



# ABFE MAGAZINE

A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities

September 2017

## Women Leaders in Philanthropy



"I'VE BEEN THE INTERPRETER OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE TO THE BROADER WHITE WORLD MY ENTIRE LIFE."  
  
HARRIET MICHEL  
ABFE FOUNDER



"I CHAMPION THE CREATION OF SPACES AND PLATFORMS FOR BLACK WOMEN IN PHILANTHROPY BECAUSE THE IMPACT OF OUR LEADERSHIP MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED, DOCUMENTED AND CELEBRATED."  
  
TOYA RANDALL



"STORYTELLING HAS TREMENDOUS POWER. THE PERSON WHO TELLS THEIR OWN STORY IS THE TRUE VICTOR."  
  
SOLEDAD O'BRIEN



"WE ARE GOING TO SET THIS WORLD FREE; IT IS GOING TO BE THROUGH US THAT WE HAVE A RADICALLY JUST WORLD WHERE OUR HUMANITY CAN BE VALUED."  
  
TAKEMA ROBINSON



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# FORWARD

Dear ABFE Members and Friends;

We are pleased to share with you our latest edition of ABFE Magazine. This issue celebrates the leadership, brilliance, and "magic" of Black women in the field of philanthropy. We are indebted to Toya Randall, Senior Director of Community Initiatives, Casey Family Programs, former ABFE Board Chair and Connecting Leaders Fellow (Inaugural Class of 2005), who served as the editor for this edition. As you settle in to read the stories of these amazing women leaders, a few weeks ago we hosted our 4th Annual Women in Philanthropy Retreat in Palm Coast, Florida. This was our largest retreat to date, with 47 Black women in the field who gathered to prioritize self-care and sisterhood. This is the right thing to do! To quote Audre Lorde, "Caring for myself is not an act of self-indulgence; it's self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

Enjoy the read, colleagues. I wish you good blessings; and above all else, take care of yourselves.

Best,



President & CEO  
ABFE



# Class of 2017



**ABFE**

A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities

WOMEN IN PHILANTHROPY

*Leadership Retreat*



# TOYA RANDALL

Dear ABFE,

The catalytic leadership of the ABFE founders forged a courageous path that provided the prototype for identity-based and issue-focused philanthropic affinity groups prevalent in the field today. Forty-six years later, ABFE's value continues to grow and expand, reaching new generations of leaders and activists through unique forums for cross-sector learning, activism, affirmation, empowerment, and collaboration.

The Women in Philanthropy Leadership Retreat is a shining example of ABFE's unique value added. Now in its fourth year, this retreat is where Black women come together around a shared belief that we cannot harness our full power and purpose without supportive spaces that renew and transform the mind, body, and spirit.

Each retreat is uniquely designed to support and sustain the overall health and well-being of attendees as the core to leadership sustainability and development. The care and keeping of this community is critical to safeguarding the voice, activism, and humanity of Black women in the field of philanthropy.



**“I can’t believe my good fortune. I’m so grateful to be a Black woman. I would be so jealous if I were anything else.”  
-Maya Angelou**



This issue of ABFE Magazine is an outgrowth of the retreat and it highlights the depth and breadth of the impact our leadership yields. It features women working across philanthropy to reform broken systems, transform communities, invest in women, and change the narrative. You'll read about women who have built entrepreneurial enterprises at the intersection of philanthropy and social justice as well as trailblazing activists and warriors in the present day fight for justice, equity, and freedom.

We could not tell these stories about Black women in philanthropy without Harriet Michel, the only woman in the original group of ABFE founders. In addition to Ms. Michel, this issue features articles about and interviews with women such as Teresa Younger, Soledad O'Brien, and Takema Robinson who are working to achieve transformative change.

Curating and writing this issue has been a tremendous honor. ABFE has contributed greatly to my leadership journey, and I am grateful for the opportunity to elevate the brilliance and beauty of our authentic stories and experiences.

I must thank Susan Taylor Batten for entrusting me with this endeavor and my boss Antoinette Malveaux for her support of me having the space and time to bring it to fruition.

With love and light,

Toya Randall is the Senior Director of Community Initiatives at Casey Family Programs and a founding member of the committee that created the ABFE Women in Philanthropy Leadership Retreat.

Pictured from left to right.  
Jennifer Dobossy, Irene Fernando, Toya Randall, Y, Elaine Rasmussen



HARRIET MICHEL

# THE MAKING OF AN ICON

## A Profile on Harriet Michel, Founding Member of ABFE

Harriet Michel is an unapologetic force of power, brilliance, and courage. Raised by working class parents in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, she grew up believing the sky is the limit. “I had an incredibly supportive family and siblings. They never suggested there were any limitations on my being either female or Black. And I believed everything they said. The image of myself, and more importantly, my possibilities were limitless.”

