

King Kong:
*Scoping in on the Curious Activities of the
International Monkey Business*

KONG—PART ONE:

**THE MONKEY SMUGGLER,
the MWAMI,
& the HANGED MAN**

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In his 2007 State of the Union message, U.S. President George Bush said "To whom much is given, much is required," when referring to aid for Africa.

Certainly unknowingly, Bush precisely defined the problems inherent in foreign aid with those eight words. The American taxpayer has contributed billions to the African continent, but has been betrayed in the bargain with conservation and humanitarian organizations that have become self-serving cottage industries in black Africa, while expanding and exploding into corporate behemoths in the white world. These organizations are accountable to no one but their own pockets and governed by boards of directors with personal and business interests in the success or failure of third world ventures. NGOs spread like weeds in the fertile plains of graft and opportunity that define the landscape of foreign aid. American zoos and animal laboratories form unholy alliances with conservationists and sanctuary operations that bet their prestige on the charisma of mega-fauna such as the great apes, while poor, illiterate African women are forced into sterilization programs so that humans do not intrude upon gorilla habitat. This

is a systematic campaign—Professor Betsy Hartmann of Hampshire College calls it “the Greening of Hate.”¹

Consider this--African conservation efforts are creating a growing class of refugees² that are strategically positioned into refugee camps which “protect” foreign borders.³ In addition, the world’s remaining great apes have become pawns in what amounts to sanctioned smuggling. In 1999 Congressman Jim Jeffords (VT) introduced legislation known as the Great Apes Conservation Act, which appropriated \$5,000,000 A YEAR from 2000 through 2004 to “assist in the conservation of great apes.”⁴

As a result, the competition has become intense to acquire gorillas, orangutans, bonobos and chimpanzees in order to obtain a piece of the funding pie. When the bill came up for renewal in 2005, the “expert witness” called before Congress to testify on behalf of this bill was Clare Richardson, CEO of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI), which stood to gain significantly from its renewal.

760 gorillas live in over 140 zoos worldwide. Of these, 300 western gorillas live in U.S. zoological institutions. 74 gorillas live in African sanctuaries which are shrouded in secrecy and zealous protection by British and American veterinarians and “researchers.” The Holy Grail, the endangered mountain gorilla, is represented by an orphan hoarded by the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International and the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project—American organizations based in Rwanda. This orphan has acquired a significance which rivals that of the Christ-child in the halls of primatology. If she cannot be released into the wild, which will almost certainly become the case, who gets the prize and the millions of tax dollars which will certainly follow? Certainly not the Rwandan people, who will ultimately see this orphan crucified upon the cross of conservation interests. Most Rwandans have never seen a mountain gorilla.

Put into historical context, in the early 1990’s the concept of working with indigenous communities was the vogue. Buzz words such as “community-based resource management,” “sustainable development,” and “participatory mapping” became non-sequiturs, that when deftly inserted into grant applications, became the winning combination on the slot machine. These terms were generated by the conservation organizations and not the indigenous communities, whose interests and national identities were sacrificed upon the altar of science. Since then the trend has been asset accumulation by the Big International NGOs (BINGOS) and increased marginalization of the same indigenous communities.

Of course, none of this is new. It is rooted in the dictates of capitalism, where the natural evolution of any entity today seems predicated on unlimited growth, profits, careers, and

¹ Interview of Betsy Hartmann by Fred Pearce, New Scientist Print Edition, 20 February 2003.

² Charles C. Geisler, “Endangered Humans,” Foreign Policy Magazine, May-June 2002.

³ Michael Maren, The Road to Hell

⁴ Great Apes Conservation Act of 1999, S1007 IS; <http://www.koko.org/help/gaca99.pdf>

corporate identity. The international "humanitarian" and "aid" and "human rights" communities are mirrors of the conservation boondoggle. Indeed, when we speak of an "international community" -- be it conservation or aid or human rights -- the boundaries of these "communities" and the people selectively allowed to be in them-- are as gated as the compounds of the primary beneficiaries working in the underdeveloped world.

The combined revenue of the U.S. branches of the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and The Nature Conservancy was \$965 million in 2000, according to the World Watch Institute.⁵ Conservation International has offices in D.C. and Arlington--a calculated proximity to lobbyists and the beltway. It can be proven that many of the BINGOS have incestuous ties to representative foreign regimes run by what one anonymous official termed "cabals" of cooperative crime partners, multi-national corporations which operate there, and that the U.S. taxpayer is paying for it all through USAID programs.

