



Amina, thank you so much for that very kind introduction. Given the previous speakers, I am even more humbled and honored to be speaking to you today standing in the shoes of Ambassador Jim Joseph and the many other prominent recipients of this prestigious Award including my friend and predecessor at the Field Foundation - Handy Lindsey and my Chicago colleague Amina Dickerson. Before I begin, I want to thank my daughters Faith and Keidra, my Field Foundation board member Rita Fry, and the many friends and colleagues including my support team from Chicago African American in Philanthropy for joining me today.

As you know I'm a lawyer and most lawyers will admit – that one of the things lawyers do best is use the words and wisdom of others to make our case (any lawyers out there –raise your hand- you know what I'm talking about). So this presentation will be no exception. But I will caution you that also as a lawyer, I of course will give myself creative license to interpret the words and the wisdom of others as I see fit. So here we go!

Given this is the James Joseph Lecture in honor of the important legacy of Ambassador Joseph I believe it only fitting to start with his words: taken from his booklet (page 8) entitled – Private Philanthropy and the Making of Public Policy published in 1985. In it he states:

“Private foundations are grappling with some of the most vexing public issues of the day – from budget deficits to tax simplification and reform, from nuclear proliferation to agricultural and industrial dislocation, from welfare policy to regulatory reform.”

Sound familiar. Remember this was thirty-one years ago. The more things change the more they stay the same!

Today, philanthropy as whole is still grappling with some of the most vexing public issues of our time – from voting rights to social justice, from police brutality to mass incarceration, from disinvestment in public education to livable wage jobs; from gender inequity to equal marriage; from generational poverty to massive evictions; from lead poisoned water to climate change.

Today, much like back in 1985, there is a sense of urgency to deal with these vexing systemic issues that continue to plague our society. But even more so



than ever before, in dealing with these issues, philanthropy today has to become more solution-driven. This requires having a strong, competent and inclusive group of stakeholders, including grantees; committed to tackling these issues. Philanthropy should be viewed as the opportunity to not only provide financial support to those engaging the problem head on, but also the opportunity to enable there to be a diverse group of stakeholders determining what the long-term solutions to these problems may be.

That said, let's step back and reflect upon what philanthropy's role really is with regards to systemic issues like racial inequality and social justice. First, we must not forget that back in the 60's in the height of the Civil Rights movement, but for a precious few, mainstream philanthropy was not widely supportive of the issues of voting rights, fair housing and school integration. Yet, despite the lack of major philanthropic dollars there were phenomenal strategic accomplishments in these areas.

Unlike back in 60's, today there are far more of us – people of color-particularly African Americans in philanthropy; though clearly still not enough. But having racial diversity, gender equity and social inclusion within philanthropy in and of itself is not enough. For those of us in this room, who are blessed to have a seat at the table where philanthropic decisions about these daunting issues are made every day; particularly those of us who have “the head seat” at the table: we must be prepared to be accountable and hold others accountable, as well. As I was once told – “Not to speak out speaks volumes and not to act is a huge action”. We cannot make excuses for our failure to act on those things over which we have influence or control. As a friend's mother once said “making excuses is a tool that people use to be a monument to nothing.”

I know this is preaching to the choir, but even with our seat at the table and our accountability, we need to be careful not see philanthropy as the ultimate solution to the systemic society ills plaguing our communities. We all know that foundations have had and should continue to have an important and often critical role in addressing systemic issues. But philanthropy alone should not be the ultimate driver toward systemic solutions. To quote Marion Wright Edelman, Founder of the Children's Defense Fund, also a lawyer “*With true structural change there would be less need for charity; without it even the best charitable efforts will never be enough.*”



Permit me to step back and give you the context for my beliefs. You may know that I am native Chicagoan, proud adopted home of our president. But as a born and bred Chicagoan, who as my daughters remind me never left town, my lens of the world is much like Chicago style pizza, home-made and unique to my tastes.

A little history - I grew up on the south side of Chicago – yes in Englewood! I was raised by a single mother with a tenth grade education – and went to grade school in what was then called “Willis Wagons” which was a trailer outside the school building; because the then Chicago Public School Superintendent Benjamin Willis refused to add on to the school buildings to accommodate the increasing number of blacks moving into then predominately white communities. But despite this rough start I graduated with honors from Englewood High School and went on to earn three degrees!! But beyond academics, growing up in Chicago back then provided another kind of education. It gave me a chance to see, to hear and to learn from elders like Dr. Margaret Burroughs – founder of DuSable Museum of African American History, Gwendolyn Brooks – first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize, renown journalist Vernon Jarrett and a mother who inspired me to believe that if I wanted to, I could be president of the United States – I was in high school before I figured out that wasn’t likely to happen. But directly and indirectly these role models gave me a sense of pride that overwhelmed the negative aspect of growing up in an increasingly segregated, redlined disinvested community – which sadly compared to what it has become now, would now be considered a fairly stable working class community.

