

Disintegrated Black Philanthropy
in Post-DEI America

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Introduction

The speed and breadth at which diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs are being dismantled following the Supreme Court's 2023 landmark ruling outlawing race-based affirmative action programs in college admissions¹ has been staggering. State and local governments, corporations, and nonprofit organizations fearing both real and threatened legislative and litigious efforts have quickly moved to eliminate any vestiges of their DEI programs. During this same timeframe, several state and local governments have passed voter suppression laws² and banned thousands of books, many on African American history, from public schools and libraries.³ Considering that it was only five years ago that corporations and foundations announced unprecedented financial commitments in support of social equity following the horrific murder of George Floyd, the current circumstances would be expected to foreshadow a strong reaction from the African American community.

Historically, African Americans have relied on their collective black philanthropy – the giving of time, talent, and treasure – to respond to systemic threats to their social, political, and economic well-being. This paper provides evidence of how African Americans (and their allies) are responding to the current systemic challenges through their giving to support black nonprofit organizations and causes. How does the current philanthropic response of African Americans differ, if at all, from the response following George Floyd's murder? What, if any, giving trends are emerging and what might be predicted for the future? To explore these questions, on October 14, 2024, the Valdry Center of Philanthropy at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, assembled a daylong focus group of distinguished leaders from African American charitable funds and foundations to share their insights and experiences about black philanthropy following George Floyd's death and in the post-DEI environment. A public session was also held.⁴

These leaders were identified because their organizations have mission statements focused on the African American community. Giving circles and African American donor funds or supporting organizations within community foundations were not included in the focus group because their very structures do not allow them the full legal authority to act independently of their parent institution. Collectively, the leaders represent different regions of the country, and their roles provide them with a unique position to observe giving trends in their communities. Each is a well-regarded national and local leader, and together, they have more than 100 years of experience in the nonprofit sector. The leaders are Charisse Bremond-Weaver, Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade (CA); Bithiah Carter, Give Black Alliance (MA); Mark Lewis, Poise Foundation (PA); Makeeba McCreary, New

Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund (MA); and Raymond Pierce, Southern Education Foundation (GA).

The advantage of a small focus group is that participants can engage in interactive discussions where they can affirm common understandings and tease out nuanced differences. The limitations are that participants can only speak to their knowledge as shaped by their experiences and biases. Notwithstanding these limitations, focus group research represents an invaluable tool for identifying trends and perceptions.

The observations of the focus group suggest that understanding black philanthropy in the 21st century requires the development of a more complex framework that could have profound implications. This new framework requires rethinking the distinction between individual African American giving and collective black philanthropy and how to mobilize each form of philanthropy to respond to systemic existential threats. This paper begins with a history of black philanthropy followed by an assessment of the giving environment after the murder of George Floyd and in the post-DEI era. The paper concludes by proposing a new framework for understanding disintegrated black philanthropy and strategies for navigating its complexities.

History of Black Philanthropy

Throughout recorded history, there has been philanthropy – the giving of money, time, and goods to help others. What has distinguished black philanthropy in the U.S., at least up until the 1970s, is that its roots are collective – people working together – rather than people acting individually.⁵ Historically, even wealthy individual black philanthropists engaged in philanthropy by working with others.

This collective approach to engaging in philanthropy can be traced back to the communal practices in tribal Africa. Collective black philanthropy is distinct from the *noblesse oblige*, which is a top-down European approach to philanthropy based on individual interests, status, and wealth. Collective black philanthropy has been the African American community's all-purpose, never-fail solution for ensuring its socioeconomic survival and advancement. The black church has been the primary vehicle for much of the community's philanthropy and, in many ways, was the first community foundation. The black church aggregated the limited resources of African Americans to combat systemic racism, provide social services, and establish the first black schools, banks, and insurance companies.⁶

Through collective black philanthropy, the Underground Railroad helped to free slaves and resettle them as freedmen and freedwomen, helped African Americans thrive during Reconstruction, protected them during the backlash of the Jim Crow era, and was the

lifeblood of the Civil Rights Movement. Following the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the capstone of which was the 1965 Voting Rights Act, black philanthropy became increasingly less collective and more individual, reflecting the European approach to philanthropy. These are, of course, broad generalizations. At any given period of time, there are African Americans who engage in individual philanthropy, collective philanthropy, both at the same time, or no philanthropy at all.

