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 CONTACT**

DKC Public Relations

Brian Moriarty	212.981.5252	brian_moriarty@dkcnews.com
Daniel Roberti	212.981.5252	daniel_roberti@dkcnews.com
Jose Martinez	212.981.5252	jose_martinez@dkcnews.com

For *Independent Lens*

Voleine Amilcar	415-356-8383 x 244	voleine_amilcar@itvs.org
Cara White	843-881-1480	cara.white@mac.com

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***THE POWERBROKER: WHITNEY YOUNG'S FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS,
 A NEW FILM ABOUT UNSUNG HERO OF THE MOVEMENT,
 PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2013***

Film Features Interviews with Howard Zinn, Donald Rumsfeld, Dorothy Height, Ossie Davis, Julian Bond, Vernon Jordan, John Lewis, Kenneth Chenault, and More

(San Francisco, CA) — Whitney Young, Jr., the civil rights champion who negotiated with top leaders of industry and government to create greater opportunities for minorities, is the subject of a new documentary, *The Powerbroker: Whitney Young's Fight for Civil Rights*. The film premieres on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci on Monday, February 18 at 10 PM ET on PBS (check local listings). Narrated by Alfre Woodard, *The Powerbroker* is executive produced by Young's niece, Emmy® Award-winning journalist Bonnie Boswell and produced by Ms. Boswell, her son Taylor Hamilton, and Christine Khalafian.

During the 1960s, as the executive director of the National Urban League, Young was one of the few African Americans who had the ears of those who controlled the levers of power: Fortune 500 CEOs, governors, senators, and presidents. He used these relationships to gain better access to employment, education, housing, and healthcare for African Americans, other minorities, and those in need. His unique position and approach earned him praise, but also scorn from the Black Power movement for being too close to the white establishment. While he is less known today than other leaders of the era because of the behind-the-scenes nature of his work, Young's legacy and influence are still felt profoundly.



“I realized several years ago at a family gathering that while I knew Uncle Whitney through my personal relationship with him, my appreciation and understanding of his role in the Civil Rights movement was not all that different from the general public’s, which is to say, somewhat limited,” said Boswell. “During my college days, I was one of those who was critical of ‘Establishment’ leaders like Uncle Whitney. I decided to make this film in an effort to get to know him better and because I believe his story can teach us today about what it takes to make a democracy work.”

Ten years in the making, *The Powerbroker* is both a personal portrait of Young, drawing on the reflections of family members and never-before-seen home movies, personal photographs, and audio recordings, and a historical chronicle of how he applied the social service mission of the Urban League to realize the rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement. The film features rare archival footage and exclusive interviews with a diverse array of people who worked with Young and who have been shaped by his work, including the late Dorothy Height, Pulitzer Prize winner Manning Marable, John Hope Franklin, Ossie Davis, and Howard Zinn, as well as Julian Bond, Vernon Jordan, John Lewis, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Young’s biographer Dennis C. Dickerson, Donald Rumsfeld, Ramsey Clark, and others.

Born in 1921 in rural Kentucky, Young was the son of Whitney and Laura Ray Young. He attended the Lincoln Institute, a segregated school where his father served as principal; his mother was the country’s second African American postmistress. His parents had a powerful influence on him, instilling confidence, dignity, and a strong belief in empowerment through education in him.

Young served in a segregated unit in the Army during World War II, where he frequently mediated tensions between the white and African American service members. The experience inspired Young to work in civil rights when he returned from the war.

After earning a degree from the University of Minnesota School of Social Work, he began working for different branches of the Urban League, and eventually became the executive director of the National Urban League in 1961. As the civil rights movement was gaining steam in the South, Young saw that the resolution-focused approach of social work was key to truly creating a society where minorities would have power and status equal to that of white Americans. This would require that they have access to the same pillars of the American Dream: jobs, healthcare, education, and housing.

To achieve this, Young believed, those who controlled these institutions — policymakers, business leaders, and political leaders — would need to understand that creating greater racial diversity in these institutions was in both their moral and financial interest.

Young’s humor and charm made him welcome company among the power establishment, many of whom had had little contact with African Americans, and held stereotypes that soon faded through their relationship with him. His insider status made him indispensable in helping broker some of the key events of the civil rights era — the 1963 March on Washington and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

At the same time, younger black activists became disillusioned with the slow pace of change and began taking a more militant stance. Young became a target of intense scorn among Black Power

leaders for his close relationships with those in the power elite, whom they saw as antithetical to their goals. They labeled him “Uncle Tom” and “Oreo” and Young received death threats. He also faced criticism from Martin Luther King, Jr. for not opposing the Vietnam War. Young later said that he did oppose the war, but did not want publicly to criticize President Johnson, with whom he had worked closely to pass the Civil Rights Act.

Young died tragically in a drowning accident in Africa in 1971 at the age of 49. In the years following his death, many of those within the civil rights and Black Power movements who had criticized Young would come to acknowledge the enormous breakthroughs he achieved and admire the methodology and wisdom of his approach.

As President Nixon said at his funeral, “He knew how to accomplish what other people were merely for.”

The Powerbroker has been selected to participate in the ITVS [Community Cinema](#) program, a groundbreaking public education and civic engagement initiative featuring public screenings around the country leading up to the February 18 broadcast.

To learn more about the film, visit *The Powerbroker* interactive companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/powerbroker>), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film’s subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section, where viewers can share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

Funding for *The Powerbroker* is provided, in part, by The Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The Powerbroker is a production of Bluegate. The executive producer is Bonnie Boswell. The film is produced by Bonnie Boswell, Christine Khalafian, and Taylor Hamilton. The co-producer is Jordan Melograna.

About the Filmmaker

Bonnie Boswell (Executive Producer/Producer) is an award-winning reporter, producer, commentator, and talk show host. A graduate of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boswell won a Golden Mike Award for a one-hour news program she created for NBC. Boswell has been a news reporter for NBC-TV, Los Angeles, the co-host of a national cable television news talk show and an associate producer for ABC’s *20/20*.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join *Independent Lens* on

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