

Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa, Peter Magubane.

A good photograph makes a point; a great photograph makes a statement.

Think of the iconic photographs of this century — the Vietnamese girl running towards us, away from the napalm explosion destroying her village; the World Trade Centre swallowed up in smoke and flames on 9/11 and the solitary figure of the Chinese man facing the tanks in Tiananmen Square. These pictures all have something in common. They are powerful, they show us the truth and they go straight to the heart.

We have our own pictures of South Africa - pictures that show us in all of our beauty, ugliness and complexity.

Peter Magubane has been taking these powerful pictures for over half a century. He started working for Drum Magazine in 1954 and, only three years later, he won the first prize for Press Picture of the Year (South African History Online, 2009). (In fact, he won the third prize as well).

He was taking powerful pictures in 1956, when 20 000 angry women marched to the Union Buildings to protest against pass laws; he was taking powerful pictures in 1960 at Sharpeville when police opened fire on unarmed protesters and 69 died; he was taking powerful pictures in June 1976, when protesting school children were shot and killed. He was also there in 1990, taking powerful pictures, of Nelson Mandela, when he was released from Victor Verster prison - the first pictures we had seen for twenty seven years.

The pictures taken by Peter Magubane have informed the way in which we see our own history. His powerful photographs, with their stark exposés of apartheid massacres, violence and brutality, were seen in South Africa and around the world. They were on the front pages of newspapers and magazines and the truth became plain to see. South Africans were suddenly confronted with the realities and internationally, the atrocities of apartheid became more difficult to ignore.

Seeing and taking good pictures came at a price. One of the consequences of being on the front line was that he was injured and shot at by police. His nose was broken. He was detained, tortured and beaten. He spent 586 days in solitary confinement, wondering if he would ever emerge from his cell. When he did emerge, he was banned.

There is another side to his powerful pictures. His collection includes many that are more personal and understated — portraits, weddings, children playing. He took Nelson Mandela's very first passport photograph, a small black and white head shot, just after Mandela's release (Well, 1990). Recently, he has moved away from news photography and concentrated more on documenting the vanishing cultures of South Africa's people. One of his happiest moments was when his picture of an Ndebele woman was selected for the cover of National Geographic.

His photographs have appeared in *Life* magazine, the *New York Times*, *National Geographic* and *Time*; he has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Mother Jones Foundation and Leica Cameras; the American National Professional Photographers Association Humanistic Award and the Order for Meritorious Service from President Mandela. Last month he received the prestigious Cornell Capa award, given every year to a 'concerned' photographer of international repute.

But it is not for these awards that we know Peter Magubane. We know him because his powerful pictures have shaped the way that we see South Africa, they have shaped the way that we see our past and they have shaped the way that we see ourselves.

Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa, Peter Magubane.

References

South African History Online, 2009. Peter Magubane.
Well, L.A., 1990. From the Publisher. Time Magazine, 26 Feb 1990.