

**Regaining Our Voice:
A 21st Century Agenda for
Black Foundation Executives**

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The Ninth James A. Joseph Lecture
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EMMETT D. CARSON

As president and CEO of The Minneapolis Foundation, Emmett D. Carson provides overall vision, leadership and motivation for one of the largest, oldest and most complex community foundations in the country. He oversees the Foundation's grantmaking, loan making, communications, fund development and investment management activities. As external spokesperson, he is responsible for developing collaborative relationships with all sectors and segments of the community as well as with other organizations nationwide. Since his arrival in 1994, the Foundation has embarked on a ten-year \$20 million initiative to improve the lives of children and families in poverty, raised record annual gifts (\$46 million in fiscal year 1999) and increased total assets under management from \$186 million to over \$400 million.

Carson came to The Minneapolis Foundation from the Ford Foundation in New York, where he spent five years as program officer, first in the area of social justice and then in governance and public policy. Responsible for the Foundation's domestic and international support of community foundations and the nonprofit sector, Carson managed a \$10 million grantmaking budget that reached across the country and as far as Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Prior to that he served as project director of the Study on Black Philanthropy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C., where he designed and directed the first national study of the charitable giving and volunteer behavior of black and white Americans. Earlier in his career, Carson taught research and public policy courses as an adjunct professor in the Afro-American Studies program at the University of Maryland and served as a legislative research analyst at The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

A native of Chicago, Carson received a Phi Beta Kappa bachelor's degree in economics from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, and M.P.A. and Ph.D. degrees in public and international affairs from Princeton University. He is the author of several books and dozens of articles on American philanthropy. He serves on several nonprofit - boards and is a widely-recognized speaker and trainer on philanthropy, diversity and organizational development issues in the U.S. and abroad.

James A. Joseph Lecture

Introduction

It is both a wonderful honor and a heavy burden of responsibility to be named the ninth James Joseph Lecturer. I was a member of the Association of Black Foundation Executives' (ABFE) board when the idea of the James Joseph Lecture was first conceived and, until this year, looked forward with great anticipation to hearing the insights and wisdom of the honorees. It is always special to be recognized by your own community, and I will be forever grateful to ABFE for this recognition. Thank you.

Over the years, there have been numerous people who have helped and encouraged me in this field. Some are no longer active in the field and sadly, one is no longer with us. I greatly appreciate the time that Jim Gibson, Freeman McKindra, Jackie Burton, Barry Gaberman, Handy Lindsey, Susan Berresford, Ike Tribble, Jean Fairfax, Barbara Murphy-Warrington, Gloria Primm Brown, Betty Adams and, the departed but not forgotten, Bernie McDonald, among many others, took to share their war stories. We have lost something in recent years in that there seems to be fewer opportunities for African-Americans new to the field of philanthropy to learn from the experiences -good and bad -of those who have ploughed the fields before us.

I especially want to thank three very special people on whose shoulders I stand and whose guidance and friendship have been invaluable. Carrolle Devonish, former president of the Philadelphia Foundation and head of the Anguilla Community Foundation, is my personal example of how to be a foundation CEO and maintain your African-American identity. Whether as part of a team or independently, Carrolle has always recognized and acted in the best interests of our community.

The other person that I must recognize is Lynn Huntley, vice president of the Southern Education Foundation and former program director at the Ford Foundation. Lynn gave me my first job in philanthropy and taught me nearly every method, strategy and trick that I know about grantmaking. She combines the strategic acumen of Sun Tzu, the political savvy of Machiavelli, the social graces of Emily Post and the joke repertoire of Chris Rock. She has forgotten more about the practice of philanthropy than most have ever known.

And, I want to thank my wife, soon to be Dr. Copeland-Carson, for her constant love, strength and support. She is truly my best friend. Please join with me in recognizing these remarkable women.

As I stated, the James Joseph Award carries with it a heavy burden of responsibility. It is the only platform in our field to discuss and reflect on issues of importance to African-Americans in philanthropy. As I try to meet this challenge, I want to share with you an experience from when I visited Israel. One of the many things I learned during the trip was that in Hebrew my name, Emmett, means truth. Whenever my wife, Jackie, and I get into heated debate, I am fond of saying this is the truth speaking. Her response, which I would ask you to keep in mind during my remarks, is that the truth is different from Emmett's truth.

I want to talk about four things this evening.

