nixon wrote then, Madiba took a very non-American approach to the way he greeted the people who flocked to see him in Cape Town.

“When Mandela finally arrived, the occasion turned into an unmediated un-American media event. Rather than using the crowd as a decoy or an address via satellite to the world, Mandela appeared indifferent to the cameras while speaking directly to those bodily present, as if spell-bound, just hours out of solitude by such physical evidence of his reunion with the mass of humanity.

His oratorical style and the crowd’s spirit brought to mind a rally from a pre-tech era. ... Mandela launched his first live speech in almost thirty years by taking direct issue with the redemptive conception of him. “I stand before you, he declared, “not as a prophet but as a humble servant of the people.”

There is no question that race had something to do with the global interest with many media outlets projecting the racial divide in the US onto South Africa as if the two were the same. They aren’t and they weren’t.

As many American black politicians and entertainers rallied to the cause, the media was dragged along in a way looking for a positive spin on how we might resolve the racial polarization in America.

As a larger-than-life, tall, handsome figure with a winning smile, he could easily be showcased as Hollywood-like hero. By the 1990’s the celebrityfication of media had become a dominant genre, and Mandela’s struggle that was reduced to black versus

white, good versus bad, played well even if those covering his first speech didn't realize or wouldn't acknowledge that he saw himself not just as a man but as part of a movement.

Media outlets prefer to focus on individuals, not groups, on the "big" men who make news, not the movements that often make history. Historians also focus on "the great and the good", usually elites, not the people down below, so I wasn't surprised by the disinterest.

The Academy Awards dissed the Mandela movie, perhaps because in our culture depictions of individual violence trumps state sponsored violence and that crime and victimization trumps political liberation. The movie didn't have studio backing and strong lobbying, and its South African producer was not a member of the Hollywood club that each year honors itself, but remains largely without any sense of global responsibility, whatever the image it seeks to cultivate. A story about slavery in the past was, in the end, a safer subject than a celebration of a people's struggle today. Even the documentary awards passed over three hard-hitting political films for a feel-good story about black background singers in the entertainment business. No one mentioned that Darlene Love, one of the great singers honored, had been one of the stars of our very political anti-apartheid music project, Sun City, years earlier.

I was grateful to be asked to direct documentaries on the making and meaning of the story told in the movie, but I was always keenly aware that the narrative had been sanitized with much of the politics, the role of the ANC in exile and the commitment of the white comrades, save Mandela's lawyers, written out of the script so that it could be told through the prism of a love story, his mostly apart relationship with Winnie. This Hollywood-style narrative became the centerpiece of *The Long Walk*. That's why

I pushed to include as much of what was missing in the films I made, and in the book I wrote, *Madiba A To Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*.

The book, edited in New York by Dan Simon of Seven Stories Press reflected my perspective, but even as it was “funded” by the movie company, it was not promoted in the promotion of the film (even as we plugged the movie.) Hence, our “tie-in” was a one way street.

That was a disappointment but, sadly, predictable, given the way commerce trumps consciousness, with companies “staying on message” as surely as politicians. The movie’s American distributor, the powerful Harvey Weinstein, known in the industry for his bullying, couldn’t be less interested or supportive, although he was happy to get free books to show-off his concerns.

He seemed more interested in organizing expensive – written-off against the budget – glitzy premieres with the high and mighty at the White House and JFK Center in Washington where, to give the appearance of bipartisanship, the hawkish Republican John McCain was a host, along with Colin Powell on the Iraq War infamy. All these endorsements by the people at the top that Harvey sought approval from – and to move among – did not, as they say in the movie biz, sell tickets or put ‘butts in seats.”

The South African producers were overwhelmed by the challenge of getting the ambitious film down to a marketable size and getting it out worldwide. Much was cut. I am sure director Justin Chadwick was not happy with all the interference, but kept a professional silence. All in all, I thought Chadwick and his team navigated the mine field thoughtfully and well, and created a powerful movie.

“Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom” became a “star vehicle” more than the kind of collective triumph that Mandela always had

insisted on. All the buzz was soon about Idris Elba as Mandela, with far less attention to the stellar cast including Naomie Harris, Tony Kgoroge, Terry Pheto, Riaad Moosa. Jamie Bartlett et. al.

No one producer, especially an “outsider” without any financial interest in the project, could expect to have a final say. So the spirit of the media work I always championed was replaced in the same way that the television system in the “new” South Africa came to resemble the old with a lack of cutting-edge programming, lots of Hollywood and US imports, and an advertiser-inundated consumer orientation that had little to do with fostering democracy unless you were interested in the SABC’s program-length commercials advertising funeral directors and costly insurance.

