



**Ambassador James A. Joseph**  
**ABFE's Twentieth**  
*James A. Joseph Lecturer on Philanthropy*



*Forty Years of History and Hope:*  
*The Enduring Relevance of ABFE*  
**April 9, 2011**  
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**Ambassador James A. Joseph** is Professor of the Practice of Public Policy at Duke University and founder of the United States – Southern Africa Center for Leadership and Public Values at Duke and the University of Cape Town. He is also Leader in Residence for the Sanford School's Hart Leadership Program. Ambassador Joseph has been appointed to senior executive or advisory positions for four U.S. Presidents. He was confirmed by the United States Senate and appointed Under Secretary of the Interior by President Jimmy Carter and United States Ambassador to South Africa by President Bill Clinton. Both President Ronald Reagan and the first President George Bush appointed him to presidential advisory commissions. The only U.S. Ambassador to present his credentials to President Nelson Mandela, Joseph was awarded the Order of Good Hope in 1999, the highest honor the Republic of South Africa bestows on a citizen of another country. In 2006, he was honored by his home state as a Louisiana Legend and in 2008 he was inducted into the Louisiana Political Hall of Fame. He serves presently as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation established by the Governor of Louisiana.

Ambassador Joseph has had a distinguished career in business, education and philanthropy. From 1982-1995, he was President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Foundations, an international organization of more than 2000 foundations and corporate giving programs. He served as a Vice President of Cummins Engine Company, the world's largest producer of heavy duty diesel engines, and President of the Cummins Foundation from 1971-1976. An ordained minister, he has taught at Yale Divinity School and the Claremont Colleges in California where he was also University Chaplain. In 1985, he was a Distinguished Visitor at Nuffield College at Oxford University and serves presently as an Honorary Professor and a member of the Board of Advisors of the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town.

After graduating from Southern University and Yale, Ambassador Joseph began his career at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1963, where he was also founding co-chair of the local civil rights movement. A frequent speaker to academic, civic and religious audiences, he is the author of two books, *The Charitable Impulse* and *Remaking America*. A third book on *Private Virtue and Public Values* will be published by the Duke University Press in 2011. He is the recipient of nineteen honorary degrees and his undergraduate alma mater, Southern University, has named an endowed chair in his honor. The Board of Directors of the Council on Foundations appointed him President Emeritus and the Association of Black Foundation Executives established the James A. Joseph Lecture on Philanthropy.

In 1979, Joseph was named by *Ebony* magazine as "One of the 100 Most Influential Black Americans" and later by *Fortune* magazine as one of "America's Best Nonprofit Managers." He has served on the Board of Directors of the Brookings Institution, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and the Children's Defense Fund. He serves presently as Chairman of the Board of Directors of MDC. He is a director of the Management and Training Corporation and serves on the Board of Advisors of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and the Leadership Center at Morehouse College. The founding chair of the Corporation for National and Community Service which established AmeriCorps, he was the first chair of the faculty board of the Center for Civic Engagement at Duke. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the National Academy for Public Administration. Ambassador Joseph is married to the former Mary Braxton, an Emmy Award winning television journalist.



**FORTY YEARS OF HISTORY AND HOPE:  
THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF ABFE**

**Ambassador James A. Joseph  
President Emeritus  
Council of Foundations and  
Chairman Emeritus  
Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE)**

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
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It is a very special delight to be with you tonight, to be able to walk down memory lane and to share with you some thoughts about forty years of history and hope: the enduring relevance of ABFE. I want first to join you in paying tribute to my colleagues with whom I began this journey more than forty years ago. Some went on to serve with distinction in public life, others in business and still others in various institutions of civil society. But the values we affirmed here, the vision we cultivated here and the vitality we developed here have continued to sustain us regardless of where our careers have taken us.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Horatio says to Fortinbras "We have some rights of memory in this kingdom." Tonight as you exercise your rights of memory, I want to use this occasion to do three things: 1) say a word about the early years - the birth of an idea; 2) recall a few of the hard won victories – the impact of a black presence; and 3) examine the enduring question of the relevance of an organization with ABFE's mission – the challenges of a new era.

