

Feb 26th 2011

Andrew Young Receives Lifetime Achievement Emmy

By Abena Agyeman-Fisher

In a star-studded event that involved singer and social activist Harry Belafonte, iconic newsman Dan Rather (pictured left), baseball legend Hank Aaron (pictured middle), former New York Mayor David Dinkins and Dr. Martin L. King Jr.'s eldest son Martin L. King III, civil rights legend Andrew Young (pictured right) received the Trustees Emmy Award for Lifetime Achievement from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) on Friday night at the Sheraton Hotel in New York City.



Getty Images

NATAS gave Young the award for being one of the first to integrate television in the Peabody award-winning CBS series "Look Up and Live," where Young served as a host from 1957 to 1960 at a time when blacks were hardly seen on television. NATAS also recognized his current award-winning quarterly series "Andrew Young Presents," where positive stories on Africa, the message of Mahatma Ghandhi, the Civil Rights Movement and gun control have been brought to life.

While Young is no stranger to awards -- he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Jimmy Carter and the Legion d'honneur from France -- this particular distinction is rare. The last time the award was given was six years ago to Walt Disney Corp. CEO Robert Iger. Other recipients of the award are past CBS broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite in 1981, CNN's Ted Turner in 1990 and television host extraordinaire Ed Sullivan in 1970.

With actor Sidney Poitier and world-renowned author Maya Angelou narrating much of the event, the ceremony was an impressive convergence of heartfelt testimony, revelatory video and song.

"Long before he transformed Atlanta, long before he was United Nations Ambassador, long before he was

elected Georgia's first black Congressman since Reconstruction, even before he met Dr. Martin L. King Jr. and set out to redeem the very fabric of this country through a campaign of non-violent social change, before all that, Andrew Young got his start in television," Angelou said.

One of the major highlights of the night occurred when Young was shown being beaten in St. Augustine, Fla.

Walking on the corner of King and St. George Sts., Young was brutally attacked as he attempted to march through the area.

Even after the beating, though, Young still returned to the street and was finally allowed to pass through the area undisturbed, gaining the respect from his adversaries who called him a "tough n*gger."

Up until 2006, nearly 50 years later, Young didn't realize that the incident was taped. Much like the Rodney King beating was watched around the world on television 27 years later, Young's beating was also broadcast and is credited for passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



Getty Images



Getty Images

Incumbent St. Augustine Mayor Joseph Balls was on hand to present Young with a plaque that read:

"The city of St. Augustine, our nation's oldest city, is proud to announce that it has designated and named the intersection of St. Georges St. and King St. 'Andrew Young Crossing.' It will forever honor and commemorate the actions of Ambassador Andrew Young for his efforts in St. Augustines' Civil Rights Movement that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Balls then added:

"This is just to let you know, that on that corner, we are going to put a big, huge granite slab that tells your story there so that everyone that sees it will know that you were able to cross through and continue the movement."

Brokaw met Young (pictured above with his wife) as he worked as a reporter for WSB-TV during the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta and has covered Young many times since. Brokaw had this to say before he presented the award to Young:

"It's a real personal and professional privilege, obviously, to know him as well as I know him. The fact is,

there's not enough words left for us to acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of Dr. King, Andrew Young and that movement."

What got the crowd really going, though, was Brokaw's comments about good friends Aaron and Belafonte:

"I really never thought I would get to the point in my life where I would call these men my friends -- two of my favorite heroes.

"One of greatest times of my life was traveling with the Braves, getting to know Hank. At the end of the summer, I really thought we had achieved a bond, and so I said, Is there anything I can do for you, Hank? Whatever it is, you just let me know. He said, 'I'd like to meet Barbara Walters.'
[Laughter]

"And the other great was a man who was known as the magical, charismatic entertainer of America, the Harry Belafonte. When I was in college, I raced across Minneapolis, Oklahoma and Des Moines, to hear Harry in concert.

"I quickly learned never to take a date to his concert, because by the end of the evening, they were no longer interested in you. [Laughter]



Getty Images



Getty Images

deciding to do what you had to do on behalf of others."

While honoring Young, singer and actor Tyrese (pictured left) revealed that Young also serves as his mentor:

"I feel like he's my best friend. I feel like he's my father, he's the grandfather I never had. There's a moment when there was a very significant role that presented itself and through my mentor, I said I'd love to talk to and be with Ambassador Andrew Young.

"Young personally drove me around in the footsteps of his significant role. At the time I was 31, and I had never been in a car with a man driving me to street signs and boulevards with his name on it.

"It was very magical, so I just want to say thank you for being selfless, thank you for

Once Young took the stage, he said:

"If all of the things that were said tonight are true, then I'm a pretty good guy, but I wouldn't be anything if it was not for the love and support of all of you who are my family. The sacrifices that are made the most are from families. Thank you."

Frankly, there will never be enough awards to fully honor Young and his rock solid commitment to his people, this nation and the world. Still, it is fitting that we continue to celebrate living legends such as Young while they are here so they can know how indebted we are to them for their contributions that irrevocably shaped and changed the world.