

Mandela and Annan, What the World Needs Now

THE ACADEMIC YEAR began with two high-intensity visits by world leaders from Africa. Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations, from Ghana, spent Thursday, September 17, at the University. Nelson Mandela, president of the Republic of South Africa, came next day, briefly, to receive an honorary doctor of laws degree and the profound respects of a multitude. Both gave speeches (see pages 90 and 93)—Annan in a packed Sanders Theatre, Mandela at a full-scale academic convocation in Tercentenary Theatre. They delivered strong and complementary messages about the world's disparities of wealth, the unsound policies and illiberal politics at the root of the global economic crisis, and the new thinking by intellectuals that now must come.

IN BOTH 1995 and 1996, Harvard invited Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela to receive an honorary degree and to be the speaker on Commencement day. "Each year he was unable to attend because of the press of business in the Republic," says University marshal Richard M. Hunt. "Then Jeffrey Sachs learned that President Mandela was going to come to the United States in September. The new Center for International Development, of which Sachs is director, was about to unveil its 'Emerging Africa' research program. Following the guidelines about extending invitations, he came to me, and then we went to President Rudenstine and suggested that President Mandela be invited to a ceremony at the Center to launch the project and then to receive an honorary degree at a convocation in the

Yard. But his schedule on his visit to the United States was tight, and he could come to Harvard for only two and a half to three hours. So the launching of the program and the awarding of the degree were compressed into one event." Managing the complex logistics for the convoca-

tion largely fell to Jacqueline O'Neill, staff director in the president's office. On the day itself, plastic netting at the sides of University Hall and elsewhere came down at 2:40 P.M. Seniors had priority in the rush for seats. "Everybody was racing—21-year-olds running like elementary-school kids at recess," said Mark McIntosh '99, of Miami and Leverett House. Anyone with a Harvard identification card was welcome, and the University had handed out 7,500 tickets to the public. At least 25,000 souls attended, a host more numerous even than the Commencement-afternoon crowds that heard Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1978), or Colin Powell (1993), or Madeleine Albright (1997). As only 7,000 seats were in place, many of the faithful had a rather long wait standing up. The sun shone; the temperature was in the low 60s.

Mandela arrived at Memorial Church by automobile, where a small group of Harvardians received him in basement rooms. He signed the University guest book. Only one photographer was present, and he had been adjured not to use flash; Mandela's eyes were damaged during his 27 years in prison, and he tears badly when flashes go off in his face.

The ceremony was scheduled to start at 4:30 but was delayed; it lasted an hour and a half. At 4:40 the dancers and drummers of the Kiyira Ensemble began to perform. At 4:50 the bell of the church began to sound. Then came the great man, walking onto the stage from the left. Eighty years old. White-haired. Of noble bearing. The throng greeted him as a hero, in a world with very few of them. He waved and beamed.

"He's so old, and he looks so young, and he has such a beautiful smile. And such wisdom," said a senior. "You're lucky to see that in a lifetime, you know?" Next



Waiting for Mandela. Clockwise from upper left: Fontaine Burruss (left) and Calah Singleton play patty-cake; seniors Joel Pollak (left) and Roanak Desai prepare to hoist a South African flag; Cathy Makahene wears President Mandela on her scarf; a watcher-and-waiter reads a special supplement of the *Crimson*.

Opposite: Mandela shows his diploma to the crowd. Flanking him are Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs (left), Professor A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., and University marshal Richard M. Hunt.

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“A GREAT MAN BEFORE A GREAT AUDIENCE”

day the *Boston Globe* editorialized that the applause “was nearly as sustained as the introductory speeches.”

Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., director of the Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research, spoke of how antiwar and civil-rights protesters in the United States had taken up Mandela’s cause and later rejoiced when he walked out of prison in 1990. Jeffrey Sachs, Stone professor of international trade, described the need for the “Emerging Africa” research project. Kwesi Botchwey, director of Africa research and programs at the new center, and former finance minister of Ghana, said that “What the times call for is a rigorous rethinking of development theory.”

President Neil L. Rudenstine read the citation on Mandela’s degree: “Conscience of a people, soul of a nation, he has brought forth freedom from the crucible of oppression and inspired, by his courageous example, the better angels of our nature.”