### **The early years**

Let me begin with the early years in the formation and growth of ABFE. There were several important meetings that preceded incorporation as a formal organization. The first was at LaGuardia airport where Harriet Michel, then with the New York Foundation, Bryant George of the Ford Foundation and I met for the first time and agreed to identify and reach out to other African Americans in the field. The second was a meeting of about fourteen people in Atlanta to discuss the possibility of a more formal network of blacks in foundations. The third was a meeting at the Ford Foundation to develop and approve the charter for a formal organization.

From the beginning, we set out to provide nurturing and support for each other; but ABFE was also a place for intellectual debate, with some heated conversations about our role and responsibilities as black foundation executives. Ivanhoe Donaldson kept us focused on the deeper questions of relevance and Ron Gault provided levity to make sure that we did not take ourselves and our positions too seriously. But it was Harriet Michel who made certain that our colleagues understood the importance of full participation. When she invited someone to a meeting they always showed up.

A central focus of ABFE was the promotion of diversity and transformation within philanthropy and beyond, including helping to grow and attract the next generation of leaders for our field. We sought also to cultivate the social consciousness of traditional philanthropy and to engage our colleagues critically in what is now called social justice philanthropy. Our aim was not simply an open and more equitable philanthropy, but a more equitable and open society. Very soon we expanded our reach to include the diaspora elsewhere, with a fact finding trip to Africa and collaboration in the formation of TransAfrica.

We caught the attention of the field not just by our advocacy, but by our knowledge of the issues, especially our understanding of the many ways in which the legal and political framework limited the flexibility and creativity of philanthropy. I must admit, however, that when we begin to speak for ourselves, some of our friends who had grown accustomed to speaking for us felt isolated and even alienated. But we pioneered in our

efforts not to replace them as advocates, but to join them as leaders and spokespersons for social change.

Our experience was not unlike that of Frederick Douglas when he insisted on speaking about the institution of slavery rather than simply about his experience as a slave. In his autobiography *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglas*, he describes how he was assigned by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to travel through the state with a white member to sign up subscribers to their magazine. Douglas role was simply to tell stories of his life as a slave, but he grew tired of this and wanted to engage his audiences more broadly on the philosophy of slavery.

Because of the clarity of his speech and the depth of his thinking, people said he did not talk or act like one who had been a slave and would not be convincing if he got into philosophy. They were concerned about whether he would be as effective in gaining converts to the anti-slavery cause if he seemed as learned as his white audience. There was a price to be paid for being able to speak to the larger issues rather than simply black issues. Those of us who founded ABFE paid that price in the early years when we, like Douglas, insisted on speaking in a way that demonstrated not simply the aspirations of our hearts but the abilities of our minds.

#### **Hard Won Victories**

How successful were we is a question that must surely come to mind, so let me shift gears and say a word about a few of the contributions of ABFE during those early years of our stewardship. The earliest period may be remembered by some as an era of confrontation. It was a time in which we confronted prevailing ideas as well as prominent individuals. We confronted issues and we confronted institutions, but it was a kind of respectful confrontation in which we tried to show respect for the humanity of adversaries and regard for the history and mission of the institutions we set out to change.

Our first high-profile confrontation was at the annual meeting of the Council on Foundations in Montreal forty years ago. In a dramatic moment that will remain forever etched in the folklore of our struggle, we elected the first African Americans to serve on the Council board and we elected not just one but five. Within a few years, members of ABFE were not only helping plan Council conferences and helping develop a statement of principles and practices that emphasized openness and diversity, but they were able to help bring onto the board Latinos, Asian Americans, Native American, more women and young people. As the first affinity group within the Council, we opened the door for the formation of other affinity groups and took a strong stand to persuade the Council to develop a collaborative rather than a competitive relationship with newly forming regional associations of grantmakers.

I hope I might be forgiven for reminding you that in a little more than ten years after the formation of ABFE we had not only wide participation by our members in the governance and programming structures of the Council, but I was elected president and CEO. Ernie Osborne was on the search committee and when my name came up as one who had declined to be a candidate, but who might be persuaded to consider the job, Ernie called me to say that while he hoped I would reconsider, he wanted me to know

that he was uncertain about whether he should wish the sorry state of the council on a friend. It was a time of declining membership and a financial crisis that made the possibility of significant change seem very unlikely. Yet, I remembered that we had founded ABFE not simply to promote diversity but to demonstrate that we could also contribute to the social, political and intellectual capital of organized philanthropy, so I accepted the challenge and with the help of some of you here tonight we were able to save the council from bankruptcy and insignificance.