Her belief in limitless possibilities fueled her passion for social justice and equity. The impact of her activism is undeniable. “Being able to formalize within American philanthropy a group whose interest was solely focused on the issues of Black people, that’s what I’m proud to say. Take a look at what has flowed from this – other affinity groups and people feel perfectly comfortable now. You have no idea about how they did not want to hear from us.”

Michel was making history long before she helped found ABFE. She was a member of the first cohort of the American Field Services, a foreign exchange program established after World War II to promote more international understanding and create less opportunity for war, the first Black staff member of the National Scholarship Service & Fund for Negro Students and she was the first Black women CEO of the New York Foundation.

“When I was 16 years old, I got to live in Norway for a year with a sheriff’s family in a very small fishing village. This experience with the American Field Services really opened up the world for me. I was there when “Little Rock” happened. The men from the village wanted to learn more about what was happening in Little Rock, and why this was so

important in the U.S. They could not understand what was going on. The “Little Rock” experience started it for me because I was forced to, for the first time in my life, think about things in a racial context. I’ve been the interpreter of the Black experience to the broader white world my entire life, doing and trying to explain our issues, our fears, our needs, and our aspirations”.

After graduating high school, Michel enrolled in Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania where her activism continued to evolve. “I went to a school where there was an African student, another Black student, and me. I chose the school because my parents couldn’t really afford to send me to school and Juniata gave me a full scholarship. In 1965, during the Civil Rights Movement, myself along with one my professors organized a group of kids to go down to Alabama. It was just before President Johnson gave the okay for the settlement of the Selma to Montgomery march when we were attacked by Alabama state police.

This picture of Michel and her professor (next page) was taken after the police attack by Charles Moore and featured in Life Magazine in 1965. It’s now on display at the National African American Museum of History & Culture in the video gallery of pictures of the Greensboro Lunch Counter Exhibit.

“When I left Juniata College, I’m sure the president of the school breathed a great sigh of relief. They did not want me and others to organize another trip to the South. I was there talking about things these kids were a decade behind me in terms of their experience and sophistication.” In later years, Michel became a trustee, speaker, and received an honorary Ph.D. from Juniata.



### Early Days in Philanthropy

“I have a lot of passion about things. The key to my successes is my passion. My passion has been and is social inequity and social justice, and that’s why I love James Joseph so much – equity, fairness, and justice have always been themes that he has talked and written about.”

She began her career after college with the National Scholarship Service & Fund for Negro Student. There she met John Huiman, head of the New York Foundation. Over the years, he’d observed her work at the Fund for Negro Students and approached her about coming to work at New York Foundation. “I was like hell yeah!”

“So I went and joined the New York Foundation as a program officer in 1970, and that’s where I met Jim Joseph and a couple of guys at Ford Foundation. We started meeting regularly and talked about Black people in philanthropy. Our first big effort was to identify Black people working in foundations. And it wasn’t easy. By 1971, we had found a core group of 12 Black Foundation Executives. We were getting together for empathy, to identify people, identify issues, and we were being supportive of one another, and we talked about funding. We discussed joint funding per se, and were there to back up one another because we had everybody in the room.”

In talking about the early days of ABFE, she described a time when Black people didn’t have a whole lot of support where they worked. “I mean, we had the jobs, but we didn’t necessarily have the buy-in. Just because the board hired someone Black didn’t mean that they were real supportive of Black institutions and causes. We had to support each other, and the challenge of helping each other wasn’t just mine, it was a challenge for all of us. In general, there was no great welcome that rolled out for us”.

