



RORY KENNEDY BY NADINE GORDIMER

SILENCE STILL EQUALS DEATH.
HERE'S A DIRECTOR WHO'S
MAKING A LOT OF NOISE

Currently airing on HBO, *Pandemic: Facing AIDS*, a five-part documentary series directed by Rory Kennedy, tells the story of five people from five countries infected with HIV and AIDS. Using an honest style of filmmaking (also on display in her award-winning 1999 film, *American Hollow*, about a time-forgotten Appalachian family), she eschews the typical documentary form of interviews and archive footage thread together with voice-overs in favor of a first-person primary point of view in which the camera lives among its subjects, letting each life tell its own story. Kennedy is neither a voyeur nor a tourist: She is a witness.

Here, Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer (who contributed to a *Pandemic* book featuring work from 100 photographers and five authors), the renowned South African writer and activist who in recent years has turned her concerns to the AIDS crisis, talks with Kennedy—who, yes, is one of those Kennedys. **RORY KENNEDY:** Hello, Miss Gordimer. It's very nice to speak with you.

NADINE GORDIMER: And with you. Now, you've made a wonderful five-part series—a film.

RK: Yes. It's a five-part series about the global AIDS pandemic.

NG: This is so essential. I'm very glad to hear you've done it.

RK: We've been working on it for the past year and a half or so, and it's been a really amazing project. Unfortunately, we weren't able to get to South Africa, but we did film in Uganda.

NG: Oh, well, it's a great pity. I was, last night, with a very remarkable man who is leading one of the campaigns in South Africa—and that's Judge Edwin Cameron. You may have heard of him.

RK: Yes, I have.

NG: He had done something wonderful about

a year ago when there was a big exhibition of photographs of how people lived with the problem of having AIDS and being HIV-positive. He had gathered around him people—sometimes very poor people—who have the same disease, and he said, "I'm a judge. I can afford to buy the drugs I need to keep me comparatively healthy, but these people standing around me, they cannot." I thought this was wonderful.

EE: One of the things we've found in traveling to different parts of the world to make this movie is how important it is for politicians and judges, legislators and policy makers to really speak out about HIV and AIDS, particularly those people who are HIV-positive. And it's such a tragedy that we have AIDS drugs—you know, part of the solution to this crisis—and yet they're not getting to so many people around the world.

NG: No. And one's very puzzled about the reasons. It seems to me that the recipes, so to say, for these drugs should not be regarded as intellectual properties to belong to any firm or country. It seems to me AIDS is a crisis of world proportions, and that all information, all possibilities should be open to everybody. I'm sure you agree.

EE: I do. Absolutely. In addition to Uganda, another place we filmed in was Brazil. I don't know if you're familiar with their policies, but they have a very progressive stance on AIDS and have made drugs available to everybody who needs them.

NG: And they are not a terribly rich country. It's remarkable.

EE: I think that's an important lesson: If a country like Brazil can make the drugs available to every person who needs them, then every country should be able to. We just need to make it a priority.

NG: Absolutely. It's of great distress to me that in my own country . . . [pauses] I've great admiration for our president, Thabo Mbeki. He has done extremely well in very difficult decisions, but I cannot understand his turning away from the great problem of AIDS.

EE: I know. It is such a tragedy. I think that South

Africa has the largest number of HIV-positive cases in the world.

NG: Yes, and that's why I can't understand why you didn't come here!

EE: [laughs] Well, I'll tell you, we really thought about it. The reason we didn't is because we wanted some amount of hope in this documentary. In Uganda, they at one point had a rate of infection of 28 percent, and that has now come down to 5 percent! And this is a country that is very poor, that doesn't have much of a health-care infrastructure, and that has had a lot of political strife—and yet they have made AIDS a priority, and they have really helped stem the tide.

NG: That's true. And, I think, for us to know how Uganda, with limited resources, managed it is very important. We need to have that information.

EE: Well, that's why we did it. You know, the film is going to air [in the U.S.] on HBO, but we are hoping to get the project out to other countries, including South Africa.

NG: Oh, I hope so. Now, tell me what countries you covered. Brazil, Uganda . . .

EE: Brazil, Uganda, India, Thailand, and Russia. We focus on five characters, one from each country. One of the reasons I became interested in this issue is, a number of years ago I joined a White House delegation to Africa to look at the AIDS crisis, and I was so moved by what I saw. I think anyone who has experienced the problem firsthand cannot not jump into the battle. I felt that the rest of the world had so much to learn from what's happening in Africa.

NG: Well, you see, that's what I hope your film will do: ensure that this problem is looked at. It seems to be swept under the carpet in many countries. I think the complacency in Europe and America about AIDS is very, very worrying.

