



Angela King

Chancellor: In *The Pelican Annual* of 1959, one of the profiles of “campus personalities” was that of a female undergraduate who was about to enter the final year of the History Honours programme. The author of the profile was identified by the initials “B.A.W.”, which we take to indicate a male student, who was himself destined for high office, and who, in the fullness and fulfilment of history, may well be within earshot of this dais now.

This “B.A.W.” began the profile by describing his subject as “a poised, unassuming St Hilda’s girl with a pleasant though vaguely defensive smile.” He singled out, as one of her most striking qualities, “an easy willingness to get things done.” This quality had been dramatically demonstrated in the way in which, on the introduction of party politics on campus, she had “quietly but rapidly mobilised an overwhelming majority in Mary Seacole Hall for the Liberal Party, with an efficient thoroughness which her opponents rued afresh with each succeeding election.” He concluded that “she will probably have more than one claim to fame; but it will always be easier to remember her not so much for her achievements as for herself.”

Chancellor, we produce her now, more poised than ever, still unassuming despite her large claims to fame, still smiling, though more knowingly than defensively now, perhaps more enigmatically, and hardly vague: Angela King, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, with the portfolio of Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women. In this post, to which she was appointed in 1997, she continues to oversee the Division for the Advancement of Women, of which she was Director between 1996 and 1997.

Her own long and illustrious career at the UN Secretariat is itself a stellar example of women's advancement. She was recruited in 1966, after two years with the Jamaican Mission to the UN, where she was one of the first two women foreign service officers. Her career at the Secretariat has taken her through a variety of positions, which have given her a wide range of experience; but, through it all, a recurrent theme has been involvement with the advancement of women. In her early years at the Secretariat, she worked in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and later in the Branch for the Promotion of Equality between Men and Women.

From 1987 to 1992, she was Director of Recruitment and Placement, and Director of Staff Administration and Training. She was the first chief of the Central Evaluation Unit, deputy to the Assistant Secretary General for Human Resources Management, and Director of the Operational Services Division. She represented the Division at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Consider, then, Chancellor, the nice irony of history, when we picture our demure and elegant Angela, seemingly the quintessential product of her genteel, lady-like, colonial girls boarding-school upbringing in the halcyon hills of the parish of St Ann, now riding the rough road to Kabul, across the war-torn mountains of Afghanistan, into the den of the Taliban lion. It is November 1997. She is cool, she is unfazed, she is in command. In fact, at this moment she is leader of the United Nations Interagency Mission to Afghanistan. The mission's objectives include: assessing the gender situation in Afghanistan, and proposing practical, field-oriented guidelines to address gender concerns in the implementation of assistance programmes.

But of all Ms King's special assignments for the UN, none has been more satisfying to her, more representative of the good she thought she might do in the world, than her assignment, between 1992 and 1994, as Chief of the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa, to oversee the transition from apartheid to democracy. In fulfilling this assignment, she became one of only three women to have headed a UN peace and security mission. It was not without its dangers, and she had to negotiate the tensions carefully. It was a personal fulfilment of history for her, because, among other things, some thirty-one years earlier, as President of the Guild of Undergraduates, she had led a march from Mona to the Victoria Pier in downtown Kingston, to protest against the Sharpeville massacre.

She has always been ready to stand up and be counted in the names of principle and justice and freedom. She has had in her, even from childhood, more than a bit of the rebel woman. While in the Lower Fourth at St Hilda's, she was prominent in what she and her schoolmates called a rebellion, against certain racist manifestations on the part of the school's administration. But that did not stop her from eventually becoming Head Girl. As an inmate of Mary Seacole Hall, she was one of the leaders of a protest, strategically timed for a visit by the Chancellor, against the fact that priority was being given to completing the Warden's house before completing the dining room for the girls. That demonstration made sympathetic headlines, and was the subject of an approving lead editorial in *The Sunday Gleaner*.

Angela King's readiness to fight for principle and justice and freedom was enhanced by her gifts for leadership, for mobilising others to purposeful action, for meticulous planning, and for diplomacy. In these matters, from the beginning, she could obviously teach the men a trick or two. When she was elected the first female President of the Guild of Undergraduates, her opponent was a young man who was later to become Prime Minister of a leading West Indian nation. Moreover, her campaign manager later became a Minister of Government and campaign manager for his Prime Minister at a crucial point in the Prime Minister's progress.

The qualities that have distinguished her are the result both of inheritance and upbringing. She is a high achiever in a family of high achievers. She was born in Morant Bay, and her father, the late dynamic and popular Canon R.O.C. King, first black rector of St George's church, fostered in her from childhood a sense of the history that Morant Bay represents. Her willingness to think for herself and to speak her mind was encouraged on those Saturday nights when he would summon the family into his bedroom, to listen to his sermon for the next day and to give him their opinions, good or bad. It was fostered too at the rectory dining table. The rectory stood, as chance would have it, opposite the House of Parliament, and was, as it were, the gallery from which the King children could watch the theatre and history of politics and statecraft unroll. To lunch at that dining table came some of the political and national leaders of the day, and to high tea on Sunday afternoons visiting missionaries and princes of the Church.

She herself will also attribute her certain and strengthening sense of who she is, and her ability to take on the world, to her Caribbean identity. As she says, "I think, coming from the Caribbean, we have a kind of assurance which we probably don't realise when we are in the Caribbean, or among our own people." This is the self-confidence which makes her, in the words of her brother, Ambassador Peter King, "a dominant player" in any situation.

Chancellor, the last time that Ms King stood on this dais was at her own graduation. Even from then she added a characteristic touch of history, or notoriety as some people said, to the occasion. Along with a few other young women, and by design, when she was presented to the Chancellor, Her Royal Highness the Princess Alice of Athlone, she refused to do the required curtsy, and bowed, economically, instead. If that was an anti-colonial gesture, it may also be taken to have been an early King statement of gender equality, for, as the folk song says, expressing the convention, "Ladies will curtsy, gentlemen will bow." Chancellor, she returns to this dais now so that you may have the privilege of honouring her with a bow. I invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University of the West Indies, to confer upon this pathfinding lady, this model of international public service, this champion of the cause of women and therefore of mankind, this fine embodiment of the capabilities of Caribbean womanhood – to confer upon Angela Evelyn Vernon King the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.

Mona

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