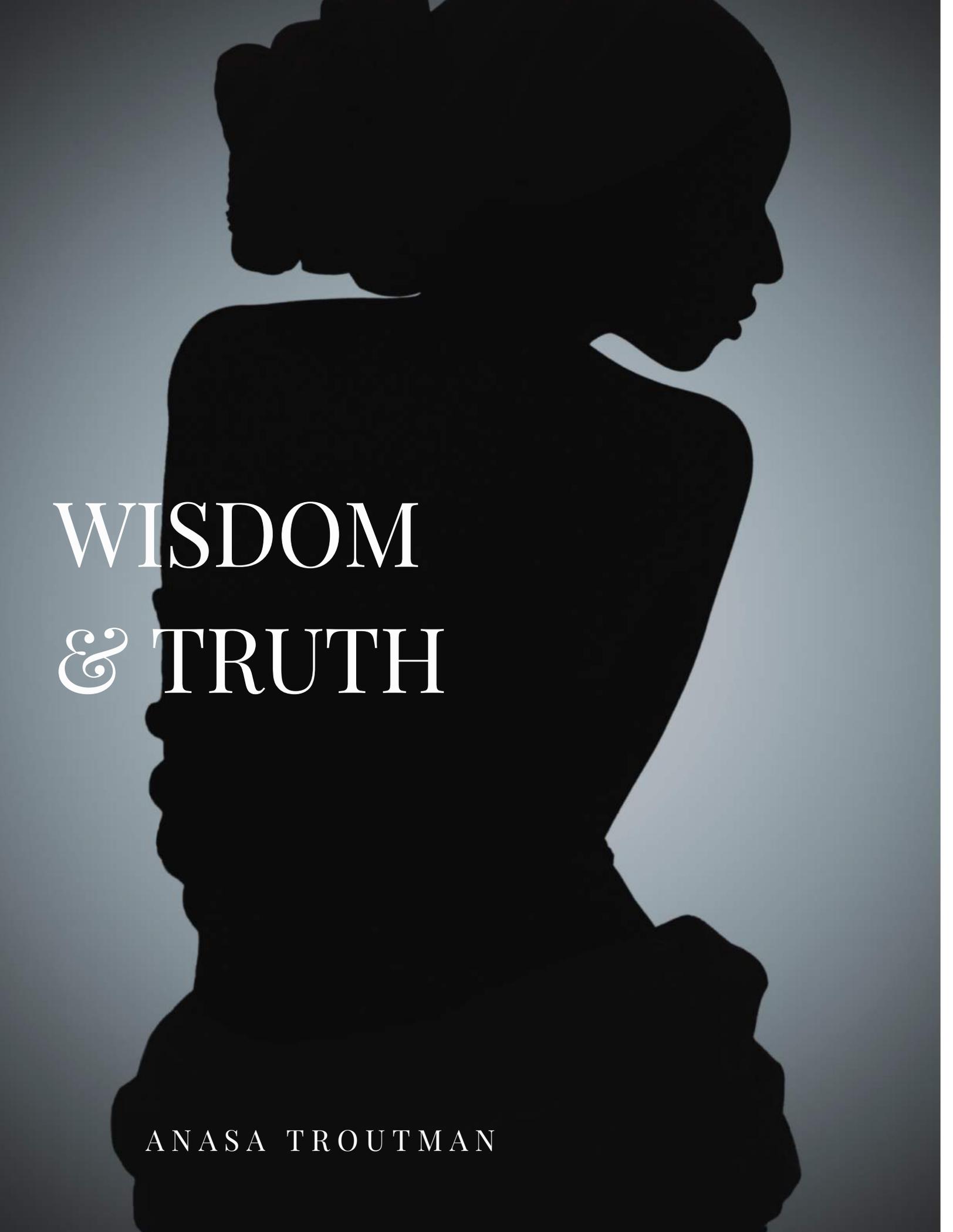
“Larger philanthropy was annoyed by the ABFE movement. We had to fight to even be recognized. You have heard the story a thousand times, and to be reckoned with as a group of people that had real genuine interest, that was legitimate. So those were the challenges.”

### Words of Wisdom for Black Women in Philanthropy

“There were so few women in philanthropy when we first started. I don’t know if it was because we as Black people were paid less than whites, but there were a handful of women who began coming in very slowly. But, that’s not where I was focusing to tell you the truth. In a race women; in a 19:10 term. I’m always looking out for the best interests of Black people. Philanthropy was a little taken back because I was aggressive and spoke up. That was not philanthropy in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, it just wasn’t. Women back then spoke softly and wore pearls. I wore big shoulders – remember the era of dresses with big shoulder pads? I use to wear big shoulder pads and smoked cigars.”

For Black women working in philanthropy today, Michel offered sage advice. “It isn’t your money. Too many people get into these positions and think the money is coming out of their checkbook. I thought it was a privilege and honor to be able to direct money to things that I care so much about, and I think it helps to keep this in mind. It helps with Black people, because most of us are so close to the issues that our philanthropy is addressing. As Black women, we’re certainly much more empathetic and our radar is that much clearer. Black people in this country, Black women especially, had to develop a sixth sense to see through foolery and make a judgement.”

“Unfortunately, we’re on a rewind because of who’s in office. We are not prepared, but we are certainly walking around talking about it, when you try to talk about reversing affirmative action in college and voter suppression. I would say to every Black woman in philanthropy to “stay woke.” All of this happened before, and they have taken it away. We’ve got to figure out what the most important pressure points are in our institutions. Everyone should be looking at the example of voter registration activities and working to make sure that people get registered and stay on rolls. I mean, that’s an issue that’s going to be a very big one for a very long time. There is going to be pushback, and I would never say to anyone to jump out there and don’t expect there could be repercussions. The main point is for you to know your organization very well, try to figure out where the pressure points are, and spend a lot of time figuring that out. Identify where you can apply some pressure, and not risk losing your job. Where do you apply some pressure; is it a board member? Is there someone you know who can introduce or talk about this subject to steer more foundation resources? Find an organization doing wonderful things and scraping together to raise pennies here and there that really has results. Another approach, be aggressive about identifying programs that work and bringing them into the organization as a pilot that can be replicated. Whatever you do, you’re going to have to be proactive. You can’t just sit and wait for this stuff to come across your desk.”

