



WALKING WITH

THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY:

THE UNITED STATES-SOUTH AFRICA FAITH AND POLITICS INITIATIVE

THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY... THE CALL TO DEEPER ENGAGEMENT



In March 1999, Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke to a rapt audience in a cavernous caucus room at the U.S. Capitol. He thanked the overflowing crowd of Members of Congress and guests, invited by The Faith & Politics Institute, for their support in South Africa's "improbable" and "splendid victory over the ghastliness of apartheid."

Archbishop Tutu spoke that day of the leadership that brought about the transition to democracy and the hope for reconciliation in South Africa. He also called upon Americans to face the pain and the possibilities for healing in their own nation. "You will not be able to have racial peace... (unless) you have given people the ability to tell their pain, their story... experience it together so that it becomes a common story."

This appeal echoed themes central to the work of The Faith & Politics Institute. Through retreats, times for reflection, and experiences such as the Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage to Alabama, the Institute offers Members of Congress and others a chance to experience the power of civic leadership guided by conscience, courage, and compassion. Archbishop Tutu's address foreshadowed a new chapter in the work of the Institute.

In March 2000, South African Ambassador Sheila Sisulu stood amidst the sculptures of attack dogs being set upon young children in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park. She marched with the Institute's Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage across Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. She thought of her own nation's freedom struggle

and its journey toward reconciliation: "Our struggles [are so similar], and we have so much in common... I know it in my bones." She offered a challenge and an invitation: "You must come to my country."

Three years later in Pretoria South Africa, Congressman John Lewis would refer to the "spirit of history" that binds the people of the United States and South Africa in the struggle for freedom and reconciliation. It is this profound interweaving of spirit that lies at the heart of the United States-South Africa Faith and Politics Initiative.

The Faith & Politics Institute has allowed members of Congress and others an opportunity to walk in the footsteps of people who created the nonviolent movement for civil rights in America and of those who led the struggle and transition to democracy and shaped the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. If the stories of conscience and courage are not kept alive, the spirit of these periods and the lessons that they teach will be lost from memory.

Legacies of historic racial and economic wounds continue to confront the goal of a just and democratic society by breeding despair and violence. Transforming such legacies requires spirit, wisdom, and profound political will. It calls for leaders who carry such qualities "in their bones."

"From time to time I feel the presence of that power, that force that I call the Spirit of History. Sometimes you are guided by it, led by it. Other times you're in tune with that force... That's what [I felt] when we were at the height of the civil rights movement – whether it was the march from Selma to Montgomery, or going on the Freedom Rides... it was an extension of my religious convictions, of my faith."

—Congressman John Lewis
from *Walking with the Wind*



FROM SELMA TO SOWETO, CAPE TOWN TO CAPITOL HILL: REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY SO FAR...

March 1999 – Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks to Members of U.S. House of Representatives and other guests of The Faith & Politics Institute; he presents copy of the *Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to Library of Congress.

September 1999 – Ahmed Kathrada speaks at Congressional forum honoring the publication of his *Letters from Robben Island* (where he had been imprisoned with Nelson Mandela).

January 2000 – Rep. Amo Houghton hosts Congressional Conversations on Race event, with South African Ambassador Sheila Sisulu, Rep. John Lewis, and Rev. Doug Tanner in Corning, NY.

March 2000 – Ambassador Sisulu joins The Faith & Politics Institute's Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage to Alabama.

September 2000 – South African Embassy hosts evening conversation for Members of Congress with editors and reporters of *New York Times* series on "Race in America."

July 2001 – Faith & Politics holds forum on Capitol Hill with journalist Renee Poussaint on documentary film project *Tutu and Franklin: A Journey of Hope*.

October 2001 – The Faith & Politics Institute's 10th Anniversary celebration features Peter and Linda Biehl's keynote address on their experience with reconciliation in South Africa following the 1993 murder of their daughter Amy.

July 2002 – Dr. Alex Boraine, former Parliamentarian and Vice-Chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission delivers annual Capps-Emerson Memorial Lecture on "The Necessary Spirit of Truth."

May 2003 – Fourteen-member Congressional delegation led by Congressmen Amo Houghton and John Lewis visits South Africa exploring the freedom struggle, peace process, reconciliation, and HIV/AIDS crisis.

"The world was waiting for South Africans to go on an orgy of revenge and retribution... (instead) the world looked on in something approaching awe as they saw this tall man, regal in his dignity emerge from prison... and was amazed at his magnanimity. He invites his jailer to attend his inauguration... he invites the prosecutor who sent him and his friends to jail to lunch... he goes to visit the widow of the architect of apartheid... Nelson Mandela is revered as a leader not because of his economic or military power... but because this world we describe as a cynical world, a hard-nosed world has an instinct for goodness." • *Archbishop Desmond Tutu, March 1999*

"What we are looking for now are people of integrity, people who can tell the truth in the midst of all kinds of falsehoods, who can plead and work toward reconciliation when so much of our hearts are filled with hatred, prejudice, and wanting revenge – very understandable, very human emotions – but we are called to rise above that and beyond that, and particularly we look to those who lead us to take us there." • *Dr. Alex Boraine, July 2002*

Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, described to the delegation in Cape Town the transformative power of "the human moment" when victim and perpetrator meet: "A moment of engagement is created... and the recognition of humanity at that moment creates the possibility for future engagement. ...If you keep them out, there is no opportunity of changing." • *May 2003*

"The mission of The Faith & Politics Institute allowed us all to experience South Africa... We read the briefing papers about the liberation of South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but it was in the personal stories that we heard that forgiveness is as much a part of the character of the country as the music delivered so heartfully and joyfully..." • *Representative Kay Granger (Republican-Texas), May 2003*

"I believe that every [one] who was on this journey completes it a better person, more convinced than ever that faith can warm the coldest hearts and heal the deepest wounds. ...[We] return to America with a renewed commitment to help build a more tolerant and inclusive society... and with an awareness of the hopes and fears that others have regarding the role our country will play in the world in the future." • *Representative Steny Hoyer (Democrat-Maryland), House Minority Whip, May 2003*

"Even though a perfect solution has not emerged from that long struggle, we were reminded... that a great victory had been won for the world – without a bloodbath. ...I was overcome with gratitude, knowing that the impossible had been transferred into the possible again and again – as long as we are prepared for the long distance, running with patience, surrounded by witnesses of hope, ready to fly." • *Dr. Vincent Harding's comments on the Wye River retreat.*

"We had great faith – and we were vindicated – that we were going to win because our ideas, our objectives, our values were inclusive values. They were for everybody..." • *Ambassador Barbara Masekela recalling the years she spent in exile, March 2005*

"...[You] have to delve very deeply into your spirit and emotion. ...I have learned from you, John Lewis and others... people became committed to be 'in the way' [of injustice] because they were emotionally driven to do so, not only intellectually but emotionally and spiritually." • *Roelf Meyer, chief negotiator for the National Party during the SA transition, March 2005*

Glenda Wildschut, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, recalled the value of returning to "iconic places" like the Selma Bridge or Robben Island... "we can touch and feel the spirit of the people who went before... You cannot go... without being moved..." • *March 2005*

"Where pain and hope intersect, something new is born." • *Rev. Peter Storey, March 2005*

January 2004 – Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, former South African Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner and author of *A Human Being Died That Night*, leads retreat for Members of Congress and their spouses.

January 2004 – Most Rev. Njongondulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Southern Africa, speaks to Congressional leaders gathered by the Institute.

July 2004 – U.S. and South African leaders gather at Wye River to reflect on the question: "Recognizing the power of the spirit that has moved between Selma and Soweto, where is this leading you now?"

March 2005 – South African Ambassador Barbara Masekela and nine other South African political, religious, and civic leaders join the Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage to Alabama commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March and the enactment of the Voting Rights Act.

June 2005 – Members of Congress and other participants in the 2005 Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage gather at the South African Embassy for a time of reflection and dialogue.

April 2006 – Dr. Peter Storey, former head of the South African Council of Churches and leader in the struggle against apartheid, speaks on "Healing on the Wounds from South Africa" during Congressional visit to Farmville, Virginia, a community addressing a legacy of racial segregation.

July 2006 – Symposium in U.S. Capitol commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Soweto uprising, the 20th anniversary of U.S. sanctions against apartheid, and the 10th anniversary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the occasion of The Faith & Politics Institute's 15th anniversary.

LEADING WITH THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY...

The stories from both the United States and South Africa contain powerful moments of transformation when people of conscience, courage, and compassion stood up, stepped forward and reached out to challenge injustice and bridge divisions.

The faith and strength necessary to lead at such moments often emerges from and is sustained by what Congressman John Lewis has called “the Spirit of History.” The role of nonviolent resistance in the U.S. civil rights movement and the spirit of reconciliation that has emerged from the democratic transition in South Africa bear witness to the words of the psalmist: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.” The Faith & Politics Institute works to follow the course of that river and to encourage public leaders to open themselves to its streams of conscience, courage, and compassion.

In partnership with South African individuals and organizations, The United States-South Africa Faith and Politics Initiative plans to move forward with the following goals:

DISCERNING THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY

- Deepen knowledge among citizens and public leaders of moments in the history of each country when a spirit of conscience, courage, and compassion transcended division and created new possibilities for authentic democracy.

SEEKING THE PATH TO RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

- Foster awareness of the necessity to face the pain of the past and instill honest historical memory into the public consciousness as a mark of leadership required to heal intensely divisive wounds.

DEEPENING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

- Promote mutual engagement between U.S. and South African leaders and citizens in dialogue and appropriate collaboration toward the realization of just societies and mature democracy.

DRAWING WISDOM FROM RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- Call forth wisdom from diverse religious traditions to evoke the values of conscience, courage, and compassion essential to the future.



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OF THE CONGRESSIONAL PILGRIMAGE TO SOUTH AFRICA IN 2003
AND OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN ALABAMA 2005

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“Together, we can build a society free of violence. We can build a society grounded on friendship and our common humanity... That is the only path open to us... Let us join hands and march into the future.”

—Nelson Mandela



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