News was often censored, perhaps not as blatantly as before, but scrutiny of corruption was pushed to the side even as the South African Broadcasting Corporation became a show piece of corruption itself, with overpaid executives, and mostly inexperienced political appointees, plundering resources for self-gain, while freelance producers and independent film companies had to fight to be paid. It became a cynical joke and a permanent institutional scandal rather than a beacon of education and symbol of transformation. This is not what we fought for.

Talk about betrayal!

As I survey the snatch of South African history I was able to cover over all these years I can’t deny that I was forced to confront part of a mirage that I helped reinforce by, perhaps, not looking closely enough at some underlying realities present in all societies and political movements that invariably inspire cynicism, criticism and detachment.

The more I came to know, the more demoralizing it felt. In recent years, I became disturbed by sickening corruption in the

ANC, often in collusion with the corporate sector and increasingly repressive measures, once again showing that power can easily be abused and that bureaucracies the world over tend to act alike.

An “information/secretcy” bill promoted by the South African government puts privacy and free speech at risk. The shooting down of striking miners showed that there is no racial monopoly on brutality. What seems clear is that every generation has its own fight for transparency and accountability.

There are many critics in South Africa today – almost everyone I meet. Mandela’s widow, Graca Machel says South Africa today is “an angry nation.” The unity that made the anti-apartheid movement so powerful has dissipated, and the government seems unable to admit mistakes or speak to the deepening dissatisfaction.

Here’s part of one “critique” by a South African that touched me. It is about people dying from a lack of services in the Eastern Cape, the very area that the world press invaded to cover Mandela’s funeral. It’s the region that he grew up in. Who in the media even reported on the reality surrounding the staged event?

Apologies to the author whose name I misplaced, but this statement touched me. “Six million people depend on public health services in the Eastern Cape. Its collapse has been presided over by a parasitic elite that has, for over a decade, abused the public trust and used our public coffers as their private slush fund. This is a monumental cover up of Watergate proportions. Why has it been swept under the table?

“Reading about it made me rage. How many clinics could have been built, how many babies died because vaccines were not available or the hospitals were dysfunctional, how many nurses and doctors could have been hired to deal with the dire staff shortages?

“I reflect on the anger of the 1976 generation, which made millions of us stand up and build the powerful tsunami of struggle that toppled the brutal Apartheid regime.

“I feel that anger rising again these days.”

As another South African wrote, “Only this time it is against an oligarchy that we voted in, which has betrayed the foundations of our freedom struggle and today assassinates the hopes of our people to enjoy their constitutional rights to quality health and education.

“Our Constitution is Mandela’s living legacy; human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. It specifies non-racialism and non-sexism and the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law.

“The preamble of our Constitution reads, “Recognise the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

“This is the essence of Mandela – the restoration of human dignity. He was the symbol of the hope that made so much of the world feel a special part of our shared humanity; the struggle between good and evil, justice and injustice.”

Not only Mandela is gone, but so are the solidarity movements that turned South Africa’s pain into a global issue. Yes, many NGO’s and committed organizations like Shared Interest that provides loans to women farmers and other development projects soldier on, but their media profile has slipped to pre-struggle levels.

In February 2014, the 24th anniversary of Mandela’s release, I joined a packed gala and fund-raiser addressed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, the daughter he ordained. In

his always-amusing comments, he chided the Academy Awards for spurning the Mandela movie but not with the angry critique I published. He diplomatically said they had sadly “lost an opportunity.”

As he spoke, I thought of my father, Jerry Schechter, who toiled for years as a garment worker in a “shop” in a building just a block away. I know these self-congratulatory events were not his style, but he told me before he died at age 90 that his generation had “failed to create a better world.”

Will the same be said of mine, despite what seems now to be a fleeting but still surviving “miracle” that transformed South Africa into, in words Tutu coined, “the Rainbow Nation”?

Solidarity with the world’s poor is now being championed by a new Pope, and many social movements, but it has become, increasingly, a tough call in Europe and America where economic decline has hit the middle class hard and reinforced a dramatic inequality that has plunged many nations into the 1%-99% divide that South Africa was once known for. Many families are struggling just to survive. Students are married to large debts. Morality has been buried by waves of materialism in a digital age where it movies are made about men falling in love with their laptop operating systems.

