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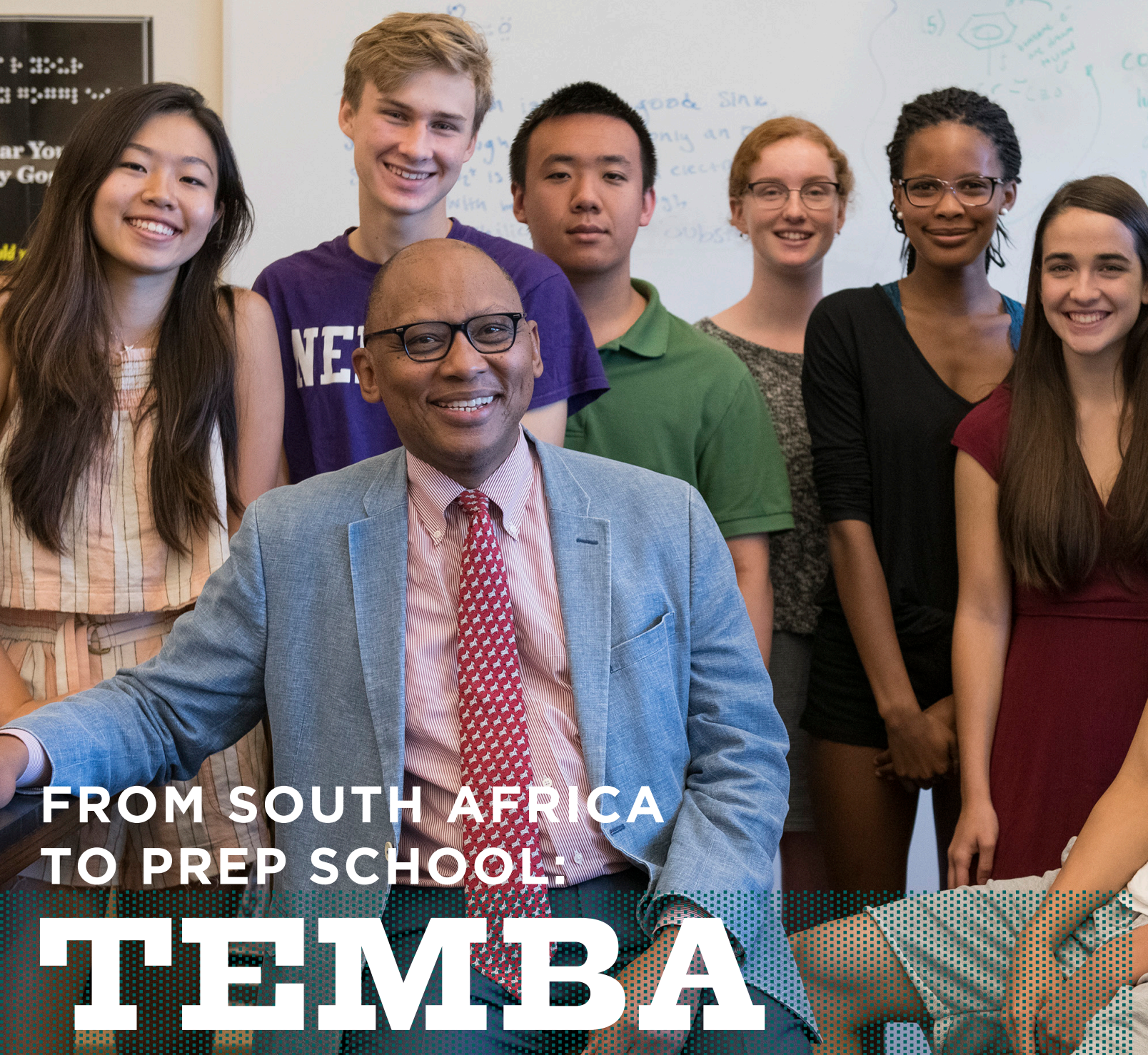
KENTUCKY

Alumni

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**Temba Maqubela:
Prioritizing inclusion
in education**



FROM SOUTH AFRICA
TO PREP SCHOOL:

TEMBA

MAQUBELA

**BREAKS DOWN BARRIERS
IN EDUCATION**

By Robin Roenker



“Inclusion through education will liberate us all.”
—Temba Maqubela

Remarkable journey

Maqubela grew up in the small village of Nonkobe, South Africa, at a time when brutal racial oppression from the country’s ruling apartheid regime was a daily part of life and challenging it was potentially life-threatening.

