

# A Royal Visit, at a Careful Distance

Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales, arrived in Boston in a snap of cold rain and on the tails of another crisis for the palace.

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BOSTON — In its spirit, the arrival of Prince William and Catherine, Princess of Wales, to Boston on Tuesday landed somewhere between Kabuki and comic operetta.

Disembarking from the plane that brought her here, the former Kate Middleton wore a slim pantsuit, a whopping pair of sapphire earrings and the stilettos that are her version of Crocs. For a later City Hall appearance, she would change into a tartan Burberry frock, an Alexander McQueen coat, more modest earrings by Shyla London and further spike heels. The prince was his wife's visual foil in a two-button suit of dark navy with a single vent, a white spread collar shirt and a figured necktie.

Notice from the royals' Kensington Palace offices alerted the press that their highnesses were traveling to the United States to promote their environmental innovation initiative, the Earthshot Prize — headed by Hannah Jones, the former chief sustainability officer at Nike — and that they “won't be distracted by other things.” Their jam-packed agenda was set to include courtside attendance at a Celtics game; visits to a clean tech incubator, a nonprofit focused on helping high-risk youths; and, finally, a televised awards gala on Friday with a star-studded cast set to include, among others, Annie Lennox and Billie Eilish.

Presumably the “other things” referenced stropky siblings with forthcoming tell-all memoirs and their own strategies for gaming the “firm” (as the royal family is sometimes called). As it turned out, though, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were not even the principal scene-stealers in the latest installment of a centuries-old melodrama. Even before the commercial flight carrying the prince and princess had touched down in Boston, the palace was distancing itself from a series of objectionable comments made earlier by, according to British press reports, Susan Hussey at a Buckingham Palace reception on gender-based violence.

“Obviously, I wasn't there, but racism has no place in our society,” a spokesman for the prince said at a Wednesday morning briefing in Boston. “The comments were unacceptable, and it is right that the individual has stepped aside with immediate effect.” Running damage control on one's 83-year-old godmother (Lady Hussey, who is that to the prince, became a member of the court of Queen Elizabeth II in 1960) can be nobody's idea of a good time.



The Prince and Princess of Wales chat with Mayor Michelle Wu and her family, from left: her husband, Conor Pewarski, and her sons, Blaise and Cass, in her office at Boston City Hall. Reba Saldanha/Associated Press

Bringing English (or, more accurately, Scottish — given the gale-force winds that accompanied an afternoon of spitting and then pouring rain) weather with them, the royal couple made their first stop at Boston City Hall to meet with Mayor Michelle Wu; her husband, Conor Pewarski; and their young sons, Blaise and Cass.

Laughter could be heard by the press corps trailing the royals as it spilled into a hallway outside the fifth-floor mayor's office within a grim Brutalist landmark more evocative of dystopian scenarios than the happy futuristic one the Earthshot Prize takes as its inspiration. Ms. Wu and her husband were regaling the royal couple, Mr. Pewarski later explained, with tales of the family's countertop composter. Composting is one of the mayor's many progressive civic schemes.

Back in 1962, President John F. Kennedy launched (the only verb, really) his “moonshot” initiative with a speech at Rice University before 35,000 people that encapsulated the optimism and innocent assurance of an American that can sometimes seem bygone. “We choose to go to the moon,” the president remarked of his goal of landing a man there before 1970. NASA, of course, beat that deadline when the Eagle landed on July 20, 1969, and Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface. In those days, the moon was a fantasy destination and not yet a plausible escape route for earthlings who may have irreparably soiled their home planet.

While there are plenty of reasons to admire royal figures whose stated aim is reversing global warming in under a decade and thus safeguarding Earth's future, what was not entirely clear is how a three-day royal jaunt to Boston might advance the cause, even given the worthy initiatives the Earthshot Prize will ultimately underwrite.



The Prince and Princess of Wales, arriving at Boston Logan International Airport. Chris Jackson/Chris Jackson Collection, via Getty Images

True, there are always many agendas and not least of them was to remind the world beyond Oprah that, aside from their exalted status as the next king and queen of England, the young royals are vitally young and mediagenic: Each is notably tall and trim, and more like runway models with excellent résumés than, as the novelist Hilary Mantel once controversially observed of the-then Duchess of Cambridge, “a jointed doll on which certain rags are hung.” And both seem committed to the job of maintaining succession.

At least that was so for onlookers like Tyler Washburn. An aide at the Maine Legislature, Mr. Washburn, 29, had traveled to Boston from his home state to join a crowd of several thousand in waiting hours in the rain for a glimpse of the couple, who represent, he said, “a living symbol of the monarchy’s evolution from the past.”

And even for those in a scrum of select press invited to observe the royals at close range — for periods of up to 90 seconds, as they greeted and ceremonially met and processed along a hallway where six blowup photographs of Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to Boston in 1976 had been installed for the occasion — the theater of the occasion did, in fact, feel transporting. The royal visit existed almost as an episode of time travel — as though the 19th century had hit the retrorockets to break into the 21st.