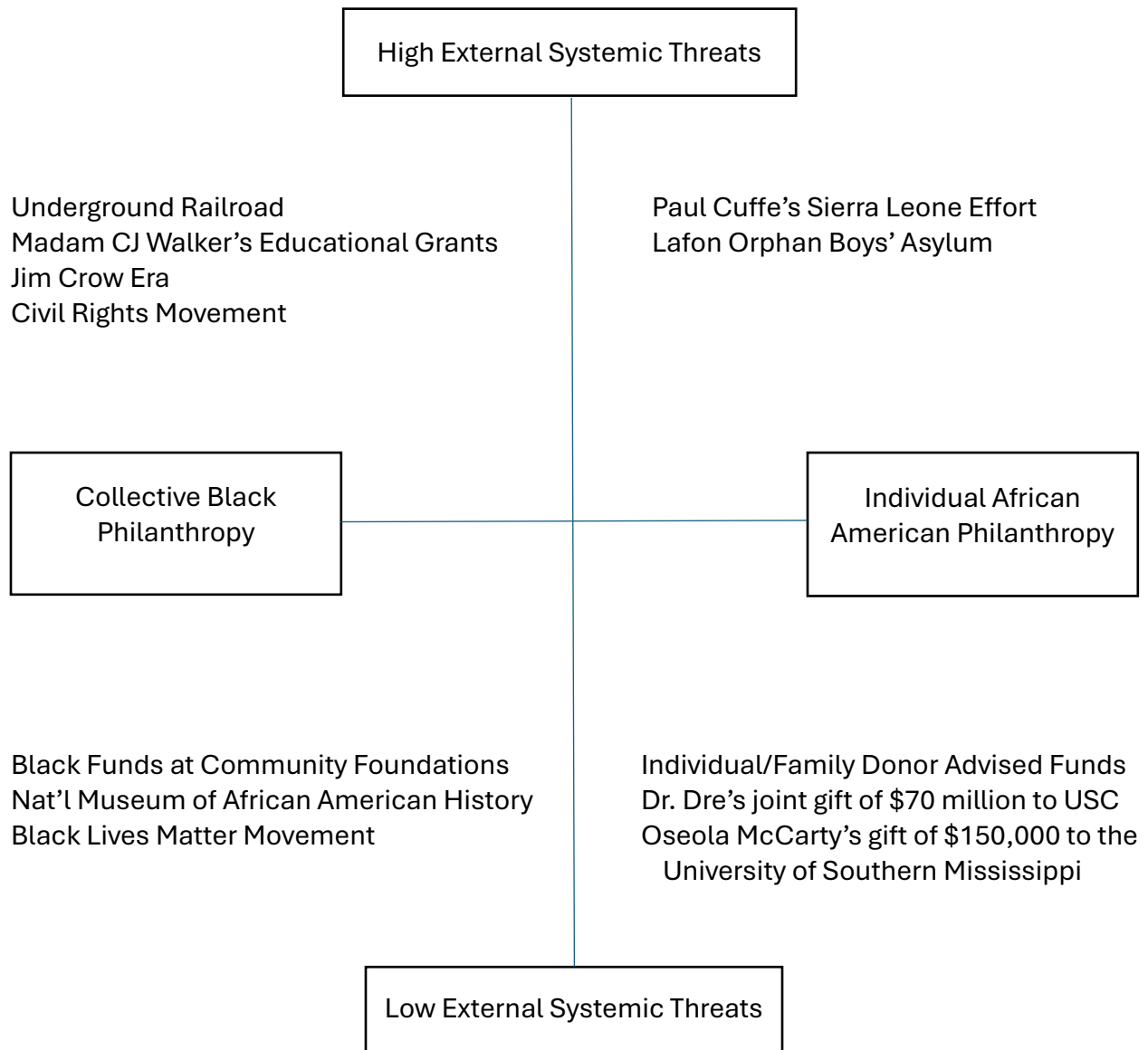
In the 1970s, as upwardly mobile African Americans began to get the jobs they deserved, could live where they wanted, and have their kids attend better schools, they became increasingly disconnected from their old neighborhoods and churches. The result? Upwardly mobile and less economically mobile African Americans no longer saw their destinies as being inextricably bound together.