It was a time in which blacks were being selected increasingly to lead predominantly white institutions when they were near bankruptcy. That was true of cities as well as nongovernmental organizations. Some might add that this is still true, but it has come to include countries as well. Working together to restore the Council to a leadership position in the field, we helped usher in an era of extraordinary growth and influence. Our early emphasis on both matters of the heart and the head led to a respect for both our intellect and our passion.

This was in some ways the second phase of our struggle. If the first was an era of confrontation, this could be called an era of competition. We competed for platforms. We contested ideas and we even competed for philanthropy – expanding our influence beyond our individual foundations to assist other foundations in deciding on priorities and developing programs. We also competed for positions, deploying our members to participate in myriad social change opportunities. We were in fact pro bono consultants to small foundations and advisors to staffs of the larger ones who shared our sense of urgency about forming a more perfect union.

If the first and second phases of our contribution were achieved through confrontation and competition, the third phase was collaboration. Many of you may not know how hard we worked to generate participation by blacks in the supply side of philanthropy as well as the demand side. We argued that when blacks were donors in community foundations they got a chance to not only advise on the distribution of their funds, but to also play a role in the distribution of other funds. We encouraged those accumulating wealth to establish their own foundations and to serve on boards of family and independent foundations.

Some of us who were engaged in the formation of ABFE worked also to develop and strengthen the National Black United Fund. I served simultaneously as chair of the board of ABFE and chair of the National Black United Fund. Luscious Walker was a central champion of the concept and Walter Bremond, who I had recruited to my staff at Cummins, became the executive director. And I am so pleased that Walter Bremond's daughter is not only with us tonight, but she is now head of the Brotherhood Crusade founded by her father in Los Angeles.

One of the joint contributions of ABFE and the Black United Fund that is not widely known is that as chair of ABFE I raised the money for litigation by NBUF to force the Combined Federal Campaign to open up payroll deductions to black non-profits beyond

those social service organizations supported by the United Way. We won the lawsuit and the rest is history.

### **What about the future**

It is now time to ask what about the future. Let me say categorically and in behalf of the founders “I hope that you will not allow anyone to persuade you that the time for ABFE is over; that organizations with your mission are divisive; that this is a post-racial society and that collaboration is the only strategy. Of course you need to collaborate, to develop and deploy allies who share your values as well as your sense of urgency. Confrontation may be on the back burner, but it cannot be relegated to the dustbin of history. I like to say that while I have been privileged to participate in presidential cabinet meetings and corporate board rooms, I still reserve the right to return to the streets when and if that seems necessary.

If we were developing ABFE today or reinventing the organization for tomorrow, here are a few of the things I would want to do:

#### *1) Leadership Development*

Provide an opportunity for the growth and development of a new generation of leaders for the field who are who are willing to think new thoughts and do new things. You know as well as I do that there is a virtual leadership industry now competing for foundation support, but I am not talking about conventional approaches recommended by leadership gurus who have never been a leader, and as a South Africa writer pointed out many have never even known a leader.

Most of you in this audience come from a tradition that has something special to bring to leadership development that goes beyond these conventional approaches. The immense public veneration of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela shows that people are hungry for a more compassionate and principled form of leadership. That is why I have been running for more than a decade a program at Duke and the University of Cape Town that focuses on leadership as a way of being with an emphasis on the four elements that made Nelson Mandela so effective: emotional intelligence, social intelligence, moral intelligence and spiritual intelligence. I have used Nelson Mandela as a prototype because he was in prison while the world economy was becoming more interdependent. He was in prison while the internet was being developed. He was in prison while we were becoming addicted to the cell phone, but he went from prison to president without missing a beat because for him leadership was a way of being.

I am especially pleased to be in the city of Philadelphia tonight because Michael Nutter, the mayor, was an early participant in the leadership program along with several others in the audience who have made us proud.

There is something else that ABFE is uniquely prepared to bring to leadership development. It is a focus on intergenerational leadership. With the retirement of the baby boomers, there is increased emphasis on the intergenerational transfer of leadership. You can lead the way in thinking about not so much the transfer of

leadership, but about a form of intergenerational leadership that sees aging as an asset rather than a burden. Nelson Mandela may not have had the energy of his early life when he became president but he had a special kind of wisdom and intelligence that he sought to transfer to the next generation while at the same time accepting the public call to lead.