In early 1976, Maqubela was 17 and months away from graduation at St. John’s College boarding school in Mthatha, South Africa. He had plans to attend medical school on a full scholarship later that year. But those plans evaporated when police stormed his biology classroom — where his mother was the teacher — and detained him, along with three other classmates, for anti-apartheid activities.

Before accepting the role at Groton in 2013, Maqubela enjoyed a 26-year tenure at Phillips Academy, a boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts, where he served, at various times, as a chemistry instructor, chairman of the Chemistry Department, director of a summer math and science program for economically-disadvantaged public school students of color, and finally, dean of faculty and assistant head for academics.

Two years away from Phillips (on a faculty sabbatical and a one-year leave of absence) allowed him to come to UK to pursue his graduate degree and conduct research on organometallic chemistry with UK professor John Selegue. It was Selegue’s specific line of research that led Maqubela to select UK for his graduate study.

“His work appealed to me,” Maqubela says. “We were working with the metal ruthenium and synthesizing all kinds of organometallic complexes. In my previous education I had not been exposed to this new form of chemistry, which combined a bit of inorganic chemistry with organic chemistry to mine the periodic table to create new products and compounds that hadn’t previously been created.”

Maqubela speaks fondly of his time in Lexington and of the kind community of friends and colleagues he and his wife, Vuyelwa, and their three sons, Kanyi, Pumi, and Tebs (Tebs was born at the UK Chandler Hospital.) encountered during their time in Kentucky.

“Our heartstrings pull us toward Kentucky,” Maqubela says. “Kentucky taught us about the character of America. Because until then, we did not know much about the culture and character of the Midwest and the South. We were embraced so warmly by the people of Lexington. As a result, every member of my family now is a big UK fan, in every sport. No matter what — win, lose or draw.”

South Africans at UK plan absentee ballots

By KRISTA PAUL
HISDOLANER BROWNS
Martin Bosman points to them, one by one, in a lettered newspaper photograph tacked to his wall. They're his fellow South Africans, murdered in their homeland for activism against apartheid and support of democracy.
In the photo, his recently massaged friends hold signs that read, "Free Martin Bosman" who was jailed in the 1980s for anti-apartheid activism and who took refuge in the United States in 1990 after remaining he was on a hit list for his views.
Now, four years later as a scholar of political geography at the University of Kentucky, Bosman is planning a trip to Atlanta where he and fellow UK scholars from South Africa will cast their votes in the first all-race elections in their country.
SEE ABSENTEE, A6



Martin Bosman, from left, Pumi Maqubela, Kanyi Maqubela, Vuyelwa Maqubela, and Temba Maqubela, with Tebs. Maqubela in his lap, will drive to Atlanta to vote Tuesday in the first all-race South African elections.

Mark Conatser

Lexington Herald-Leader, April 25, 1994

Despite coming from a long line of prominent South African educators and activists (His maternal grandfather, Zachariah Keodireland “Z.K.” Matthews, was the first black person to earn a degree from a South African University and was a teacher to Nelson Mandela.), Maqubela had carried out his anti-apartheid work underground and without his parents’ knowledge.

“They were comfortable with the fact that I was going to be a medical doctor,” he told the Groton School Quarterly in a 2013 interview, just after his headmaster appointment. But as a young man, and even looking back today, Maqubela never

Though he may now be headmaster at the prestigious Groton School, an elite boarding school in Groton, Massachusetts, Temba Maqubela ’94 AS will always hold a place in his heart for the University of Kentucky.

