



Candidate Bush rides a campaign bus in New Hampshire, January 2000.

CAMPAIGN Artistry

BY WILLIAM L. HOLDER '75

No news photographer has better access to President George W. Bush than Brooks Kraft '87, whose images of Bush have appeared regularly in *Time* magazine since early in the 2000 campaign. Political campaigns fascinate Kraft, and he portrays them with an artist's sensitivity.

The shutter clicks and Brooks Kraft '87 captures President George W. Bush whispering in the ear of Senator Ted Kennedy, the president's hand lightly resting on the senator's shoulder as both men smile. It's a quintessential Bush moment: a touch of personal charm delivered while other Senate leaders are milling about. "Hands Across the Aisle," says the *Time* magazine caption, observing that these sometime political adversaries are personal friends.

No photographer captures the personality and moods of Bush better than Kraft. He has the acute sensibility of top photojournalists for framing the fleeting moment when a person's expression tells a story. His cover image for the Nov. 5, 2001, issue of *Time*, for instance, shows Bush leaning over his desk with a furrowed brow, tight lips, and a no-nonsense look in his eyes. The visual message is that Bush has refocused his administration's agenda on terrorism.

Kraft is a "natural," possessing the kind of talent a teacher rarely encounters in a student, says his former mentor, J. Seeley, professor of art. "If Brooks had chosen fine arts photography, I am sure that he would have been equally successful. He has a good eye for the visually significant and the skill and timing required for the successful capture."

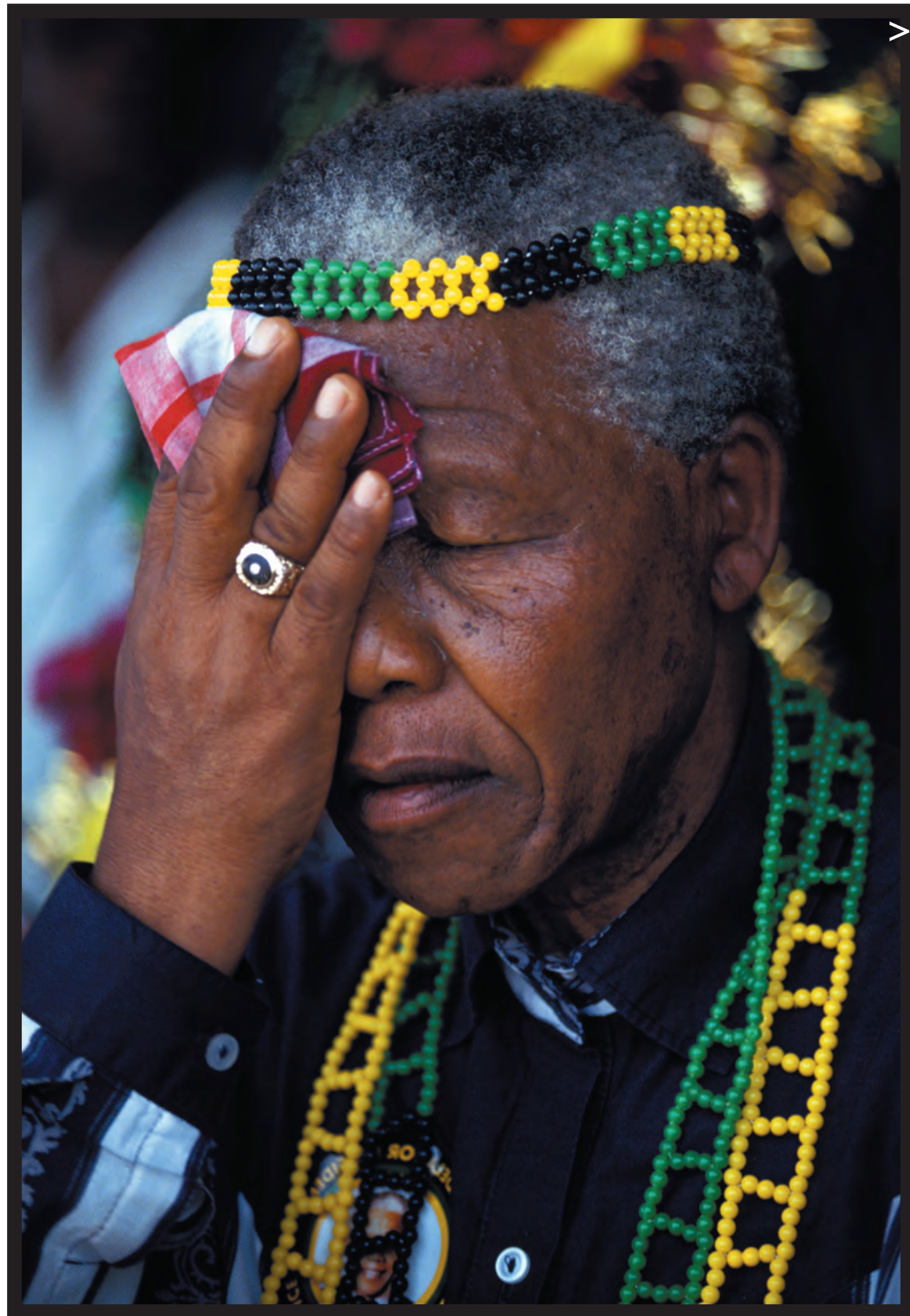
Nor does any media photographer have better access to Bush than Kraft. Their relationship is both professional and personal. They banter; Bush knew when Kraft and his wife, Christine, were expecting their first baby. "Bush is the kind of guy who knows personal details," said Kraft over a light lunch last winter at Café 300, not far from the Children's Museum in Boston. "He likes the banter. That's the key to his success." Bush also values loyalty and appreciated that Kraft was always with the press contingent in the back of the plane, even in the early days when the group was small.