Getting the story sometimes becomes the story, as the only way to reach the tribal territories, plantations, gorilla sanctuaries, and villages in question is to journey into the over-sensationalized "heart of African darkness" itself. It required years of research, special visas, endless hours cramped in coach on overseas flights, press credentials obtained through the United Nations Mission to the DRC, translators for the enigmatic local languages, which include French-influenced Swahili and Lingala, personal bodyguards, lots of money we did not have, and a wing and a prayer that we could get in and out without losing our cameras, audio equipment and worse. Sometimes prayers were useless and Keith Harmon Snow was briefly held prisoner by a local militia group before the UN intervened. He was also arrested numerous times, and Georgianne Nienaber was robbed of her video record and interviews, and "detained" for two days in Goma by the DGM (Direction Generale de Migration) after being accused as a "spy" by white, well-paid, elite agents of western conservation interests. The reporters' involvement in the story is noteworthy only because it demonstrates the lengths that conservation interests will go to protect their turf and secrets.

The mainstream media could not be more disinterested and misinformed, and it seems rather obvious that they are intentionally misrepresenting and misreporting the obvious stories. Profit is a powerful prerogative in the primate protection paradigm, and the press plays its proper part in propagandizing the taxpaying public. Years of begging for logistical support by Keith Harmon Snow went unanswered while Anderson Cooper gave free airtime to a monkey-smuggler, and CNN spent weeks covering Oprah Winfrey's \$40,000,000 school for girls in the idyllically named "Henley-on Klip" near Johannesburg South Africa. But the afore-mentioned Hogwarts Academy for Girls could not cast a spell powerful enough to erase the reality of life for the poorest of the world's poor. Our final journey into Congo ended much the same as it began, and we together faced the specter of Walikale and Tayna--two rural Congolese villages in the heart of gorilla conservation territories that will be the centerpieces of our pathetic tale--with no

⁵ Chapin, Mac, "A Challenge to Conservationists," World Watch Institute.

one but friends, family, and a lonely, be-spectacled, sick, diabetic chief who lie puking on a floor in a hut in Uganda, giving a goddamn whether we succeeded--or not.

All politics is local, and while American citizens may or may not share an interest in the preservation of African wildlife, which is in itself a noble cause; they certainly have a vested interest in the disposition of their tax dollars, especially when these dollars are going to companies and organizations operating on the African continent, but registered as non-profits in the United States. USAID's budget for "foreign assistance and humanitarian aid" was \$9.5 billion, with \$4.5 billion jointly managed with the State Department.⁶

\$43.6 million dollars plus \$30.2 M in matching funds has been earmarked for one conservation program in central Congo alone.⁷

The US Fish and Wildlife Service kicked in \$100,000 and the US Forest Service, \$737,000. Freedom of Information Act requests take years for resolution, calls to Conservation International's (CI) African Office are ignored, the US Forest Service gets jittery about answering straightforward questions about their involvement in the Congolese programs, threats are made, gorillas are shifted across national boundaries with little or no accountability, tribal leaders are forced from ancestral lands, slavery is rampant on rubber plantations, impoverished woman are coerced into sterilization and drug trials, and the poorest of the world's poor and their natural resources continue to be exploited by militias, henchmen, and economic interests propped-up by western interests.

If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, then the acrimonious trinity composed of USAID, CARPE and business interests in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the three-headed dog that guards the maws of Hades. Like the mythical Cerberus, covert interests in the darkest part of Africa protect the secrets of third world intervention, allowing the money to flow like spittle through the creature known as "foreign" aid, with accountability burned and buried with the dead, displaced, and disenfranchised. In Greek mythology, just a few heroes were able to pacify the creature, and only Heracles brought Cerberus to the land of the living as part of the gauntlet of his Labors. Not all conservation organizations are created equal; some are corrupt and work hand-in-glove with militias to confiscate tribal lands with promises of money that never materializes. In 2004, The World Watch Institute published a report on conservation organizations which temporarily shook their secretive world.