The labor unions and progressive movements that rallied behind South Africa in the apartheid years are now struggling just to exist in societies that have increasingly been dominated by the kinds of repression and authoritarianism we used to see in South Africa. Today, they often project a softer and deceptive look

The rulers of Apartheid justified their abuses in the name of fighting terrorism. Many leaders in our “democracies” do the same. South African intelligence called itself BOSS. Ours use

acronyms to make us think their *raison d'être* is to safeguard our security. Every violation of privacy and human rights is justified as necessary to keep us safe. The idealism that powered the struggle to free South Africa is still there, but the issues it confronts today are less black and white.

We are now marking the twentieth anniversary of South African ‘freedom.’ It is less than many want or need, but is far more than, years ago, anyone thought they would ever see. Let us not ignore or downplay the strides South Africa has made and the progress that has been achieved in restoring dignity, thanks to the ANC and an active public.

Are there other global human rights emergencies that demand our engagement and intervention?

Of course, there are.

I am under no illusion that our marches and journalistic efforts made a revolution. At best, they helped support the people on the frontline while showing that there was an alternative to tepid politicians and complicit media.

I believe the realities of how things work, not only in the system but among those of us trying to fix it, are to be found in the details of the stories I have told in these pages . They seek to shine light on the corruption of institutions, including our media combines, that may have become worse than ever, but also how they might be challenged. Many important independent media projects are underway now. I suspect that the globally seen daily news show Democracy Now was influenced, in part, by the example of South Africa Now.

Do I regret the years I invested in these efforts? Not at all! They taught me so much about the nature of power and oppression and ways to fight them. They gave me a chance to “serve,” in O.R. Tambo’s words, and an opportunity to learn about a culture that

was at the same time so different and so similar to the one I grew up in.

The say revolutions “eat their young.” Is it naïve to think it could have turned out differently, given the power of globalization, and the lack of vision at the top? It would be easy to denounce greed there, but, to do so, you have to recognize their role models are here. Exploitative systems and blatant self-interest are very hard to dislodge as their values seep into all of our lives.

They are everywhere!

This struggle for freedom in South Africa also made us all better people and world citizens as well as members of a community of change who learned from the solidarity that this work inspired.

It gave us all a sense that activists from many lands and traditions can work together in the spirit of internationalism for social justice.

Those who fought against apartheid then, have to keep fighting against its reincarnations.

I was against apartheid then – and I still am!

Yet, the struggle did show that “the people” can win – at least for a while. South Africa today is no utopia but it sure as hell is better than what it was.

And, it didn’t change all by itself.

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DANNY SCHECHTER IS A JOURNALIST, AUTHOR, TELEVISION producer and independent filmmaker who also writes and speaks about economic and media issues.

He is the executive editor of MediaChannel.org, the world's largest online media issues online network, and recipient of many awards including four Emmy Awards, and the Society of Professional Journalists' 2001 Award for Excellence in Documentary Journalism.

His most recent book is Madiba AtoZ: The Many Faces Of Nelson Mandela (Seven Stories Press, Madibabook.com), commissioned by the producers of the movie Mandela Long Walk To Freedom.

He has produced and directed many TV specials and documentary films.

His latest films are Beyond The Long Walk to Freedom: The Making and Meaning of Nelson Mandela's story (slated for release in 2014); Dewitt Clinton H.S.: The School That Can Teach Them All, on the fight for Public Education (2012); Who Rules America?, a series of six half -hours on how the government is run outside the government (2012); A Work in Progress: Danny Schechter and the Journalism of Change (2007) – Chronicling a media life in the trenches from The 60's To 60.

Others include: Plunder: The Crime of our Time, on Financial Crimes (2010); “Barack Obama, People's President (2009), an examination of how Obama was elected in 2008; and In Debt We Trust: America Before The Bubble Bursts,” (2007) an investigation

of the impact of credit and debt on American society. The film was one of the first to expose subprime lending and warn of an economic crisis.

Before that, there was: WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception) on the media coverage of the Iraq War (2004); “Counting on Democracy” about the electoral fiasco in Florida narrated by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee (2002) ; We Are Family,” the post 9-11 film, (2002) shown at the Sundance Film Festival; “Nkosi: A Voice of Africa’s AIDS Orphans” (2001) narrated by Danny Glover; “A Hero for All: Nelson Mandela’s Farewell” (1999); “Beyond Life: Timothy Leary Lives” (1997); “Sowing Seeds/Reaping Peace: The World of Seeds of Peace” (1996); “Prisoners of Hope: Reunion on Robben Island” (1995, co-directed by Barbara Kopple); “Countdown to Freedom: Ten Days that Changed South Africa” (1994), narrated by James Earl Jones and Alfre Woodard; “Sarajevo Ground Zero” (1993); “The Living Canvas” (1992), narrated by Billy Dee Williams; “Beyond JFK: The Question of Conspiracy” (1992, co-directed by Marc Levin and Barbara Kopple); “Give Peace a Chance” (1991); “Mandela in America” (1990); “Free At Last” (1990); “The Making of Sun City” (1987); and “Student Power” (1968).

