

## The instruction

Written by Al McFarlane Editor-in-Chief  
Wednesday, 13 June 2012 14:31

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Former United States ambassador to the United Nations, the Reverend Andrew Young seemed to be on a new diplomatic mission aimed at negotiating a mutually beneficial relationship between legacy institutions that serve Minnesota's Black communities, and corporate and public sector entities.

That relationship, he told hundreds of business, civic and community leaders attending the Minneapolis Urban League Annual Gala at the Minneapolis Convention Center Thursday, May 31st, should reexamine and illuminate the asset base of communities like North Minneapolis and craft economic development strategies that start with engaging residents and institutions as stakeholders in the development of the area and of the region.

In Atlanta, GA where Young served as Mayor before he was named top US diplomat, the Black community suffered lack of investment by both public and private sectors, similar, some would say, to North Minneapolis, headquarters of Minneapolis Urban League. Under his direction, city planners initiated massive development projects centered in previously marginalized communities in Atlanta's southside. The development projects included Atlanta's successful bid for the 1996 International Summer Olympics, and projects which led to expansions of the Hartsfield International Airport, renamed to Hartsfield-Jackson International in tribute to the great first Black Mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson.

"On a \$2 billion project," Young said, "we went to corporate and construction industry leaders with a plan that called for 60% of the business to go to Black-owned businesses. We expected some push back and there was some. But we made the case that 40% of \$2 billion that would go to white businesses was still a lot of money....too much to walk away from....and that these developments would likely trigger future developments in which white business would take 70-85% percent of the deals."

In what sounded like music to leaders of North Minneapolis economic and civic engagement institutions, Ambassador Young said a development that included concession stands sought out women who were on welfare who were heads of households and trained them to run the concession businesses. They were made not only operators, but owners of the concession businesses. Their contracts gave them 60% ownership of their concession business.

"What can we do with Black men who have disparately high rates of unemployment and underemployment?" the planners asked. "We scoured the community for men who had military or scouting experience and created security businesses that they would work and have majority ownership control," Mayor Young said.

Likewise, Young said, the planners reached out to the youth in the early stages of the hip-hop business explosion. "We offered them exclusive contracts to develop t-shirt and other memorabilia concessions that complimented and supported the business developments," he said.

Young's message was that the gateway for growth for the white community, for the corporate

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community, was in partnership and development of the Black community. His instruction was that the development of the Black community was dependent on elevating the art of stakeholderism, which, in the arena social entrepreneurship, approximates and drives returns on investment equivalent to stockholdership.

Earlier in the day, Ambassador Young, who also was elected to the US Congress from Georgia, addressed an assembly of high school students from throughout the Minneapolis Public Schools District who gathered at North Community High School Academy for Arts and Communications. Young told three stories about young people who discovered the connection between the pursuit of higher education and training, and their ability to find fulfillment in the world.

There was a young woman who came from complete, total and abject poverty. She and her younger sisters and brothers were being raised by a single mom. She worked part time to help the family make ends meet.

She was a straight “A” student. She was brilliant. She was gifted. And she worked very, very hard. She earned a scholarship to a major university in the North. The scholarship was for nearly \$60,000 a year for 4 years.

“My wife and I heard about her and sought her out. Because even though she had the scholarship, she had no resources to even get the clothing she would need to live in a northern city...no winter clothing, no overcoat, no boots and the like. We told her ‘when we take our kids shopping to get ready for college and the school year, we’re taking you too.’”

“She was so exceptional we wanted to know how her younger brothers and sisters were doing. Were they like her, smart, focused? She said all of them are straight “A” students as well. In fact, when her employers and colleagues heard about their co-worker’s exceptional children, they wondered, what about the mother?”

It goes without saying that the mom, who was working as a nurse’s assistant, was brilliant as well. They found a way to enable her to go to a local community college, where she, of course, became a straight “A” student.

The point, Ambassador Young said, is that this girl, and this family, discovered the link between dedicated, focused preparation and opportunity. “You do your part....get prepared...and God provides the opportunity that’s tailor made for you.

The second story involved a junior high school student. Young was invited to address students and noticed one kid in particular who stood out in the crowd. “He was a skinny kid with a huge, meticulously groomed Afro. When I walked past him I smacked him upside the head. He jumped back, startled, with a ‘why’d you do that look’. I told him I hope what’s inside the head is as together as what is outside.

He told his parents that a school visitor hit him in the head. They told him that “visitor” was the Mayor of Atlanta.

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I came across him a decade later. He was a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and wrote asking what I thought about his plan to run for student government president on a platform challenging all students to allocate an additional \$15 to their tuition and student fees, for a student controlled fund designated to provide cash assistance to students who found unforeseeable financial challenges that might derail their education. He won that election, even in a student body that was known for bourgeois privilege and not for charitable compassion.

Today, Young said, that young man, Kasim Reed, is Mayor of Atlanta, and next month is hosting a conference of Black mayors from North and South America, the Caribbean and Africa. His gift: the ability to perceive and define opportunities to create common good through collaboration and sharing.

The last story was most personal. In his own youth, Young was privileged to have parents that could send him to any school. At a summer job as a lifeguard, he rescued a drowning junkie, who recognized him, and reminded him that they both had been kicked out of school in the 3rd grade for a prank they pulled.

Young remembered the incident and his childhood classmate. "Whatever happened to you?" he asked.

That expulsion began a descent into the nether world of detention centers, reform schools and state penitentiaries.

"When he asked what had become of me, I said I was still bouncing from school to school, uncommitted and undecided on what I wanted to do. He read me the riot act. He said you got back in school in the 3rd grade because you had parents who could come to school and get you back in school. 'My mom worked for a few dollars a day plus tips doing domestic work and she could not miss one day of work to argue on my behalf with schools or the courts. You should be ashamed to be bouncing around without direction. You must do better!' he insisted."

That admonishment brought focus to his life, Young said, and set him on course to become a preacher, a pastor, a congressman, a mayor, and an ambassador, an architect of the Civil Rights Movement with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., an author, and holder of over 100 honorary doctorate degrees from prestigious colleges and universities worldwide.

He had two things to say about politics. First get a job for your professional development and living, do it well, and volunteer in local political activity. If you are earnest and effective, the party and voters will seek you out entrusting you to serve their interests. Secondly, he said, remember, politics is about being at the table, or having your person at the table, when the money is being divided up.

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