A black silhouette of a woman in profile, facing right. She has her hair styled in a bun and is wearing a long, flowing dress. The silhouette is set against a light blue background with a subtle gradient.

WISDOM  
& TRUTH

ANASA TROUTMAN



SHESTORIES | @ANASATROUTMAN

# Anasa Troutman

When she was a little girl, Anasa Troutman's father told her that the days of working for a company for 40 years were over. He predicted that when she became an adult, she would have multiple careers, do multiple things, and work in multiple places.

Anasa has launched a successful record label, worked as a campaign strategist for a presidential candidate, served as a philanthropic advisor, managed the music careers of successful recording artists, and designed learning experiences that integrate cultural strategy as a community organizing tactic.

Her latest venture is SheStories, a storytelling platform for women to combat the "silencing of femininity." Tapping into her skills as a storyteller, producer, cultural organizer, and strategist, Troutman set out

to create a culture shift by mobilizing a critical mass of women talking to each other.

"Anybody who identifies with feminine energy has been silenced in some way. Even those of us who are able to articulate it out loud now had to work for our voice. We had to earn it – it's not like we just woke up talking. Most of us had to work at it, and we still fight for it every day. SheStories is for anyone who believes in the idea that women have value and dignity. It is a place of learning, healing, and power for all who believe women deserve respect, freedom, and safety."

Visit SheStories at [www.shestories.net](http://www.shestories.net)



# MELISSA DESHIELDS

Frontline Solutions | @mcdeshields

From behind the scene, Melissa DeSheilds of Frontline Solutions has led some of the most important research and development work in the field of philanthropy. Many don't know that she is the organizer and strategist for A Gathering of Leaders, one of the most well attended, inclusive convenings of cross-sector leaders of color at the forefront of social justice movement building.

Melissa is now out front leading the team, shaping and guiding vision and strategy development for Grantmakers for Girls of Color (G4GC). The Center for Law and Social Policy is partnering with Frontline on the G4GC engagement with Kisha Bird and Nia West-Bev co-leading research. The team also includes Danielle Torain, Jessica Barron, and Ashley Simpson and Renée Joslyn also with Frontline.

I asked her about the significance of her leadership on this endeavor. "Folks who know me well know that I prefer to lead from behind the scenes, where I've always felt the most comfortable. The work with G4GC pushes me out in front in a new way. My team and the

entire Frontline community have been so supportive as I'm learning how to move from behind the curtain, and I can't thank them enough. I feel a powerful connection to this work because, for the first time, I see myself in all of it. Listening to the experiences, narratives, and testimonies of women of color and seeing myself, friends, and family in the stories and struggles for liberation is incredibly powerful and inspires me every single day."

We asked how has moving from behind the scenes changed your approach? "I approach this work with the same values Frontline holds as a firm to guide our approach to every engagement. We believe deeply in community-driven innovation, centering on the people most affected in the development of solutions. We also believe in intersectional equity and understand that building just communities requires us to dismantle barriers created by racism and patriarchy. We recognize that these two issues are overlapping and interlocking, and we design strategies that tackle them together. Rooted in these values, we are listening to girls of color as the foremost experts on issues facing them."

“Our engagement with Grantmakers for Girls of Color is two-fold. The first component is to track philanthropic investments available for girls of color across the U.S., with a specific lens on investments that address structural issues facing girls of color. This is a critical benchmark that has never before been systematically measured across philanthropy. The second is to help G4GC develop an infrastructure that will best serve their growing community of funders by equipping them with the tools to boldly and substantially increase investments for girls of color.”

Melissa is a quiet, steady partner and ally. She is highly respected and her commitments to equity and justice are unwavering. That being said, she is clear that the fight for gender equity and racial equity have not historically been kind or welcomed to women of color. But she sees this moment as the forefront of a power shift.

“I don’t immediately identify with women’s history, which my brain interprets as white women’s history. Non-intersectional feminism pretty much did all that it could to exclude the issues and struggles of women of color, so I’ve never seen myself in that history. But when I think about women, I think about my mom, a single parent of a little girl who dismantled her newly-assembled Barbie Dream House. A woman who worked tirelessly to make sure I had a good education and the skills to navigate a world that she knew could be cruel and unkind to Black women and girls – especially ones like me. When I think about the Black feminist movement, I think about Audre Lorde, whose writings helped mold a 20-something-year-old who never fit into certain spaces, even spaces full of Black women. It seemed like she was speaking directly to me when she wrote, “Those of us

who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.” I’ve spent a lot of time honing that skill.”