"In June 2003, representatives of major foundations concerned with the planet's threatened biodiversity gathered in South Dakota for a meeting of the Consultative Group on Biodiversity. On the second evening, after dinner, several of the attendees met to discuss a problem about which they had become increasingly disturbed. In recent years, their foundations had given millions of dollars of support to nonprofit conservation

⁶ PowerPoint from USAID and Biodiversity Symposium, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, May 31-June 2, 2006

⁷ CARPE documents

organizations, and had even helped some of those groups get launched. Now, however, there were indications that three of the largest of these organizations—World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Conservation International (CI), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)—were increasingly excluding, from full involvement in their programs, the indigenous and traditional peoples living in territories the conservationists were trying to protect. In some cases there were complaints that the conservationists were being abusive.”⁸

The role of civil society in developing nations has been increasing to the extent that NGO’s and non-profits operating on the African continent have become major players on the world stage. The influence they wield can be directed for the common good of the African people and their severely endangered ecosystems. However, abuse has become rampant in some quarters, sometimes funded by American and international aid programs. However, taxation certainly does, and while it would be impossible to examine and track the disposition of all US tax dollars in Africa, it is possible to look at one project, one example of how American tax dollars have gone to fuel questionable practices by conservation organizations in central Africa.

More formidable than the three-headed dog, transparency and accountability in the heart of Africa became an elusive muse, hidden by a fabric of secrets, lies, and competition, which literally pulled the “wool” over the lamp of truth. Political Scientist, David Gibbs, observes: “the view that the United States has always championed national self-determination and opposed colonialism—is the most obviously flawed.”⁹

Gibbs suggests that a new model of foreign intervention, one that establishes the interests of business and the proximity of business interests to positions of power, has taken precedence over the altruistic model of American involvement in third world aid programs.

The “business conflict model” (Gibbs) assumes that business interests affect all aspects of US foreign policy. One can examine the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo and argue that American business interests have influenced everything from the assassination of Congo’s first president to the rise and fall of the Mobutu regime. The study of colonial interests in the third world fill a good portion of university libraries, and a full understanding is all but impossible for the average American who just wants to know that his/her tax dollars and personal donations to aid organizations are being used to assist citizens of the third world, that is, assuming that Africa even enters the conscious mind of the “average” American.

Here is the story of the Monkey Smuggler, and how he rose to the top of the heap in the halls of conservation and formed an unholy alliance with a Congolese henchman.

⁸ Chapin, Mac,” A Challenge to Conservationists,” World Watch Institute

⁹ David N. Gibbs, The Political Economy of Third World Intervention, (University of Chicago Press, 1991) p.23.

Here also is the tale of one “chef”—a tribal chief—a Mwami--who swears he is on the run from an assassination attempt engineered by a Congolese man who is the local “hero” of the conservation organization known as CARPE, funded by USAID, assisted by the U.S. Forest Service, and wrapped in the mantle of the good name of the murdered naturalist Dian Fossey. The alleged assassin was feted at a luncheon at the National Press Club, awarded \$20,000 by Conde Nast and American Express as a conservation award, and at the same time his henchmen were allegedly smuggling gorillas and bonobos to the bushmeat trade.

Finally, the tragic story of the hanged man who out-Fossied Dian Fossey and met the same fate.

The cast of characters, including the monkey smuggler, the alleged henchman/assassin, the monkey torturer, the hanged man and a possibly disengaged federal wildlife administration notwithstanding--the involvement of at least \$46 million in USAID funds under a program that will admittedly “benefit the United States,” strongly suggests that David Gibbs is correct when he states that Congolese chiefs have been used for a hundred years and counting as instruments of colonial rule.

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Next: THE MONKEY SMUGGLER (EXCERPT)

“God damn it Preston, all you had to do is look her in the eye and lie.”

--Producer Carl Denham in KING KONG.

In the late fall of 2005, the Hollywood film, King Kong, opened to sellout crowds everywhere. The high-action cinematography and special effects combined with the racy recycled story of Beauty and the Beast to bring home a walloping fortune for everyone involved. Behind the film however is a trail of conservation organizations, primatologists and public relation firms peddling billions of dollars in conservation programs for Central Africa. Behind these conservation organizations, funding them, or working with them directly, are some very interesting species. As you penetrate deeper and deeper into this jungle of surprises, the landscape gets curiouser and curiouser....