Mandela began and ended his speech with jokes. He said nothing about the moral crisis that gripped the University for years—whether to sell investments it had in companies doing business in South Africa. *Globe* columnist Derrick Jackson wrote on September 23, “because of Mandela’s gracious silence about Harvard’s past, he was presenting the biggest award. It was as if he was granting Harvard absolution.” (He must forgive it further, for an error on this occasion. Mandela’s office had been told that Harvard had granted honorary degrees to single individuals outside of Commencement only twice—to George Washington and Winston Churchill—and Mandela made mention of that in his speech. In fact, 12 other people have been so honored, as a letter in the *Globe* on October 3 made clear.)

In closing remarks, Margaret H. Mar-

shall, born and educated in South Africa, former general counsel of the University, now associate justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, spoke for many when she said, “President Mandela, you grace us with your presence here today.”

“The convocation was one of Harvard’s memorable moments: a great man before a great audience—diverse in every way,” said marshal Hunt. “Those who saw Mandela were attentive, respectful, even awe-

Eradicate the World’s Disparities

Excerpts from the address by His Excellency Nelson Mandela, President of the Republic of South Africa

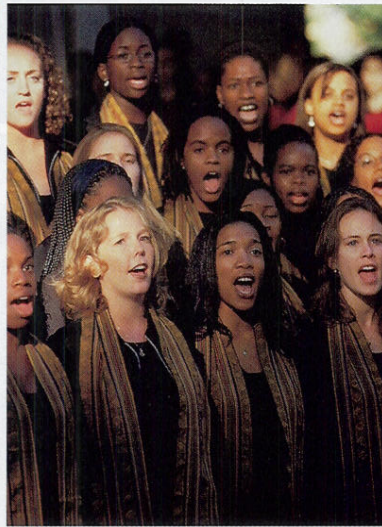
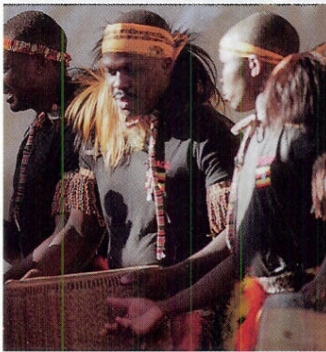
THIS MAY VERY WELL be our last official visit to the United States before retiring from office next year. There could not have been a more moving start to the visit than one which included being honored in this way by one of the great educational institutions of this nation and of the world.

I know that through this award you are not so much recognizing any individual achievement, but are rather paying tribute to the struggles and achievements of the South African people as a whole. I humbly accept the award in that spirit, while at the same time wishing you to know that we are not unaware of nor unmoved by the great compliment you pay us by conferring this degree at a specially convened convocation.

To join George Washington and Winston Churchill as the other recipients of such an award conferred at a specially convened convocation, is not only a singular honor. It also holds a great symbolic significance: to the mind and to the future memory of this great American institution, the name of an African is now added to those two illustrious leaders of the Western world.

If in these latter years of a life lived in pursuit of equality, we can at last look upon our own country as one in which citizens, regardless of race, gender, or creed, share equal political rights and opportunities for development, we do so with great gratitude towards the millions upon millions all around the world who materially and morally supported our struggle for freedom and justice.

Together with those freedom- and jus-



Soprano Jessye Norman, D.Mus. '88, sang “Amazing Grace” (top, left), the Kuumba Singers offered the South African national anthem (bottom, right), and the Kiyira Ensemble drummers (bottom, left) made a joyful noise when Mandela walked onto the stage. Top, right: President Rudenstine answers a presidential query about the proceedings.

struck by the solemnity of the occasion.”

“For a moment one man was able to transform thousands in this place as he has been able to transform millions in his own country,” said Peter J. Gomes, minister in Memorial Church. “For an instant we were able to associate ourselves with a man of such magnificent moral stature that the association elevated us all.”

tice-loving citizens of the world, we do at the same time, however, note that at the end of this century—a century which humanity entered with such high hopes for progress—the world is still beset by great disparities between the rich and the poor, both within countries and between different parts of the world.

If in individual life we all may reach that part of the long walk where the opportunity is granted to retire to some rest and tranquillity, for humanity the walk to freedom and equality seems, alas, still to be a long one ahead.