When reflecting on this moment in history, Melissa offered, “I would describe it as a tipping point in the liberation of Black women, women of color, and queer women of color. There’s been a movement with an explicit race lens and a movement with an explicit gender lens, and now we’re right on the edge of this dope moment where the movement for justice is around the intersection of race and gender. We know that the “master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” This moment is about dismantling the master’s house by placing black women and girls at the center of everyone’s liberation.”

We concluded the interview with Melissa sharing how readers can learn more and get involved in G4GC. “There are several options. First, head over to the G4GC website and sign up for the newsletter which is full of resources: [www.grantmakersforgirlsofcolor.org](http://www.grantmakersforgirlsofcolor.org).

If you have questions about Frontline and our engagement with G4GC, feel free to email me directly at [mdeshields@frontlinesol.com](mailto:mdeshields@frontlinesol.com). Lastly, we are planning a series of national, regional, and place-based forums. Stay tuned for opportunities near you.”

When asked to describe her leadership in one sentence, Melissa replied “I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.”

# SOLEDAD O'BRIEN

POWHERFUL FOUNDATION



Soledad OBrien is an Emmy award-winning journalist, speaker, critically acclaimed author, and philanthropist. Her groundbreaking, multi-series documentaries, *Black in America* and *Latino in America*, were among CNN's most watched programs. After a successful career on network and cable news, OBrien stepped away in 2013 to form a multi-platform media production company dedicated to telling empowering and authentic stories on a range of social issues. In addition to Starfish Media, OBrien also founded PowHERful Foundation, a philanthropic endeavor dedicated to providing financial assistance and mentorship to get young women to and through college. She took a break from her busy schedule to talk about her philanthropy and the power of stories.

## What was the inspiration for PowHERful Foundation?

The stories I heard during my reporting on Hurricane Katrina. I met so many young women who needed support to get through college after the devastation and trauma. They were getting some support, but it wasn't enough. Small things would get in their way. They didn't just need help with tuition. They needed help with transportation, housing, day care – often they had family members who also relied on them. I was inspired to launch a foundation that could help students in practical ways, provide wrap-around support, be there for emergencies and mentoring and overall support in the same way a family might be. Each scholar gets two mentors, one to help them navigate college and a life mentor to help them get through the social, emotional experiences. That scholars program is how we got started. Since then, we've grown to include conferences that now reach hundreds of girls.

The education of women and girls is of paramount importance to the future of our planet. Talk about why you chose to focus your philanthropy on girls and young women?

Because that is a population where I feel you can make a tremendous difference. Women are often the head of a household, sole providers, the person who makes a lot of the key decisions for the family. Whether a mother is

educated often determines whether her children will get a good education. If you invest in women and girls, then you see communities opening up to the idea of education and you see girls become transformed by learning. All of which makes a community stronger.

## What are some examples of tangible ways PowHERful provides support, besides money?

For our conferences, we partner with community-based organizations to bring high school and college-aged young women and girls together to help them with their educational, professional, and personal development. It was our way of taking the support we were giving our scholars and expanding it to a larger population.



\$1.6 million in scholarships awarded

33 recipients

18 scholars have graduated

25 mentors

## Why are stories important?

Stories are important because they allow us to have a voice in the public conversation, to tell rich and powerful tales about people's lives and sometimes even our own.

Starfish Media Group is dedicated to telling stories about people who are sometimes overlooked or ignored. We explore topics in great depth through character-driven stories about people who anyone can relate to.

One thing we don't do particularly well in this country is allow people to tell their own stories in their own way. We tell their stories for them through a prism. We rarely provide forums where people can frame and shape their own narrative. People need to be able to tell their own stories and understand that their stories are valuable.

Stories help us stretch and think bigger about who we can be. What stories made you think bigger about who you could be?

The story that inspires me the most is the story of my immigrant parents coming to America (Irish-Australian father and Afro-Cuban mother). They were an interracial couple living in a place where that was not widely accepted. They had trouble buying a house. They ultimately found just one person who would sell them one. It was illegal for them to get married where they

lived, so they went to Virginia. They taught me that everyone isn't going to like you and everyone doesn't need to like you.

### What stories do you tell your children?

I tell them about my parents and how they made their own way. I try to teach my children what my parents taught me - self-love, self-advocacy, and to do quality work. I also learned that advocating for myself doesn't mean I have to do it all by myself.

This is what I teach and tell my children. Their story is open-ended and they get to write it. But they have to learn how to advocate for themselves. My job is to teach them how to think about a challenge and what to pull from around them to come up with good solutions.

### How would you advise foundation leaders investing in changing the narrative for communities of color?

Foundations can start by supporting people's ability to tell their own story. Allow

them opportunities to talk about themselves and the things they care about. It's a basic sign of respect. By doing so, you're saying that their version of events matter and is equally as important as that of the governor's or mayor's or whomever. This validation of someone's version and vision is invaluable.