- . I want to talk about whether ABFE's mission remains relevant in the new millennium.
- . I want to offer some observations about the need to differentiate between words and deeds as it relates to race matters.
- . I want to examine the future career prospects for Black foundation executives.
- . And, I want to talk about the unique opportunities that exist today for Black foundation executives to leverage greater resources to address the needs of our community.

The African-American Presence in Philanthropy

ABFE, the oldest of the affinity groups, was founded in 1971 to increase foundation support to the African-American community and to encourage the recruitment and retention of African-Americans in philanthropy. As we begin the new millennium, it seems appropriate to ask if ABFE's 30-year old mission is still relevant.

It is estimated that there are 44,146 foundations in the United States with collective assets of \$329.9 billion.(1) Data from

the Foundation Center indicates that of \$9.7 billion granted by the 1,000 largest foundations in 1998, only 3.8 percent, \$367 million of foundation resources were specifically directed to the African American community.(2) While these statistics are disappointing, they are not surprising. Foundation resources are allocated based, in large part, on the interests of their founders and how succeeding boards and staffs interpret the original grantmaking priorities.

It is not intended to provoke controversy to say that most foundations were not established to protect or advance the interests of Black people, poor people or people of color. Moreover, despite all of the well-intentioned diversity efforts and the rhetoric around inclusiveness, foundations continue to do a poor job in recruiting people of color to their boards and staffs. In 1985, Elizabeth Boris found that 99 percent of foundation CEOs and 92 percent of program staff were white.(3) Nearly 15 years later, more comprehensive data from the Council on Foundations indicates that 93 percent of trustees, 96 percent of CEOs and 87 percent of foundation professional staff are white. African-Americans represent 6.1 percent of trustees,(4) 3.2 percent of CEOs and 16.6 percent of program staff.(5)

The racial, ethnic and gender mix of a foundation's trustees and staff is important because it is this group that establishes and interprets its grantmaking priorities. The more homogeneous this group is in terms of race, gender and life experiences, the less likely it is that they will be supportive of projects that may challenge their shared perceptions. This is not to suggest that anyone of us lacks the capacity to empathize with the situations of others, but rather to recognize that women bring a different view to the table than men. Hispanics bring a different view to the table than Asians. Gays and lesbians bring a different view to the table than heterosexuals. And, the disabled bring a different view to the table than those who are able-bodied. Given the continuing small percentage of foundation resources directed to the African-American community and the small number of African-Americans in philanthropy, ABFE's mission is as relevant today as it ever was.

Believe the Behavior

There is an old saying that when the words are different than the behavior, believe the behavior. With the exception of the Confederate flag flying over the South Carolina state house, there are few current examples of legalized public intolerance for people of color. On the contrary, the public rhetoric is that our nation has made so much progress toward racial equality that programs to

redress 200 years of inequality from slavery through legalized discrimination are no longer necessary. In fact, it is argued that such programs actually hurt the beneficiaries in that they unfairly advantage them over people who are more deserving. This race neutrality approach argues that foundations, government, businesses and schools should use measures such as poverty as the mechanism for allocating opportunity rather than race and ethnicity. Proponents of this view argue that to continue to rely on race or ethnicity divides us as a nation and provides opportunities to those who have not fairly earned them. This view is quickly gaining acceptance, and foundations are beginning to respond by reducing or diluting their race-specific grantmaking programs.

If African-Americans were treated in a race neutral way, such thinking might have some merit. Regrettably, the African American experience continues to be an all too unique experience. We alone bear a history as former slaves. Today, we continue to be disproportionately subjected to police terrorism, systematically under educated and over incarcerated. Let me take a few moments to examine the uniqueness of our experience in these areas.

The power of terrorism is not that it happens to everyone but the paralyzing fear that it could happen to you. Video evidence showed that Los Angeles police could beat Rodney King within an inch of his life and have a state court find the police not guilty. New evidence is now coming forward that police officers in Los Angeles have engaged in planting evidence, giving false testimony, beating people to secure false confessions and possibly even murder. Not to be out-done, New York police fired 41 shots hitting an unarmed , Amadou Diallo 19 times in front of his own home and were found not guilty. More recently, an unarmed Patrick Dorismond was killed by New York police while trying to hail a cab to go home. And let's not forget Abner Louima, who was beaten and sodomized by New York police in the station house. Police stops of African-Americans are so pervasive that a new phrase has been coined, "Driving while Black." Several states are conducting studies to document what the police already acknowledge by their use of racial profiling -African Americans are not treated in a race-neutral way. Where is the public outrage? Where is the accountability? Where is the equal protection under law?

