



# events at the center



## ***RFK in the Land of Apartheid: A Ripple of Hope*** A Film Screening and Roundtable Discussion

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December 09 2010, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

The Woodrow Wilson Center's Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity and Africa Program present with the International Center for Journalists a film screening and roundtable discussion of Larry Shore's documentary, *RFK in the Land of Apartheid: A Ripple of Hope*.

Using never before seen archival footage, and interviews in South Africa and the United States, filmmakers Larry Shore and Tami Gold tell the unknown story of Robert Kennedy's 1966 visit to South Africa during the worst years of Apartheid. RKF in the Land of Apartheid follows Senator Robert Kennedy to the site of his famous "Ripple of Hope" speech at the University of Cape Town and his encounter with Afrikaans students at Stellenbosch, the pro-Apartheid university. The film evokes the connections between the American Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. The filmmakers find witness to this special moment in time through the sights and sounds of present day South Africa. With an original sound track by American musician Jason Moran and voices from the University of Cape Town Africa Choir, the film tells an unusual story through the words and actions of an American politician whose legacy continues to advance human rights around the world.

After the screening of the film, Director **Larry Shore** joined South African Ambassador to the United States **Ebrahim Rasool**, International Center for Journalists Program Director **Jerri Eddings**, and Director of the Africa Program and Leadership Project **Steve McDonald** for a discussion of their respective experiences in South Africa during during Apartheid.



Being South African himself, Shore recounted his personal interest in Kennedy's trip going back to his youth and recalled being stunned reading about Kennedy's visit. Upon coming to the United States, he became interested in U.S. relations with South Africa: "I was struck immediately when I got here," he said, "how Americans saw the struggle in South Africa through the lens of their own history."

After the inauguration of Nelson Mandela, his interest was again piqued by an opinion piece in the New York Times. "I began to do research," he said, "and I found that even people who were supporters of Robert Kennedy knew that he gone there, but had never gotten any detail, so I thought: that's a story worth telling." Returning to South Africa, he found that Kennedy's visit had made a lasting impact.

He found that Americans tend to only know about Nelson Mandela, he said, but the film documents how Chief Luthuli led the ANC and received a Nobel Peace Prize for his unwavering support of nonviolence resistance. "I think it was also unknown that there were whites in the anti-apartheid struggle," he said, and the film documents the involvement of the white National Union of South African Students' (NUSAS) role organizing Kennedy's trip.

Rasool provided historical context. "There was this breath of fresh air called Robert Kennedy," he said. The visit was particularly



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important, Rasool commented, because it came at a time when U.S. official policy seemed to support the Apartheid regime. It was the peak of the Apartheid era, he said, when the government had passed the Suppression of Communism Act, and "was bold enough to jail Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Thabo Mbeki, and every one else who posed a threat to them." In this context, the hope that Kennedy inspired, was an important "impulse for liberalism." Like Shore, Rasool said that he was particularly moved by the story of Chief Luthuli. As governor of the Cape Province, Rasool said that he had tried to govern based on Luthuli's message of peace during the height of repression: "South Africa will be a home for all."



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McDonald recounted his experience as a U.S. embassy officer in South Africa in 1976 to 1980, when he found that the good will from Kennedy's visit was still present. "I'll never forget speaking to the household staff at the ambassador's residence," he said, who told him that Kennedy had spent the first 15 minutes of his visit to the ambassador's residence meeting with the kitchen staff. McDonald recalled being asked to invite Ted Kennedy for to speak at the University of Cape Town on the anniversary of Robert Kennedy's visit.

Speaking from a long relationship with the journalists featured in the film, Eddings highlighted the bravery of journalists in the anti-apartheid struggle. "I'd like to particularly thank you for including the journalists," she told Shore, "because journalists are the people who write the first chapter in history." Alister Sparks, the editor of the popular South African newspaper, the Daily Mail, had an important influence on her, she said. His belief in the responsibility of journalists to take their responsibility to writing history professionally was one of the influences that led her to work with the International Center for Journalists.



Responding to questions on the impact of Kennedy's visit on American policy, Shore said that he believed Kennedy had been deeply moved by the visit. He noted that Kennedy had contacted all the CEO's of Fortune 500 companies in South Africa, and suggested that South African policy would have been a much higher U.S. priority if he had been elected president in 1968. McDonald emphasized how individuals like Robert Kennedy helped relations with South Africa after Apartheid. "It's remarkable the warm relations we have with South Africa," he said, "and much of this is due to Robert Kennedy and later Ted Kennedy—individuals like that, that kept giving a human face to America."

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—WOODROW WILSON, FOUNDERS' ADDRESS, SWARTHMORE COLLEGE, 1913

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