When foundations tell stories about people, they need to tell authentic stories, not stories that view people as assets or create a hero narrative. Policy change is not full of heroes. It's about a lot of people coming together to make important things happen. A hero story is not accurate. People want something tangible, not inspirational. What are the tools at their disposal to overcome the obstacles? That's the story.

### What are you working on now?

My new political show, Matter of Fact. It's like the teaching hospital of news where we take a deep, thoughtful look into the history of top political issues.

We lift up stories about what works to counter the narrative that everything is broken. So we focus on data points to tell us what kinds of things are working. We spend a lot of time in the field to get a ground level view of the issues.

### What's next for PowHERful?

We're looking to branch out to provide programming to parents because we want them to see the opportunities that exist. I think by doing that we can influence how they see the possibilities that exist for their kids.

**To learn more about PowHERful Foundation, go to [powherful.org](http://powherful.org) and check out Soledad's recent conversation about race, politics, and the media with Rebecca Carroll.**

**<http://www.thegreenespace.org/story/watch-live-conversation-soledad-obrien/>**





“WE ARE GOING TO SET THIS WORLD FREE, IT IS GOING TO BE THROUGH US THAT WE HAVE A RADICALLY JUST WORLD WHERE OUR HUMANITY CAN BE VALUED.”

**TAKEMA ROBINSON**



Takema Robinson has dedicated her life to the idea of freedom with an abiding commitment to creating a world where all people live freely. I sat down with the entrepreneur, philanthropist, artist, activist, and proud mama of two boys in the offices of Converge, the New Orleans-based consulting firm she founded in 2016 with partners Annette Hollowell and Hamilton Simons-Jones. We met the day before the Robert E. Lee monument was taken down from the center of “Lee Circle.” A sobering reminder why Converge’s mission to accelerate the creation of a radically just world where communities of color thrive is still needed in the 21st Century.

Since its launch, Converge has become an influential thought leader, strategist, design partner, and facilitator of some of the most important work taking shape in the south. Its portfolio of partners (not clients) are working at the intersection of philanthropy and policy aimed at dismantling oppressive systems and institutions using a racial equity and social justice frame.

Their work includes the design and build-out of the City of New Orleans’ equity programming, developing the business model for the Greater New Orleans Funder’s Network, which Converge now manages, and the development of an equity index for public schools.

#### What was the inspiration for Converge?

Our logo means excellence and authenticity. Annette, Hamilton, and I are genuine partners committed to the same values professionally and personally. We saw a need in New Orleans (and in the south) for a place-based firm that offers a full range of tools and services, available across sectors. Together we strive to provide and produce excellent work for our partners who have set out to do some really big things. We bring the same level of excellence and dedication to big and small organizations because we believe that New Orleans and the south deserve a platform on the global stage.

You're originally from Connecticut, how did you get here?

I came after Katrina to work as a loaned executive supporting rebuilding the schools and fell in love with the city. I decided to move and took a full-time job with the New Teacher Project to hire and train public school teachers.

Is that when your career in philanthropy began?

Yes! I met Sherece West Scantlebury when I was working as a loaned exec., and we stayed in touch. She was one of the first people I called when I realized the job with New Teacher Project wasn't a good fit. I started as a consultant for the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Fund, and later joined her team at Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation as Senior Program Associate for Education and Community Change.

How did those experiences prepare you for the work you're leading today at Converge?

Sherece is my sister and my mentor; we have had such a powerful relationship. She taught me how to stand in this space. I appreciate having the access to watch a leader emerge, learn, grow, and evolve. That's what I was able to see and that has been the biggest gift she's given me. She taught me how to accept responsibility for my own leadership. More than anybody in my life, I want to make her proud because she has given me so much. It's more than what you get from somebody only telling you, she let me see her leadership in an intimate and vulnerable way.

Sheila Robinson at Polk Brothers Foundation told me to use my voice and power to make space for women. Is that what Sherece did for you?

Yes, and it's interesting because before Sherece, I had mostly been mentored by men. Garland Yates was an amazing mentor, but that was different. I actually think I was more resistant to receiving mentorship from a woman than I was from a man. I think the men who supported me were mostly affirming. Sherece pushed me and would not accept anything less than my best self.

There's a vulnerability part of mentorship that you're not likely to get from men.

Yes, it was much more paternal. And I needed that too because it created the space for me to move so far. But it's the vulnerability of being with someone who shares an experience. That's why our stories are so important, it's how we set each other free. If you hide behind your story and you don't share it, folks don't have access to your vulnerability. Toya, when you say open up space, to me that's a big part of it. How do we open up space to our vulnerability? That's the most powerful force in the universe, but in our professional careers as women (especially if we're trying to pattern them after men), we don't always get that.