Later, when Dr. King came to Chicago – fifty years ago this coming August – some of us young upstarts were privileged enough to at least be in places like Ogden Park in Englewood where Dr. King spoke or church basements where elders like Ether Payne, one of the country’s first female African American newspaper reporters with the Chicago Defender – also a native Chicagoan and Dr. Arnita Young Boswell – the sister of Whitney Young and the founder of the National Hook-Up of Black Women and others like radio commentator Lou Palmer; spoke openly about the end goal”; and what they were doing to achieve it.



Yet, even during these inspiring times of Dr. King and the tremendous leadership of many African American Chicago elders, there was also a much younger and some would say more disruptive group of black folk led by men like Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush, working toward the “end goal”. With Fred and Bobby – now Congressman Rush - at the helm of the Black Panthers their theme of self preservation and anti-oppression quickly spread through Chicago most vulnerable communities. So in addition to our respected and esteem elders, we would see younger Black people and people of all races struggling, albeit differently to achieve the same end goal.

I know you may be asking yourself, so what has this mini Black history lesson have to with philanthropy today? In my mind - EVERYTHING!!!

Lately, I’ve heard well meaning people say that what we need now is another Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to lead us out of this mess. And God knows we could definitely use his help with all of this, but I want to share a note the late Pennsylvania Congressman Robert Edgar, also an ordained United Methodist Minister wrote to my friend Steve Katz (raise your hand Steve) – the note read “*Always remember: We are the leaders we’ve been waiting for!*” I think that says it all.

Standing on the shoulders of Ambassador James Joseph, Franklin Thomas and in Chicago Dr. Adrienne Bailey, it is our turn to Stand and Deliver and not be afraid to Speak Truth to Power – be it by supporting grantees that are doing the work or by walking the walk in our own foundation; much like the stellar work of, the Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey, Kellogg, the Open Society Foundations and others joining to fight inequality.

Right now, we in philanthropy need to spend far less time self-imaging and messaging and more time working to enable the development and the implementation of real-life solutions to the systemic societal ills of our time. Sometimes that means directing and focusing our grant making to specific pre-identified strategies and activities; but hopefully it will also mean allowing those on the ground to determine what strategies and activities are best for them. Oft times the best answers come from those most impacted by the problem. I recall Melinda Gates once saying at a COF conference “*just because we have all the money doesn’t mean we have all the answers*”.



Yet, without having all the answers, we must still become much less risk adverse in our grant making. Now that doesn't mean we step away from doing the due diligence to determine an organization's capabilities, but it may mean in some cases making more "expenditure responsibility" grants whereby the Foundation assumes much of the risk – as the MacArthur Foundation did when I ran the Fund for Neighborhood Initiatives and with the initiative of Handy Lindsey, the Field Foundation has done since the early 90's in making grants to individual traditional Chicago public schools.

In addition to assuming more risk, it will also mean giving grantees and the programs they develop the time to learn from their mistakes. As I recall Amina Dickerson once saying, *"In the corporate world, through well funded research and development corporations are rewarded for they learn to do better or what not to do at all. But in philanthropy, our grantees are expected to hit the ball out of the park first time a bat."* I believe our grantees deserve the right to reflect on their lessons learned; as well.

After all, these systemic problems didn't happen overnight and as such, the solutions to them will not be developed overnight. We must realize that no one anything, alone - be it a foundation (no matter how large), a program (no matter how replicable), a nonprofit (no matter how successful) nor an elected official (no matter the office) can ever resolve the daunting societal problems of our day. It will take a combined concerted effort. For example, if we are focusing on the tragic issue on Black on Black community violence, as important as research may be, people in impacted communities need our help now. They can't afford to wait to see what the well funded long-term research reveals: much of which we intuitively already know – that is hyper-segregation, class isolation, limited educational and economic opportunity, all contributing to the abandonment of hope, remain the primary drivers of this tragic issue. Yet, it is in the area of creating hope that I believe philanthropy may have its biggest impact. Much like back in the 60's, supported by only a handful of philanthropic donors, I see groups in Chicago like the Workers Center for Racial Justice and Leave No Veterans Behind moving folk from anger, to hope, from hope to action, and ultimately from action to the end goal of broad based community-driven solutions.



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In closing, let's be real, we can't fix it if we don't face it!! By that, I mean, no matter how well intended, philanthropy can never begin to fully tackle these systemic problems if we don't come to grips with what the systemic sources of these problems really are. And in doing this, it is essential for those of us privileged to be within the walls of philanthropy, to accept the role; we must all play in helping to achieve that end goal. With that, I thank you again for this tremendous honor.

“The End Goal”: Presented by Aurie A. Pennick - April 10, 2016
Association of Black Foundation Executives