Schechter is co-founder and executive producer of Globalvision, a New York-based television and film production company now in its 26st year. He founded and exec-produced the TV series “South Africa Now” and co-produced the series “Rights & Wrongs: Human Rights Television. He has specialized in investigative reporting and producing programming about the interface between human rights, journalism, popular music and society.

His career began as the “News Dissector” at Boston’s leading rock station, WBCN. Later, he moved into television as an on-

camera reporter for WGBH (Channel 2) in Boston and then as a producer for WLVI (Channel 56) and WCVB (Channel 5)

Schechter then joined the start-up team of CNN and later became a producer for ABC NEWS 20/20. He produced 50 segments for ABC NEWS and won two national Emmys and was nominated or two others.

He is an award-winning blogger with Newsdissector.net, a daily critical take on the news, and writes regularly for Op-Ed News, Huffington Post, and many well known websites worldwide.

He has spoken at scores of universities – from Harvard to Hamline, from Minnesota to MIT, NYU to Georgia State, Santa Monica to the University of Hawaii, Princeton to Cornell.

A Cornell University graduate, he received his Master's degree from the London School of Economics, and an honorary doctorate from Fitchburg College. He was a Nieman Fellow in Journalism at Harvard, where he also taught in 1969. After college, he was a full time civil rights worker and then communications director of the Northern Student Movement. He worked as a community organizer in a Saul Alinsky-style War on Poverty program.

Then, moving from the streets to the suites, Schechter served as an assistant to the Mayor of Detroit in 1966 on a Ford Foundation grant.

Schechter has reported from 65 countries. He was an adjunct professor at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and taught investigative reporting at the New School. Schechter's writing has appeared in leading newspapers and magazines including the The Nation, Newsday, Boston Globe, Columbia Journalism Review, Media Studies Journal, Detroit Free Press, Village Voice, Tikkun, Z, and many others.

Books by Danny Schechter

Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela

Seven Stories Press

Dissecting the News & Lighting the Fuse

NewsDissector.net, 2013

Blogothon

Cosimo Books, 2012

Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street

Cosimo Books, 2012

ColdType.Net (eBook)

Foreword to The Report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry

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Cosimo Books, 2011

The Crime of Our Time: Why Wall Street

is Not Too Big to Jail

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Introduction to The History of The Standard Oil Company,

by Ida M. Tarbell

Cosimo Books, 2009

Plunder: Investigating Our Economic Calamity

Cosimo Books, 2008

When News Lies: Media Complicity and the Iraq War
Select Books, 2006

The Death of Media and the Fight to Save Democracy
Melville House Publishing, 2005

**Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception
(How the Media Failed to Cover the War on Iraq)**
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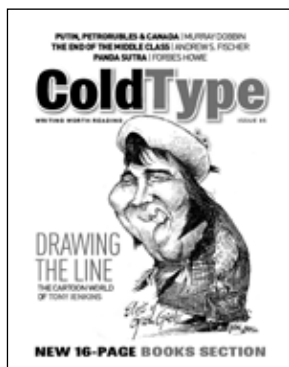
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**Hail to the Thief: How the Media “Stole”
the 2000 Presidential Election**
[Edited with Roland Schatz]
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Falun Gong’s Challenge to China
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The More You Watch the Less You Know
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THERE WERE TWO BATTLES AGAINST APARTHEID – A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AND A MEDIA WAR. THE POLITICAL STORY HAS BEEN TOLD. NOW, READ ABOUT THE MEDIA FIGHT

As South Africa marks its twentieth anniversary as a democracy, its transformation is still hailed as a "miracle" with most of the credit given to towering leaders like the late Nelson Mandela. The freedom fighters did not do it alone – they had active solidarity from a global anti-apartheid movement with a media component that showcased the struggle and kept it visible worldwide.



"News Dissector" DANNY SCHECHTER reveals the inside story of what he calls a "Media War" in **WHEN SOUTH AFRICA CALLED, WE ANSWERED** detailing journalism as activism. He went underground into South Africa in his 20's, and remains active in his 70's, as a producer, filmmaker, blogger, and author of *Madiba A-Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*. (Madibabook.com)

Introduction by Tony Sutton, Editor of ColdType magazine – www.coldtype.net – former editor of Drum, South Africa's foremost African magazine during the battle against apartheid

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