Philanthropy by African Americans exists on a continuum between two ends of a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum is collective black philanthropy – African Americans working together toward a common goal to benefit some aspect of black life. At the other end of the spectrum is individual African American philanthropy, in which personal philanthropic interests are pursued.

To clarify this distinction, a charitable gift to Princeton University or Morehouse College for general support by an African American donor would be an act of individual black philanthropy, as would a gift by the same donor to establish a scholarship program for African American students. Those are all acts of individual African American philanthropy. Collective black philanthropy requires working in concert with others to achieve a common goal, for example, contributing to a black charitable fund at a community foundation. By this definition, contributing to the endowment or general fund at a black nonprofit institution or a similar fund at a white nonprofit institution focused on African American interests would be supporting collective black philanthropy.

Systemic existential threats to the well-being of the African American community cannot be addressed by individual philanthropic acts alone and require collective black philanthropy. This is a high bar to achieve, yet African Americans have consistently met this standard when required in the past. When external institutional and governmental threats to the African American community are high, African Americans rely more on collective philanthropy. Conversely, when external systemic threats are low, African Americans feel freer to pursue their individual philanthropic interests. This historical paradigm is depicted in Diagram A.

Diagram A



Oseola McCarty's gift of \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi⁷ and Dr. Dre's joint gift (with entrepreneur Jimmy Iovine) of \$70 million to the University of Southern California⁸ are stellar examples of individual African American giving at a time of low external systemic threats. By contrast, ship captain Paul Cuffe's philanthropic and logistical support in relocating 38 African Americans to Sierra Leone in 1815⁹ and Thomy Lafon's (the wealthiest African American of the 1800s) support of the Lafon Orphan Boy's Asylum and the Home for Aged Colored Men are examples of individual giving during high systemic external threats.

Lafon was also active in supporting collective black philanthropic efforts such as the Underground Railroad and the Friends of Universal Suffrage, which focused on securing the vote for African American males.¹⁰ Similarly, Madam C.J. Walker (the wealthiest African American woman of her time) was active in supporting her individual philanthropic projects as well as collective black philanthropy through her support of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and Mary McLeod Bethune's Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls that became Bethune-Cookman University.¹¹

The widespread collective philanthropic support for the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Black Lives Matter Movement also occurred when there were low external systemic threats. The same collective black philanthropy during the Civil Rights Movement, the Jim Crow era, and Madam C.J. Walker's myriad educational grants to black educational organizations occurred during periods of high external systemic threats.

The Aftermath of George Floyd

In the aftermath of George Floyd's death, there was a tremendous outpouring of philanthropic commitments from corporations, foundations, and individuals to address the systemic challenges facing African Americans. Stakeholders also created the grassroots Black Lives Matter Movement, which, at its height, received \$79 million in gifts.¹² *The Washington Post* reported that "America's 50 biggest public companies and their foundations collectively committed at least \$49.5 billion ... to addressing racial inequality."¹³ Similarly, a report by McKinsey found that "over 1,100 organizations committed a total of \$200 billion to racial justice initiatives between June 2020 and May 2021."¹⁴ Individual philanthropists were also active. MacKenzie Scott reportedly contributed more than \$567 million to help advance racial equity.¹⁵