Maqubela, a native of South Africa who escaped the country during apartheid, earned a master’s degree in chemistry from UK in 1994, while at the same time pursuing a distinguished career as an educator and academic administrator in the Northeast.



regretted his efforts to subvert a regime that was unjust. “We were going to use a combination of brainpower, nonviolence [and] passive resistance to end apartheid,” he added.

After being detained, Maqubela evaded a certain jail sentence in South Africa by escaping to Botswana as a political refugee. After a year in Botswana, he moved to Nigeria, where he earned his undergraduate degree in chemistry from the University of Ibadan.

Their newlywed days weren’t without fear, though. Even in Botswana, the couple found themselves under perpetual surveillance from South African authorities and were forced to move constantly from one friend’s house to another’s to evade arrest or even death. The couple was targeted and narrowly escaped with their lives during an infamous June 1985 government-sponsored attack on anti-apartheid activists in Botswana known as the Raid on Gaborone.

white New England boarding school, Maqubela has been interviewed by media outlets since his appointment as Groton’s eighth headmaster, including the CBS Evening News.

“I am an unusual headmaster of Groton, if I do say so myself,” he told CBS in 2016.

Prioritizing inclusion

Founded in 1884 with high-profile graduates including future president Franklin D. Roosevelt among its alumni, Groton is a preparatory school of roughly 380 students in grades 8-12, where the average graduating class has an ACT composite score of 32.

Tuition and boarding cost approximately \$56,000 per year, and the school has an endowment of \$380 million. Roughly 43 percent of Groton students receive financial aid, and the average financial award per student is about \$46,000 annually.

Since assuming the headmaster position, Maqubela has made inclusion at Groton a driving mission. The high cost of admission, he believes, should not be a barrier to students who wish to come.

“Apartheid was exclusion. And the antidote for exclusion is inclusion, and that’s what propels me,” Maqubela says.

All of Maqubela’s life experiences — living under and fighting a repressive political system, coming to a new country as a refugee, residing in an impoverished urban neighborhood, subsisting on welfare and minimum wages, becoming a parent wanting to provide the best for his children — have converged to make him certain of one ultimate truth: education is the key to a better life.

It’s why he’s so passionate about his calling as a teacher. And it’s become his personal mantra.

“Inclusion through education will liberate us all,” he says. “It was our rallying cry in South Africa, whether we were detained or jailed, or whatever. We knew that education would eventually liberate us.”

That assuredness about the profound value of education stayed with Maqubela and Vuvu — herself an accomplished, longtime teacher of English at Phillips Academy and now Groton School — when they arrived in America, and likely helped build a foundation for their sons’ success. (Kanyi, Pumi, and Tebs Ma-

Photo: Eileen Haraszimonicz



Vuyelwa and Temba Maqubela (center) in 2013 with their children (from left) Kanyi, Tebs and Pumi.

For roughly eight years he lived in exile and had little correspondence with his family and future wife, Vuyelwa, who often goes by Vuvu, except for infrequent letters sent without a return address, so his whereabouts could not be tracked.

In 1984, the two were finally able to reconnect, and in January 1985, the couple married in Botswana, an event celebrated by more than 1,000 guests. People “... came from thousands of miles to be at this wedding. They crossed borders to say that love would defeat apartheid,” Maqubela told the Groton School Quarterly.

When their first child arrived, they made plans with Temba’s grandmother to hide their newborn son in her attic if anything should happen to them.

Seeking a safer, more secure life for their family, the Maqubelas applied for resettlement as political refugees in America and moved to Manhattan in 1986. There, they lived on \$60/week from Temba’s minimum wage job as a coat checker at the Museum of Natural History. They made ends meet with food stamps and by standing in line for meals at soup kitchens.

Eventually, Maqubela secured a job teaching chemistry at Long Island City High School in Queens. After a year there, he landed a teaching post at Phillips Academy in Massachusetts and began his accomplished trajectory toward headmaster at Groton School.

As a black, South-African educator at an elite, predominantly

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qubela, graduates, in turn, of Stanford, Dartmouth, and Boston College, have successful careers in venture capital investment, engineering and the music industry.)