EE: I completely agree. We did spend time in Russia, as I said, and according to the government, over 200,000 people are infected with HIV, but nongovernment organizations say there are well over a million cases. Officially, on the books, Russia says they're going to treat every person in their country who is HIV-positive,

"My approach—a *vérité* style of filmmaking—is an attempt to humanize these terrible statistics."

yet they had a budget last year to treat only 600 people. They're very much in denial. Ninety percent of AIDS cases in Russia are among people between the ages of 15 and 30, so it's affecting a very young population.

RG: Here in South Africa, one of the extraordinary things is the infection of women *vis-à-vis* the rate of infection in men. Here, the majority of the infected are women. And, of course, with women, it raises the question of handing the virus on to babies.

RE: That's one of the issues that, for me, is maddening. It costs so little to prevent mother-to-child transmission! It can cost less than \$1, and you can cut the rate of infection by 50 percent! That we're not doing that in every country for every woman is unacceptable.

RG: I have been in heated discussions where people have said, "Well, what about the other 50 percent?" But my point is that from an aspirin up, there is no such thing as a palliative or curative drug that is 100 percent effective. It doesn't exist. There are always exceptions. Shall we let everybody else die because it's not 100 percent?

RE: Right! You know, I think that the approach or style I use in the film—a *vérité* style of filmmaking—it's really [more Kennedy page 148]

Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer's *Loot and Other Stories* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) was released in April. Opposite: Rory Kennedy wears clothes by **KENNETH COLE NEW YORK**. Necklaces by **MARILYN MAURER** and cuff by **DAWN HALE**, both at **Fragmenta**. **Fragrances:** **KENNETH COLE WHITE**. **Styling:** **HEIDI DIVENS/de facto, NYC**. Hair and make-up: **DIEGO AMERICO/de facto, NYC**. Special thanks: **PETER GEE/Orchard Studios, NYC**. For fashion and photo details see page 148. Photographer: **CARTER BERG**.

MORE KENNEDY

(continued from page 53) an attempt to try to humanize these terrible statistics.

SG: To bring it down to the people who are really living it. Yes, I'm sure your film is going to be very important. I don't think that anything else like it has been done.

EE: Well, we hope it will be very impactful and hope that it will contribute to the fight against AIDS. You know, I got into filmmaking, really, more as an activist than because of a love for filmmaking. And one of my first acts of activism was when I was 14 years old: I got arrested in front of the South African embassy (in Washington, D.C.) for protesting apartheid.

SG: So you're an old hand?

EE: [laughs] Yeah.

SG: Good! [both laugh] I want to tell you about a little thing that I'm doing. I have been troubled by the fact that musicians have big concerts where the money goes to AIDS, but we writers—as individuals, we may have contributed money or contributed in some other way—have done nothing. I had an idea about a year ago: Why not put together an anthology of stories—and frankly, I'm being very selective here—by the big, famous names in short-story writing from all over the world? There would be stories of all kinds, from writers like Arthur Miller to Woody Allen and Susan Sontag, and in each country where the book is published, the publisher would take only the production costs.

EE: Oh, that's incredible!

SG: But no profits. And the writers will not receive any royalties. Whatever money is earned will go to AIDS organizations in that particular country. I've found three publishers—they're all three mine, I may say: I may have twisted their arms a bit [laughs]—who will do it. That will be in America, in England, and in Germany, and I hope France and Italy will soon follow. I've even sat down and wrote letters to 20 writers, and I've already had 15 very enthusiastic responses. It's beginning to get off the ground.

EE: That is great! And are the writers contribut-

ing stories that deal with AIDS directly?

SG: No. They're nothing to do with AIDS. These will be wonderful stories by brilliant people on every subject under the sun. I want this book to be something people will buy to give as a birthday present or a Christmas present, just to give pleasure. I think you've got to be very commercial about this if you want to raise money, just as singers and musicians are. Not everything they sing about concerns AIDS.

EE: Right. I think that's a great idea. Can I ask you one other question? I'm wondering what you think in terms of how we can persuade people in America to look at the AIDS crisis as something that is meaningful in their own lives. In places where it hasn't hit as strongly as it may have in South Africa, how do we make AIDS and HIV a global priority?

SG: Well, I think the very subject and state of your film is important. When you point out that with the incredible movement of people all around the world, this is not one continent or one country's problem. If it isn't stopped where it is rampant, it's going to spread everywhere. You can't stop people flying around the world; you can't stop them picking up lovers. People must wake up and realize that they cannot sit back and think, "It can't happen to me." This incredible globalization we're a part of can become globalization of a terrible infection.

EE: Right. And do you think there's an awareness, a global awareness, of how AIDS has impacted South Africa in the way that there was an awareness about apartheid?

SG: No. And I don't think you can bring the two together. Apartheid was our special problem, but AIDS is the whole of Africa's, and our world's. You know, it has been very good to talk to you. I do congratulate you.

EE: Thank you. I enjoyed speaking with you, too, and hopefully I will get to meet you when we come to South Africa with the project.

SG: I hope so too. You must visit.

EE: I will. Thank you.