Kraft is one of "a special few" photographers who are politically savvy enough to penetrate the barriers that keep the media at arm's length from President Bush, says Rick Boeth, who was deputy picture editor at *Time* in charge of the 2000 campaign and is now director of global news at Corbis photo agency. A campaign consists of grueling 16-hour days, and Kraft has the ability to capitalize on the five or ten minutes of access—maybe just 45 seconds—emerging with a special image that is journalistically compelling.

The milieu of a political campaign excites Kraft. More than pageantry, more than news, he sees a campaign as political iconography, as an opportunity to explore cultural values through a visual medium.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BROOKS KRAFT '87

Selected images from the exhibit *Campaign Iconography: Mandela '94 and Bush '00*



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An aging Nelson Mandela shows his exhaustion after a campaign rally in the heat, Northern Transvaal, March 1994.

Candidate Bush gets makeup before a television appearance in Michigan, May 2000.



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His studio was a short walk from Café 300, and the city's harsh winds were fortunately in check. Kraft led the way to a funky, large space carved out of an old building claimed by artists. [Today he and his family live in Washington, D.C.]

At that moment, though, he climbed a ladder and rooted around in old boxes for images from the campaign that gave him his first big break and deeply influenced his eye for political iconography.

In 1994, the election in South Africa installed Nelson Mandela as the country's first black leader. Kraft flew to South Africa four months prior to the scheduled vote, well before major media outlets were paying any attention. He was working with a photo agency and had previously placed some images from the 1992 Clinton, Tsongas, and Kerry campaigns in newsweeklies. Although he had attended a prestigious Eddie Adams photography workshop for 100 selected young photographers at a farm in upstate New York, where he had rubbed shoulders with top editors, he was still struggling to make a name for himself.

"I can vividly remember when Desmond Tutu came to Wesleyan to speak when I was a student," he recounts. "After that, I read every story I saw about South Africa. I wanted to be there for the first democratic election, post-apartheid."

Covering Mandela was a bet, one that he underwrote partly with his own money. One of only five photographers traveling with Mandela throughout the countryside, Kraft worked on illustrating economic conditions in the townships. He spent four weeks with small entrepreneurs in Soweto. He spent a week in diamond mines. His pictures weren't selling and Sygma photo agency, which sent him there, tried to pull him out. He refused to leave.

"Mandela would drive around in a pickup truck with a bullhorn," Kraft says. "That was the best way for him to get his message out. There were no staged political events. The campaign was far less manufactured, more organic than anything you would find in the United States. Mandela would wave or throw his arms in the air only when he felt the moment was right."

About a month before the election, Kraft was covering a police patrol in a violence-prone township outside Johannesburg. Almost overnight, the South African government had created a racially mixed police force, ill-trained and unprepared to cope with violence erupting between Zulu tribesmen and members of the

African National Congress. As a group of about seven photographers stood near a wall, police suddenly started to return fire coming from nearby buildings. In the melee, one South African photographer fell dead just two feet from Kraft; another dropped wounded, and Kraft felt the sensation of "sand thrown against my back." A few minutes later an armored vehicle collected the terrified photographers, who were crouched down by the wall. Only then did Kraft discover that he'd been hit in the back by small pieces of shrapnel. Doctors judged the metal fragments not worth the

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trouble to remove, so he carries them to this day. Shaken, Kraft continued to cover the election but told his agency he'd had enough of dangerous assignments.


Finally, as it became clear that Mandela was headed toward victory, Kraft's bet paid off. The international media turned the full glare of its attention on South Africa, and the images he had been creating for months were suddenly hot commodities. He had the cover of *U.S. News*, inside shots in *Time* and *Newsweek*, and numerous photos in foreign publications.

One of Kraft's shots shows Mandela with a kerchief to his forehead, eyes closed, obviously exhausted. Mandela was in his 70s and had spent 25 years in a South African prison before undertaking the rigors of a political campaign. At an exhibition of Kraft's work at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Portland, Maine, last fall (*Campaign Iconography: Mandela '94 and Bush '00*), this image hung next to one of his shots of President Bush taken during the 2000 campaign. An elegant woman's hand is applying makeup to Bush as he's prepped for a television appearance. The image suggests the exquisite control of presentation, the scripting, the stage-managing of the photo op—elements that were noticeably absent in South Africa.

The image also hints at Bush's nervousness, which was apparent when Kraft first covered Bush on the campaign trail in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He quickly became aware of the divergence between Bush as an unpolished media entity and the skillful politician off-camera.

"I was horrified when I first heard him speak in Cedar Rapids," Kraft recalls. "In a room he has a commanding presence that he still doesn't have on the stump. The public never sees how he's able to use his personal skills to cut through partisan bickering."

"I try to show how he relates to people, to voters, to his adversaries on the Hill, to his advisers." On an airport tarmac he explores Bush's use of gesture; he zooms in on Bush's cowboy boots (a lot of the campaign is spent on one's feet); he catches Bush with a platoon of photographers shooting while he gets a haircut; he documents the ecstasy of the crowd at Bush's nominating convention amid a sea of balloons and confetti.

No sea of balloons descended on Nelson Mandela. Beat-up shoes and bare feet were more common images on the political trail in South Africa. Yet that campaign provided Kraft with some of his most moving images. In Soweto he spent three hours preparing for one photo inside a school gymnasium. An aged black woman places her paper ballot in a box—for the first time ever. Light streams down on her from windows above. Kraft's image has a Renaissance painterly quality that lends it a religious intensity. He portrays the fall of apartheid as a transcendent moment, a finely crafted piece of political iconography. 



Voting on election day in Soweto, South Africa, April 1994.