

ssured atmosphere  
ver, this ideal was  
a radical form of in-  
now undermining  
e is something al-  
concludes, "about a  
is intoxicated by  
while failing to pay  
meaning."

used "afflictions" of  
er little more than  
as already learned  
made a religion out  
ectually impatient  
an they conserve.  
2005 was "engen-  
of a consumer soci-  
ent looting of New  
anger and appetite  
knew no other val-  
d in the Temple of  
consumerist creed"  
culture" dominated  
y, the fallout from  
y, debt, poverty and  
as Jefferson's man-  
ness "falls like kero-  
liberty", warming  
nd blinding" count-

readers tempted to  
ould do well to per-  
e author's America  
théd and less nega-  
In the end a sharp  
ining in anthropol-  
th to paint a vivid,  
e of a society con-  
lled between con-  
forge a single identi-  
ty; to set some sort  
ide quicksilver indi-  
culture of innova-  
are throttled by spe-  
cile the American  
for all with the real-  
for many. Among  
traditions help to  
attachment to reli-  
y in Europe. "Sub-  
Mr Riley-Smith, "is  
ve to the challenge  
by the bootstraps."  
ents Mr Riley-Smith  
"Hobbesville USA",  
liberty has degener-  
g man against man  
ia. At other times he  
Hobbiton in J.R. Tol-  
, whose denizens  
y, ordered society  
ellowship is strong  
it is small. "There is",  
Hobbiton meshed  
dysfunctional com-

munities of the USA, not least in the sub-  
urbs that harbour the bulk of the nation's  
population." But he believes that the first  
decade of the 21st century has seen the  
balance tip too far in the direction of  
hyper-individualism. Now the balance  
needs to be corrected. But how?

The answer, in so far as this book has  
one, is Barack Obama, whose mixed back-  
ground and eloquent writing appear to  
have persuaded Mr Riley-Smith that this  
particular president has the "opportunity,  
the capacity and the vision" to recast the  
Liberty Bell and make room for the civic  
values such as equality, fairness and justice  
that America has neglected as a result of its  
disproportionate emphasis on personal  
freedom. How ironic that the book should  
be published just when a quirky election  
in Massachusetts has shown how little  
power even the most inspiring of presi-  
dents has to recast America. Some may say  
that this, too, is one of the "afflictions of  
liberty". But maybe it is just liberty. ■

New film

## Bringing an icon to life

### The inspiration of Nelson Mandela

CLINT EASTWOOD'S "Invictus" has  
given Morgan Freeman, a 72-year-old  
ever-rising cinematic star from Memphis,  
Tennessee, his best chance yet to show  
what a canny actor he is. The year is 1995,  
just 14 months after South Africa's first  
multiracial elections. Nelson Mandela  
wants to use the rugby World Cup, for  
white South Africans the absolute pinna-  
cle of sport, to prevent the veneer of social  
unity from being rent asunder. Mr  
Freeman plays Mandela as a man both

burdened and blessed by having become a  
living icon after years of political struggle,  
many of them spent as the world's most  
famous political prisoner. But the newly  
elected President Mandela is determined  
to make use of his image rather than letting  
it use him, and no director could under-  
stand this better than Mr Eastwood, who  
has always kept ahead of his audience by  
ringing unexpected changes on his own  
star persona. The confluence of these three  
wily men—Mr Freeman, Mr Eastwood and  
Mr Mandela—has given birth to a perfect  
storm of a character study.

Frail and stooped at 76, the former  
revolutionary calmly bucks his closest  
colleagues during his first days in office by  
insisting that post-apartheid South Africa  
can survive only if fear and hatred are  
consigned to the past. Addressing a group  
that has just voted to change the name and  
colours of the Afrikaners' beloved Spring-  
bok rugby team, which blacks consider a  
symbol of oppression, he coolly explains  
that he spent his years in prison studying  
the enemy, and rugby is the ticket to  
winning their hearts.

He deploys a quaint, courtly charm  
when he takes tea with the Springboks  
captain, Francois Pienaar (Matt Damon),  
and discreetly lets him know that he  
would appreciate it if he would lead his  
losing team to a World Cup victory. And  
when he begins studiously memorising  
the names of the players and excusing  
himself from policy meetings to check on  
their progress, Mr Freeman lets the viewer  
glimpse the great man's inner child, who is  
a mischievous boy becoming an ardent  
rugby fan.

The past casts only fleeting shadows:  
Mr Mandela finding a bracelet belonging  
to his estranged wife; Pienaar visiting the  
Mandela cell. By incarnating a hero for  
whom leading well is the best revenge, Mr  
Freeman has enabled Mr Eastwood, Holly-  
wood's avenging angel, to make his  
sunniest film yet. ■



Try, boy, try

John Heilemann and Mark  
York magazine and not in  
in our review ("Ring the  
has been corrected online.