Our humanity and vulnerability as Black women are so important. But the dominate narrative doesn't always value us - at times there are attempts to erase us by denying our humanity. The biggest danger of the master narrative is for us to believe it. We cannot allow ourselves to internalize it. When we internalize it, it shows up in all kinds of ways that are not healthy for us. I think given the historical experience of Black women around being devalued by society, it's our experiences and our humanity that will probably set society free.



### How did you learn not to internalize it?

When I'm internalizing the master narrative, the way I show up is not who I want to be. It took me a long time to realize that I can't just pop off even when somebody comes for me. I'm still learning that, because that part of me is still there. I do think women, particularly women of color, are going to change this world. We are going to set this world free; it is going to be through us that we have a radically just world where our humanity can be valued. I think that is a feminine quality and power. Our key is not to internalize it, no matter how hard it is, because the narrative is reiterated every day. We cannot allow ourselves to believe it.

### How do you protect yourself?

By not living in a projection of what it means to be a Black woman. It's living in my own authentic truth, and the only way I know how to find that is in my self-care practice. To find it, reinforce it, hold it, and find it again when I lose it. I do a variety of things like yoga, meditation, running, and having time with my sister friends. Those sacred spaces remind me that I am a Black woman and a human being. I get to define my humanity and celebrate being a Black woman. I don't have to live in the negative projection by being reactionary.

When I hold on to my truth, I don't feel so dragged around by life. I don't feel so triggered. As much as folks want us to stay in the box, our power is transcending that. Our power is getting out of our own way. Not standing behind the limitations and the projection of being a Black woman. Black women, be angry, be bitter, be resentful, be unhealthy, be a martyr. Our freedom is transcending the identity that gets handed to us.

The ABFE annual women's retreat was designed to provide and promote self-care and wellness as core elements of leadership development. You've attended the retreat since it was launched in 2014. What brings you back each year?

Sacred communion with my sisters. It has come to represent a touch-point in my year when I get to pause, reflect, and reboot. Coming back each year, I also get the gift of watching other sisters grow. As they grow, I grow, we grow. This is power-building.

### Describe your leadership in one sentence?

To lead others with love, I must lead and love myself first.

# THE POWER OF SISTERHOOD



Pictured from left to right. Kellie Chavez-Green, Erika Wright, Isabel Barrios, Christy Slater, Charmel Gauden, Ashley Shelton, Bonita Robertson, Leslie Lowe, Carmen James, Lydia Cutrer, Takema Robinson, Andrea Armstrong, Ameca Realí, Monique Brown, Christy Ross, Annette Hollowell

There is a powerful, multi-generational network of women leading reform efforts in New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. They harness their time, talent, and influence inside and outside of organized philanthropy in ways that are resulting in meaningful impact on issues of criminal justice reform, coastal restoration, education equity, racial justice, and systems change.

When I first witnessed the joy, comradery, and connection these women shared, I was in awe. I wanted to lift up their work and the ways in which they deliberately connect their values and goals in alignment. I asked Alvertha Penny, current Foundation for Louisiana Board Member and former ABFE Board Member, her thoughts about the network. “This is an incredible array of extraordinary women. When I started in philanthropy 30 years ago, there was no ABFE fellowship. I didn’t have a

network, and I was often the only person of color on staff. My career began that way, and it ended that way when I retired. I am amazed and comforted by your leadership, and it is their talent that will make the difference in transforming this community. They will change the face of New Orleans.”

Christy Slater, a Program Officer at Kellogg Foundation, has been diligently leading community change work in New Orleans for many years. “It’s good to be seen. We usually put our head down and do the work, and you don’t always see the threads that weave it all together. Going forward, I want to make time to think about the impact I want to create. What is lasting that will make life better for everybody’s children. We have more bold and present challenges than ever before, but there’s a real shot at changing some things here.”



This network is a space of nurturing and restoration for their sisterhood. It is where they cheer each other on. It is also where they take each other aside in love when course correction is necessary. Faith and trust in one another are at the core. Carmen James, Vice President of Programs at Greater New Orleans Community Foundation, says that by working together across their organizations they are moving New Orleans towards becoming a vibrant, thriving, and just community. “What we stand for is clear. That has not always been my experience in other places. Here it is clear, and that’s what makes this work a joy.”

New to the network and her Program Officer role at Kellogg Foundation, Deirdre Johnson Burel expressed gratitude: “There are shifts in power underway, and I am privileged to do this work at this time with these women.”

“YES! We get so busy we sometimes have to step back and realize how truly amazing it is to do this work together,” concluded Takema Robinson of Converge.



# TERESA YOUNGER

I had a great opportunity to speak with Teresa Younger, President and CEO of the Ms. Foundation, to get her thoughts on Black women leaders in the field.