“When I was on welfare in New York, I knew that eventually my education would lift me out of those times into a place where I could rightfully educate others, which was my calling,” Maqubela says.

Influenced by his past experiences, one of Maqubela’s first acts as headmaster at Groton was to initiate and launch a new campaign called Groton Affordability and Inclusion (GRAIN), which was approved by the school’s board of trustees in 2014.

Deemed the school’s top strategic priority, the initiative drove home the school’s new commitment to making Groton affordable to families at all income levels by freezing tuition increases for three years, increasing the percentage of students on financial aid and considering applicants regardless of their ability to pay tuition.

“When I came here, I asked myself the question, not so much who is here, but ‘Who is not here? And why?’” Maqubela says.

“Talent and income — there is no correlation between how much money you have and your talent academically. It’s up to schools like Groton, who have the resources, to show how schools can be inclusive,” he told CBS.

Students who are academically eligible for Groton who come from families making \$80,000 or less in annual income were already essentially able to come to Groton for free, through robust financial aid support.

“We had already been taking care of those with very modest means. But for families making between \$80,000 to \$300,000 a year before taxes, it’s hard for them to part with \$60,000 for tuition,” Maqubela says.

Schools and colleges in general overlook, in his words, the “talented missing middle” — middle income families from urban and middle America.

In addition to increasing the overall percentage of students receiving aid, the GRAIN program also allowed Groton to admit five full-scholarship Inclusion Scholars each year for four consecutive years, until the total reached 20, a level now maintained. At any given time, there

are 20 Inclusion Scholars at Groton School, a subset of the overall financial aid population.

The efforts seem to be working. Between 2014-2016, Groton saw a 43 percent rise in student diversity, and students of color now represent 44 percent of the total student body.

“Temba has Groton School pulling with all oars in the same direction ... toward equity, diversity and affordability,” says Megan Harlan, Groton’s assistant head for external programs. “Every decision he makes, he does with the well-being of students on the forefront of his mind.”

“We want Groton to forever be a school that is associated with inclusion, so that nobody can ask the question, ‘Who is not here?’” Maqubela says. “We want everybody to be here.”

Student focused

Today, Maqubela, known to his students as “Mr. Maq,” continues to teach an organic chemistry class alongside his duties as headmaster. Teaching is something that’s simply in his DNA — going back generations on both sides of his family — and it’s something he happens to be great at.

In 1993, while living in Kentucky, Maqubela was honored with a White House Distinguished Teaching Award for his work at Phillips Academy. The UK Chemistry Department at the time helped supply him with funds and a car so that he could make the trip to Washington to receive the honor. “That was the American spirit, which was shown to us in Kentucky,” he says.

In 2014, he received the South Africa Partners’ Desmond Tutu Social Justice Award. And just last year, Maqubela was one of five national honorees in the 2018 Ozy Educator Awards program, selected by the website on the basis of student and alumni nominations.

“Temba keeps the students and the student experience at the center of his thoughts,” says Andy Anderson, Groton’s associate head of school. “He knows them and personally cares for them. He reminds all of us who work at Groton that the care of students should be foremost in our thoughts.”



Temba Maqubela not only acts as headmaster at Groton Academy but manages to teach organic chemistry, too.

Photo: Tom Kates

Maqubela reflects on his time at Kentucky as an example of the inclusion and acceptance he hopes to pay forward to generations of Groton students into the future.

“I was one of the only black students in the science department at Kentucky at the time. But I didn’t feel excluded. I felt embraced,” he says.

He recalled another fond memory of his stay in the Bluegrass State: the lengths his UK colleagues went in April 1994 in order to ensure that he and Vuvu could make it to the nearest designated polling station in Atlanta. They cast their votes for Nelson Mandela in the first independent general election to be held in South Africa — a true democratic election in which all races were finally able to take part.

“The Chemistry Department arranged for us to get a state car and gave us a credit card to pay all of our travel expenses, enough for a family of five to travel to Atlanta so that Vuvu and I could vote,” he says.

“Who does that? The love we felt was real in Kentucky.” ■