Focus group participants were asked whether they saw this surge in philanthropic support in their communities. The answer was a resounding yes. However, participants were quick

to note that a high percentage of the commitments were never realized. “I think committed is the operative word. There was a commitment, but there was no tracking of what the actual gifts were – what the execution was,” said McCreary. Lewis stated, “It was a great marketing opportunity, and it was a great reaction, but there was no strategy behind it.” These comments are consistent with a McKinsey report, which found that 32 percent of top U.S. companies made statements in support of racial justice, 22 percent made external commitments, and only 18 percent made internal commitments.¹⁶

Several participants noted that many of the commitments made by the financial and banking industry consisted of promised loans to African Americans that primarily benefited the companies’ business interests and had little to do with advancing social justice initiatives. *Forbes* magazine affirmed the participants’ views, citing research by Candid that, as of 2020, only \$3.4 billion of commitments had been distributed.¹⁷ Similarly, *The Washington Post* found that of \$49.5 billion that had been committed, “more than 90 percent of that amount – \$45.2 billion – is allocated as loans or investments they could stand to profit from, more than half in the form of mortgages. Two banks – JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America – accounted for nearly all of those commitments.”¹⁸ Participants noted that since the criteria for qualifying for the loans didn’t change, no actual increases in the lending capital available to African Americans or people of color were realized.

What accounts for the failure of corporations to honor their racial justice commitments? McCreary speculated that 20 percent of the commitments were made by partners who were already vested in social justice issues, 60 percent of commitments were from those who needed the public’s permission before engaging in this work (and when the public support evaporated, so did their commitment), and 20 percent of the commitments were from those who saw a marketing opportunity with little to no intention of following through.

The fact that there has been no effort to hold corporations and foundations accountable for whether they honored their commitments has been especially troublesome and ironic to the participants, given that foundations have often held nonprofit organizations to high accountability and outcome standards. McCreary reflected, “We are asking the question now, a lot of us, where did the dollars actually go? And that question has yet to be answered.” Carter offered: “There was not a lot of thought or accountability. Even today, we don’t know who exactly is holding who accountable to tell us.” Pierce felt that if “companies are unwilling to tell you what they did, then that tells you all you need to know,” implying that if companies had achieved their commitment, they would be willing to publicly say so.

The leaders expressed significant concerns about why, how, and to whom these grants for social equity were distributed. Lewis felt that to fully understand the philanthropic

response to Floyd's murder, it was necessary to view the incident in the broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

"I don't believe if the George Floyd incident happened outside of the pandemic that you would have had that [philanthropic] response. ... It was the two of these together. ... The pandemic just kind of took the lid off, or unveiled, all these inequities and disparities and everything else."

Other participants supported this view.

One participant felt strongly that white fear of retaliation by African Americans was also a large part of the underlying reason for the mega philanthropic response. Others believed that the white power structure needed to be seen as acknowledging ongoing racial disparities and doing something to address them before concluding: "Never saw so much Black Lives Matter on Disney, trying to communicate to their children, I'm not racist." This may seem like a cynical view until one recalls the widespread social unrest and rioting that occurred in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and 19 other states following George Floyd's murder resulting in \$1 to \$2 billion in property damage claims.¹⁹ Also, the divisive debate continues over the naming and very existence of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

The leaders were uniform in the belief that many of the grants were not strategic and did not focus on building the long-term infrastructure capacity of black nonprofit organizations. Lewis commented, "Who are you making the pledges to? How are the pledges going to benefit the black community? Did we even ask the black community [what would be helpful]?" Many of the grantmakers did not have a strong pre-existing knowledge of black nonprofit organizations with which to inform their grantmaking. Pierce observed, "It didn't appear to be a lot of strategic thinking to it." Recalling conversations with several funders, a participant remarked: "What I heard from a number of organizations [grantmakers] is they didn't know this many black [nonprofit] organizations existed. They didn't even know what an HBCU [Historically Black College and University] was."