## Why does Black woman leadership matter in philanthropy?

Women of color have a legacy of giving back to their community and have been critical in every single movement for liberation. From Harriet Tubman serving as a spy during the Civil War to Ida B. Wells fighting alongside the suffragists for the right to vote, Black women have dedicated their lives to their communities. The legacy of women of color, and in particular black women, is to fight for our communities with our purses, our time, and – at times – our bodies.

As the second Black woman to lead the Ms. Foundation in its 44 years, I often reflect on the shoulders that I stand on, from those who came before me and spoke of truth to power and advance their communities and hold others accountable.

In addition, it is critical that Black women serve as leaders in philanthropy, because the diversity of voices is critical to ensuring that philanthropy is not only inclusive but also directs funding in a way that impacts those who are most affected by social injustice. Currently, only about 7-percent of philanthropic dollars go to women and girls, even less to women and girls of color. Black women leaders in philanthropy not only bring our experience to the table, we bring a legacy of functioning in the best interest of our communities and centering those most impacted.

### How would you describe this moment in women's history and the fight for Black women liberation?

Right now, we are in an historic time in the fight for Black women's liberation where we have more representation than we have ever had. From the power of the Black women's vote to the presence of women of color, particularly Black women, in positions of power in philanthropy, the private sector, and in political leadership, we are seeing a wave of what and where Black women are and how we can make an impact. For the first time in history, Black women are graduating from college and graduate school in mass numbers, starting businesses, and creating change in every sector. In addition, Black women are at the front lines of change, from the most educated First Lady in history to amazing leaders like Senator Kamala Harris and the Honorable Stacy Abrams. That also means that girls, young women, and even adult women are moving through the world seeing themselves at almost every single level of government and business. That kind of representation changes the way we move in the world and the power we have to fight and secure our liberation.

### How do you approach supporting movement building at the Ms. Foundation and in the broader field of philanthropy?

The Ms. Foundation for Women is a social justice philanthropy that was created to support, amplify, and strengthen the already inherent power that women have to make change and build movements in their communities.

As a "high touch" social justice public charity we not only grant funds to the organizations that we support but serve as partners and advocates for those organizations to ensure that they have the support they need to succeed and continue serving their communities. In addition, the

Ms. Foundation serves as a thought-leader and a thought-partner to the greater philanthropic community highlighting not just the necessity to invest in and trust women but to ensure that the philanthropic community is looking at broader, sustainable solutions to social justice issues that apply not just a class lens but a race and gender lens to their work.

This includes the work we are currently studying and investing in of women and girls of color, and in supporting cross-movement building work between the reproductive justice and economic justice movements.

This also includes how we build out cohorts to support cross-movement building. Our safety program seeks to redefine safety from a Black, queer feminist lens. We have an issue-diverse cohort of all Black women, centering their expertise, experiences, and work.

### Do you view women's health, safety, and economic safety as (intractable) interconnected issues? Where are the greatest points of leverage, influence, and/or impact?

There is not one right that belongs to us that is not interconnected with any other right. Therefore, when one right is infringed upon, it impacts all other inalienable rights. You cannot separate the right to reproductive justice and health rights from access to adequate transportation, personal safety, or the ability of women to earn a living wage and provide for their families. As Audre Lorde said, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single issue lives." The power and leverage that exists is that when we look at issues as interconnected, we understand that all of these issues come from the same root cause. Knowing the cause of social injustice allows us to not only strengthen singular movements but create a landscape that strengthens ALL movements.

Is there a significant policy or advocacy issue Ms. Foundation for Women is working to address?

Although the Ms. Foundation for Women does fund in three specific “grantmaking” areas – economic justice, health, and safety – our views on issues are much larger. Our goal is to focus on highlighting the need for a gender lens to be applied to all issues that impact women and their families. A recent example of this is lack of a gender lens is the recent efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Regardless of your political views, the fact is that 13 white men sat in a room and decided what was best for women and girls when it came to their health. The result was a 142-page bill that does not say the word “woman” ONCE.

This work can weigh heavily on the mind, body, and spirit. Do you have a self-care practice? What is it?

So, when I first started at the Ms. Foundation for Women I used to joke about my being from North Dakota and how I grew up knowing more about farming than feminism and more about Girl Scouts than Gloria Steinem. In that vein, my self-care includes time for me – and sometimes my best friends – to enjoy nature. Whether it is being home in Connecticut, hiking, or just taking time to walk the Brooklyn Bridge, having a chance to be with and enjoy nature is key to keeping me centered.

Describe your leadership in one sentence.

My leadership style? Well, I strive to lead by example. I trust and invest in women, and that is why the Ms. Foundation for Women – centered around trusting and investing in women to create and implement the solutions that are best for their communities – is the perfect place for me.



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