Let me turn to education. I would first observe that race-neutral theories like California's Proposition 209, which eliminated race as a consideration for academic admission to state colleges and universities, only seem to gain favor when the proponents are African-American and the intent of the plan is to in some way

eliminate opportunities that have successfully helped African Americans. In 1998, Proposition 209 resulted in the University of California Berkeley campus seeing its freshmen enrollments of African-Americans drop from 562 to 191 students and a drop for Hispanics from 1,200 to 600 students.(6) Texas, under a federal court order to eliminate affirmative action, has seen lower enrollments of students of color at the University of Texas despite a state mandate that the top 10 percent of each high school be guaranteed admission to either the University of Texas or Texas A&M.(7) The states of Florida and Pennsylvania are currently considering plans to abolish the use of race, religion or gender preferences as college admission factors which, if adopted, would likely have the same effects on the enrollments of students of color as those in California and Texas.

Affirmative action was certainly part of the rationale Princeton University used in admitting me; however, it was my hard work alone that got me out. I would also tell you that the nature of the discussions were very different with me in the classroom. That was 15 years ago, and since that time Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs has yet to graduate another African-American Ph.D. student.

It is imperative that those of us who have benefited from educational opportunities become far more vocal in our support of programs that promote the access of people of color to equal opportunity. Yes, yes and yes -things are better than they were 20 years ago; however, that is not the question. The question is: Are things as they should be?

There is no area in which it is clearer that things are not as they should be than in the area of criminal justice. While California argues for race neutrality in education, its criminal justice system is anything but. Several studies have shown that the state's "Three Strikes" law is disproportionately used in cases involving people of color. The Justice Policy Institute found that African-Americans are five times more likely to be arrested for felonies, seven times more likely to be sent to prison and thirteen times more likely to be sentenced under the "Three Strikes" law than whites.(8)

In 1995, nationally, one in three African-American males between the ages of 20 and 29 were either in prison/jail, on parole or on probation.(9) It is estimated that half the young African-American men in Washington, DC fall into this category and more than half of the young African-American men in Baltimore, Maryland. Most disturbing of all, 1.4 million African-American men, 13 percent of the Black male population, have permanently lost their right to vote.

In some states, it is estimated that 40 percent of African-American men have lost their right to vote.(10)

A new report, "And Justice for Some," released last week by the Justice Department and funded by several courageous foundations, found that minority youth are treated far more harshly by the criminal justice system. The report finds:

Among young people who have not been sent to a juvenile prison before, blacks are more than six times likely as whites to be sentenced by juvenile courts to prison. For those young people charged with a violent crime who have not been in juvenile prison previously, black teenagers are nine times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison. For those charged with drug offenses, black youths are 48 times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison.(11)

We must ask: Why has building prisons replaced a rural economic development policy? We must challenge what it means that a generation of African-American youth have lost their voting rights to participate in setting the political agenda of this country although they are still required to pay taxes. And, we must morally question a "Three Strikes" law that is applied unfairly that throws away the key to the lives of our young men. Time does not permit me to discuss the class action suits involving Texaco, Denny's and Eddie Bauer, among others for discriminatory practices, the dismal health status of our children or the growing digital divide. Until the problems are race-neutral, African-Americans and those in support of social justice must argue against the suggestion that the solutions can be race-neutral.

Limited Career Opportunities

Let me turn to my third topic, the career prospects for Black foundation executives. Research has consistently shown that Black foundation executives have obtained more education and are paid less than our white colleagues.(12) Notwithstanding the issues of merit raised by this fact, it is my belief that foundation boards will increasingly choose to recruit high-profile individuals outside of the field of philanthropy when seeking to fill the CEO post. As foundations move out of obscurity, big name ex-politicians, college presidents and newspaper publishers will be attracted to lead institutions that control hundreds of millions to billions of dollars. As a consequence, people of color within foundations will increasingly find that the glass ceiling is limited to upper-level staff

jobs short of the CEO post.

What should this mean for African-American foundation staff? It should liberate us. Our positions within institutions that exist in perpetuity are, by definition, transitory. Rather than assuming a strategy of not rocking the boat in an effort to quietly work our way to the top and then make change, we need to make as much change as we can today. We must recognize that our silence is not likely to position us for leadership positions in the future. In fact, the African-American heroes and sheroes that have made a difference in this field and in our community have spoken out at each lookout point along the way up the mountain. They didn't wait to find their voices until they reached the top.