2) Leadership Renewal

There is a need to go beyond developing new leaders and forming an intergenerational alliance to renewing both mid-career and veteran leaders who may have been on the frontlines so long that they are nearing burnout. Many of us are the victims of the “urgency of now” syndrome that sees stepping back for personal renewal as selfish rather than seeing it as a way of preparing to serve others more effectively.

3) Knowledge Generation

There is an intellectual gap in the level of discourse about the priorities and potential of private philanthropy. Who better than ABFE to lead in re-examining the macro-organization and reach of the foundation model of philanthropy? Who better than ABFE to lead in developing new ways of thinking about and doing philanthropy that goes beyond grantmaking to creatively utilize the other 95% of foundation capital. But even this is almost yesterday’s debate. The intellectual leadership that is now needed is about integrating into operating plans goals and strategies that go beyond financial assets to deploy the myriad other forms of capital under foundation management for a public good – from intellectual and reputational capital to social and moral capital.

I hope you will help also to unlock the mysteries of philanthropy, reminding donors that these instruments of benevolent wealth are both private and public, private in that they are the product of individual goodwill, but public in that they are chartered and given a tax exemption to serve a public good. I still believe, as I did forty years ago, that if you lead in both the intellectual discourse and knowledge generation you will gain the respect and find the space to lead on issues of diversity and inclusion. Leopold Senghor was most effective in what he had to say about Negritude only after he demonstrated that he knew as much or more about French culture than many of the French he was seeking to influence. Nelson Mandela used his knowledge of Afrikaner history and culture to seduce them into respecting him enough to allow him to win them over in support of his ideas for transformation.

4) Reform

We cannot forget that central to ABFE’s original mission was social change; not social service; not simply charity that ameliorates consequences but philanthropy that eliminates causes. Someone needs to challenge the conventional wisdom that confuses philanthropy with charity. The time may have also come to examine and focus the spotlight on the process of recruitment in the field, not just to disaggregate demographics, but to analyze the emotional and moral makeup of



program officers who come to philanthropy with a great heart and a great head, but who end up with an intellectual arrogance and even a heartlessness that defies the simple understanding of humanity that philanthropy is supposed to reflect.

5) Values

Not surprisingly, I include values on my list. You may need to help change the culture of philanthropy by keeping a spotlight on the ethics of organized giving. Seeking a grant has become in all too many places a de-humanizing experience. If ABFE has stood for anything, it has stood for ethical grantmaking that is as much interested in how you give as what you give.

Values like openness, transparency and diversity have come a long way since we were urging foundations to open the black box of philanthropy and to not just open their books but to open their doors. You need to remind the field, however, that while we must stand for diversity in all its forms, race still matters. The idea of a post-racial society is a myth perpetuated by many who would like to retain the privileges and the benefits gained from a legacy of intentional underdevelopment of a people. You must remind them that meaningful diversity is far more than sharing a communal space. What we fought for was the sharing of communal power.

6) Reconciliation

Finally, remember that while we launched ABFE with strategies of confrontation we were also agents of reconciliation. We understood that confrontation without reconciliation could provide the illusion of success without the reality of success. It is my hope, therefore, that you will help develop the kind of leaders who are just at ease in comforting the afflicted as some of us have been in afflicting the comfortable.

So there you have it. When philanthropy was in danger of losing its soul, ABFE was born. Those of you in this audience have in your hands the tools, the leadership, the network and the resources to carry on an important legacy. So in behalf of the founders, I challenge you to go farther than we ever dreamed. As for me, I like to paraphrase Isaac Newton, "If I have gone farther than my earliest dream, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Some of whom are with us tonight. We were successful in difficult times because we held on to the possibility that someday history and hope would rhyme. Like the character in Sophocles play, I hope you will hear these extraordinary lines echoing in the clouds and bouncing from the mountain top.

*History says, don't hope  
On this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a life time  
The tidal wave of justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.*

We are not there yet, but because of those of you who have picked up the torch the founders can leave this place tonight believing that someday the tidal wave of justice can rise up and hope and history rhyme. Thank you for listening and good luck.

*(Ambassador James A. Joseph is professor of the Practice of Public Policy and director of the United States – Southern Africa Center for Leadership and Public Value at Duke University. He also served in senior executive or advisory positions for four U.S. presidents, including Under Secretary of the Interior for President Carter and Ambassador to South Africa for President Clinton)*