

Andrew Young, bagman for US capitalism in Africa

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Andrew Young, the former black civil rights leader and confidant of Martin Luther King Jr., has recently come under criticism for his dirty dealings with corrupt African governments, especially for his close relationship with General Olusegan Obasanjo, Nigeria's former president.

Young has followed the well-worn path from protest to politician to venal corporate bagman. His case is particularly repugnant in that his earlier struggles against segregation and police repression in the American South of the 1960s contrast starkly with his present political alliances with brutal dictators. While operating as a purveyor for American corporations in their plunder of African resources, he has, not incidentally, gotten very rich in the process.

Recently both the *New York Times* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published exposes on Young's consulting firm, ironically named GoodWorks International (GWI), as a lucrative conduit for facilitating US interests in the "emerging markets" of Africa.

According to the *New York Times* article, questions about Young and GWI's relationship with the corrupt outgoing president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, became a lightning rod for those opposing Obasanjo's anti-democratic policies during the run-up to the sham elections held last week. (See "Call for Nigerian presidential election to be annulled after massive corruption.")

The firm advertises that it "opens doors for corporations interested in doing business in Africa and the Caribbean." The mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin, who is also a friend of Young, praised GWI for practicing "public-purpose capitalism."

This view is not shared by those following human rights issues in Africa. "Andrew Young has never been interested in these [humanitarian] issues," Femi Falana, president of the West African Bar Association, told the *Times* "He is just here making money."

Young put it another way, "For 40 years of my life," he told the *Times*, "I was on the outside seeking change. I realized that I could be more effective being on the inside implementing it."

What changes have GWI implemented? As the principal lobbying agent for the government of Nigeria in the US, it is making millions representing major companies like ChevronTexaco, General Electric, and Motorola seeking contracts from the Nigerian government.

The company generally receives a commission equal to 1 ½ percent of a contract's value. This is a tidy sum when GoodWorks consults on contracts such as General Electric Energy's agreement to provide \$400 million in turbines for Nigeria, as they did last year.

The firm is a major shareholder in a Nigerian energy company, Suntrust Oil, which won a lease for offshore oil fields. According to the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, Nigeria provides as much as 40 percent of GoodWorks revenues, paying \$1.75 million to the company since 2000, not including a retainer fee of \$60,000 a month.

GWI also specializes in relations with other oil-producing African states, including Sudan and Angola. Moreover, it represents other American companies among the most notorious for their slave-wages and environmental destruction in Africa, including Nike, Coca-Cola and the gold mining concern Barrick Gold, a company connected with the Bush family

The principals at GWI represent a virtual "who's who" of political and corporate Democrats. According to the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, Young set up GWI in 1997 with the help of Hamilton Jordon, President Carter's former chief of staff. Foundation directors for GWI include President Bill Clinton, Alexis Herman, the former Secretary of Labor, and Maurice Tempelman, a diamond merchant and fund raiser in the Democratic Party. Tempelman has been implicated as an important figure in the DeBeers diamond cartel in Africa, now known as

the “blood diamond” business.

Reports indicate that Young’s ties to Africa developed while he was the US ambassador to the UN in the late 70s, meeting Obasanjo, the military-installed president of Nigeria, at the time. “Obasanjo and I kind of hit it off immediately,” Young told the *Times*. “We were mainly interested in democracy.”

Actually, Obasanjo was a US operative, closely allied to the CIA, who took power in 1976 after his predecessor, Murtala Muhammad, was assassinated under unexplained circumstances. At the time, the US was still reeling from the OPEC oil embargo and was vitally concerned with Nigerian oil interests.

When Obasanjo left power the first time, in 1979, he was appointed to the board of directors of the CIA-run African American Institute, headed by the former US ambassador to Nigeria Donald B. Easum. In the 1980s, Obasanjo was sent on high-profile speaking tours by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the US Institute for Peace.

Young has defended his relations with Obasanjo, portraying him as the defender of democracy in Nigeria who has broken the past practice of corruption that has been rampant since the country won its independence. Obasanjo has also received the praises of President George W. Bush and Colin Powell as an example of the type of democracy they would like to see in Africa.

A very different picture is drawn in the February 14 issue of the *International Herald Tribune*, in an article entitled, “Fooling people some of the time,” which reports that Obasanjo has done nothing about corruption in the country with “as much as \$600 billion in ill-gotten gains sitting in foreign bank accounts while the rural farmers live on less than one dollar a day.”

The paper accuses Obasanjo of “monopolizing power the day he entered office,” and of keeping “the oil portfolio for himself so that he could use Nigeria’s vast oil wealth for political ends.” As a result, all politicians in the government were “beholden to him for money.”

In an attempt change the constitution so that he could run a third term, he tried to pressure state governors and members of Parliament with bribes as high as \$400,000, the *Herald Tribune* said. “Governors who refused were threatened with impeachment,” as was the case with his former ally and vice president, Atiku Abubakar, who broke with Obasanjo and ran against his hand picked successor for president.

In 2004 Transparency International ranked Nigeria the most corrupt regime in Africa. According to the BBC, out

of 145 countries, only Haiti and Bangladesh ranked worse. That year, Obasanjo, despite sitting on the world’s sixth largest reserves of oil, ended government subsidies on oil, sparking a series of strikes and pitched battles in which the police and military murdered protesters. The removal of subsidies was part of an IMF restructuring program that Obasanjo imposed with a vengeance.

“Who benefits from Andy Young’s relationship with the government of Nigeria? It’s not the Nigerian people,” remarked Ken Silverstein, a reporter for *Harper’s Magazine*. “As I see it, the primary beneficiaries of his work in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa are those corrupt, authoritarian regimes he works with and his private corporate clients.”

Young has provided his services both to enrich his clients and himself, but also to assist the United States as it joins hands with various blood-soaked dictatorships and strongman in order to secure American strategic interests in the pivotal continent.

Young is a member of the National Security Study Group and therefore would have been briefed on the Bush administration’s newly established United States Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Young is aware that the US has developed strategic interests in the oil states of Africa and has made plans for the establishment of strategic military bases. West Africa alone has an estimated 15 percent of the world’s oil reserves. And by 2015, the region is expected to provide 25 percent of the US energy market.

Meanwhile, the funds flowing into GWI and the hands of Andrew Young are at the expense of the Nigerian and African masses. Despite the nation’s wealth in natural resources, 70 percent of its population of 140 million lives on less than US \$1 per day.



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