Unprecedented Opportunities

The new millennium presents Black foundation executives who have found their voices with unprecedented opportunities to leverage foundation resources to improve the quality of life in our community. To start, we need to view our role as door openers to create opportunities rather than as gatekeepers that keep people out. How can we better prepare nonprofit leaders in our community to successfully navigate the maze of our institutions? How do we use the conference planning community of the Council on Foundations for the annual meeting, fall community foundations meeting, the family foundations meeting as well as the local regional associations of grantmakers to create ample access for nonprofit advocates of the African-American community? How does ABFE become a bridge for informing and educating the larger foundation community about the injustices and inequities faced by our community in the areas of police terrorism, education, criminal justice and health care, among other issues? History has shown that when we achieve social justice for African-Americans, we also achieve it for women, groups of color and others. Where we can, we should collaborate with groups that share our agenda but be careful not to view collaboration as the ends but rather the means to specific outcomes.

Never before in American history have so many people become so wealthy at such young ages. There is an enormous opportunity to educate and inform these new philanthropists about the issues facing our community and to advance creative grantmaking ideas that can make a lasting difference in the lives of Black people, poor people and people of color. History shows that founders of foundations may be less risk averse than the governing boards and staff that follow them. Julius Rosenwald was personally committed to racial equality and led his foundation in ways that

were considered controversial at the time. At a time when race-specific approaches in education are unpopular, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has created a \$1 billion scholarship program through the United Negro College Fund at a cost of \$50 million per year to support scholarships in technology for kids of color. The richest man in America recognizes that America is not yet all that it should be and has sent a powerful message about his values and willingness to support race-based opportunities. Similarly, Ted Turner's billion dollar gift to the United Nations (\$100 million for the next ten years) to promote children's causes and academic research is another opportunity.(13)

We have to support efforts to grow our own endowments and develop our community's philanthropy. While they differed on many things, Fredrick Douglas, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Dubois, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. all agreed on the importance of Black self-help. We have a significant and growing number of wealthy athletes, entertainers, doctors, lawyers and dot.commers who must be challenged to move from crisis giving to establish more systematic giving strategies. How do we encourage the Cosbys, Winfreys and Jordans to establish lasting legacies to benefit our community and the larger society?

The newly established National Center on Black Philanthropy is an important effort in this direction. The Center has held two successful national conferences and has supported several regional conferences across the United States. While still in its formative stages, its creation signals that there is at last a critical mass of people who understand that the words Black philanthropy are not an oxymoron.

More than any other group, Black foundation executives should realize the power of endowments and compound interest over time. And yet, how many of us have honestly thought of ourselves as philanthropists rather than philanthropoids? How many of you have wills to ensure that the government won't take up to 70 percent of your estate? How many of you have made a charitable provision in your will to support an organization or cause that you care about? We must walk the talk if we are truly committed to community empowerment.

ABFE desperately needs to re-examine its membership criteria. The transitory nature of our field ensures that many of our brightest and most talented will be attracted to other pursuits. How do we continue to benefit from the Jim Gibsons, the Franklin Thomases, the James Josephs and the Angela Blackwells in our

field? We also need a mentoring program to link those with philanthropic experience in and out of the field with newcomers so that lessons can be shared and common pitfalls avoided.

Finally, the world is a smaller place. My own state, Minnesota, has the largest concentration of Somalis and Southeast Asian Hmong in the United States. Lynn Huntley's path-breaking comparative race relations project documents how the issues faced by people of color in Brazil, South Africa and the United States are not that different. Each of us should nurture an interest in a foreign country and attend meetings through the Council on Foundations or others on those places. Several weeks ago, I attended the first meeting of a three-year exchange program between community foundations of the United States, Europe, Canada and the United Kingdom. I was the only person of color in the room and, once again, the discussion was significantly different. As Carrolle Devonish has said to me countless times, we have more to offer and to learn from other countries than we realize.

In the final scene of the movie *Amistad*, the lead character, Cinque, tells how he will call on his ancestors for strength and guidance in his moment of greatest need. He states: "I will call into the past, far back to the beginning of time, and beg them to come and help me. At the judgment, I will reach back and draw them into me and they must come, for at this moment, I am the whole reason that they have existed at all." We are at our judgment day. We need to draw our ancestors in and remember their advocacy and passion for our community. We must find our voice if we are to take full advantage of this unique moment in time to move our institutions to support programs and activities that ensure liberty and justice for all.

Notes

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Spring 1994, pp. 331-344, and Burbridge, Lynn C., *Status of African Americans in Grantmaking Institutions*, Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1995.

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