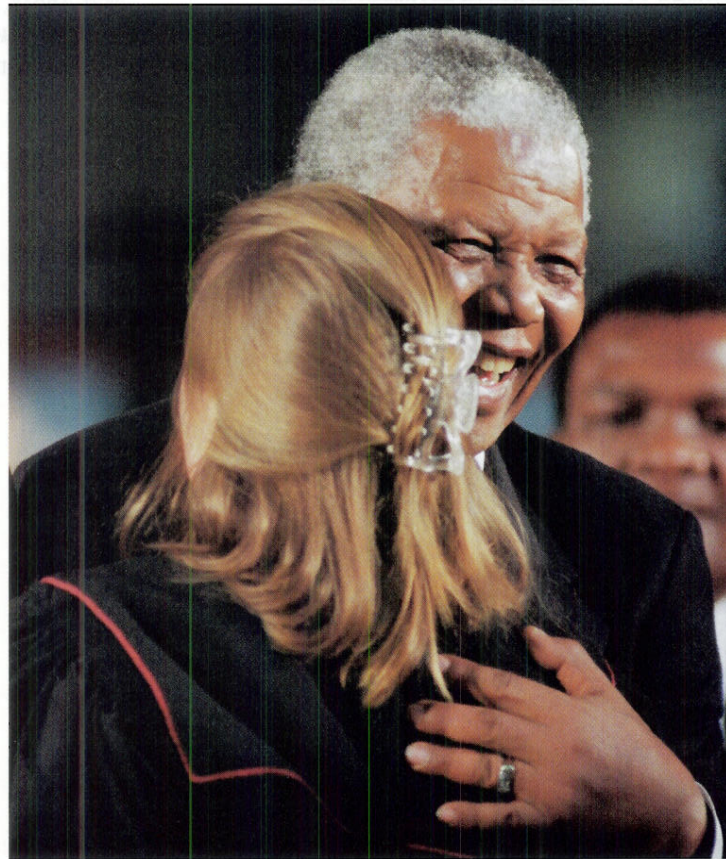
THE GREATEST single challenge facing our globalized world is to combat and eradicate its disparities. While in all parts of the world progress is being made in entrenching democratic forms of governance, we constantly need to remind ourselves that the freedoms which democracy brings will remain empty shells if they are not accompanied by real and tangible improvements in the material lives of the millions of ordinary citizens of those countries.

Where men and women and children go burdened with hunger, suffering from preventable diseases, languishing in ignorance and illiteracy, or finding themselves bereft of decent shelter, talk of democracy and freedom that does not recognize the material aspect can ring hollow and erode confidence exactly in those values we seek to promote. Hence our universal obligation towards the building of a world in which there shall be greater equality among nations and among citizens of nations.

The disparity between the developed and developing world, between North and South, reflects itself also in the sphere of educational and intellectual resources. When in Africa we speak and dream of, and work for, a rebirth of that continent as a full participant in the affairs of the

world in the next century, we are deeply conscious of how dependent that is on the mobilization and strengthening of the continent's resources of learning.

The current world financial crisis also starkly reminds us that many of the concepts that guided our sense of how the world and its affairs are best ordered, have suddenly been shown to be wanting. They are seen to have hidden real structural defects in the world economic system. The



The University Choir filed to the front of the stage, sang "Fair Harvard," and began to file off. Mandela called them back—in a gesture that delighted everybody but the Secret Service agents on stage—and shook hands with or hugged each chorister, and then did the same with the Kuumba Singers, about 155 students in all. Some of them were moved to tears.

precepts of the economic theorists who could so confidently prescribe to all, now appear to have drawn much of their apparent intellectual validation from having been unchallenged by the day-to-day operations of a system that operated in the interests of the powerful, and not the poorest of the poor.

Not only does this crisis call for funda-

mental rethinking and reconceptualization on the part of the theorists of the North. It more particularly and urgently emphasizes the need for thinkers and intellectuals of the developing world to sharpen their skills and analyses, and for a genuine partnership between those of the North and the South in helping shape a world order that answers to the shared and common needs of all the people, and not just the rich.

This University already has had a long partnership of teaching and learning with the South African people. There are many names that one could mention of persons now holding office in government or in institutions of civil society who spent time at Harvard or benefited from programs conducted jointly with this institution. For that, our fledgling democracy faced with enormous tasks of reconstruction and development owes your institution a great debt of gratitude. As South Africans play their role in helping to conceptualize and give content to the African Renaissance, we continue to draw upon the intellectual skills nurtured and honed here.

MISTER PRESIDENT, we accept this great honor bestowed upon us today as a symbol of

how South Africa and the United States, Africa and the West, the developing and the developed world, are reaching out and joining hands as partners in building a world order that equally benefits all the nations and people of the world.

For 300 years this great institution has served its nation with distinction. We enter the new millennium in the hope that the rich fruits of learning, science, and technological progress will in this coming century truly be shared by all in this global village in which we live.

We are confident that this institution of which we are now a proud member will play a leading role in achieving that. ▾