Many of the black nonprofit organizations that received funding did not have the necessary staffing or financial and human resources systems in place to manage a large infusion of money. Moreover, few of the grants provided support for developing or expanding the organizational infrastructure to keep pace with the programming. As noted in a Bridgespan Group report: "Black-led and Black-focused organizations are disproportionately underfunded."²⁰

This lack of knowledge on the part of grantmakers and individual donors resulted in some black nonprofit organizations receiving funding for which they did not have the requisite track record, systems, or staffing to manage. More than one participant felt that the failure

of some black nonprofit organizations to be good fiduciary stewards of the grants they received was not surprising and would negatively impact the reputations of all black nonprofit organizations. Participants had a range of reactions:

“I won’t say it was intentional, but to me, it was almost like you’re setting them [black nonprofit organizations] up to fail.”

“We [black nonprofit organizations] don’t get do-overs. ... We don’t get second chances.”

“I’m not so sure we [black nonprofit organizations] were ready.”

Others noted that some of the social justice grants went to white-led organizations. Pierce recalled working with the Association of Black Foundation Executives to try to encourage institutional philanthropy to direct their grantmaking to black-led organizations. Pierce emphasized, “Black-led organizations that are better poised to lead these efforts were being left out.”

The participants indicated a strong need for some black nonprofit organizations to learn what it means to be responsible fiduciary stewards and follow state and federal nonprofit laws. One participant shared that black nonprofit organizations “literally are so out of compliance with the Feds and the state, that we cannot continue to fund them. ... We have people close to having dire consequences.”

Several leaders reflected on their need to take greater personal responsibility in helping newer black nonprofit organizations develop strong relationships with grantmakers by being sponsors and ambassadors rather than gatekeepers. Bremond-Weaver shared, “I had a champion, but how many other black leaders don’t have a champion or cannot get the investments from philanthropy or corporate executives?” It was also mentioned that the leaders’ organizations could help by serving as fiscal intermediaries when needed:

“It is up to us, the folks who have the skill set, to help educate smaller black nonprofits and to also look at ways where we are bringing them in for them to build up their capacity because the work is being done at a high level.”

Another participant went further, saying it was necessary for responsible black leaders to speak out if a black organization wasn’t prepared to effectively steward a large gift:

“There is a responsibility on us, and I believe we don’t take it seriously enough. We don’t take it seriously enough to speak up when we’re not ready. ... We have to speak up and we used to decades ago.”

When asked how their own organizations fared during this time, most participants indicated that giving generally increased but not significantly. The one exception was the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade. Bremond-Weaver commented: “We benefited greatly.” She attributed the organization’s success to its pre-existing strong relations with corporations, foundations, and local government officials and remaining open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Others discussed examples of receiving unsolicited gifts from previously unknown companies and individuals. The lack of a substantial increase in funding for these organizations is somewhat surprising given that, in all but one case, they are established institutions with proven track records.

Most of the participants did not experience an increase in giving to their organizations from African Americans. Lewis said, “In Pittsburgh, I think we saw some increased philanthropy in the black community, but it was not from what I would call the wealthy class.” This is surprising given a 2018 pre-George Floyd report by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy found black philanthropists were leading the way in funding racial justice efforts. The report found that at least 50 percent of wealthy black donors supported African American causes, and nearly 44 percent prioritized giving to organizations focused on improving race relations.²¹

A 2021 study by the Women’s Philanthropy Institute (WPI), also part of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, might help explain this seeming contradiction. WPI found that, although 42 percent of households supported the idea of Black Lives Matter, only 14.2 percent financially supported racial justice organizations – primarily single women, black households, LGBTQ+ households, and younger households.²²

The WPI study confirms what several participants observed in the time following Floyd’s murder. They said individual African Americans were more inclined to use their social capital to speak out and encourage others, in particular, corporations and foundations, to give but did not give their own financial capital. The Give Black Alliance (GBA) and the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade were outliers in this regard. In the case of GBA, Carter stated, “We did receive more black donor checks.” Bremond-Weaver indicated that the Brotherhood Crusade received grants from individual African Americans and that “black athletes stepped up in a big way.” In particular, she pointed to the leadership of basketball star Chris Paul. It should be noted that the Southern Education Foundation’s fundraising strategy does not have a specific focus on raising money from African Americans.

The use of black social capital did not always result in a successful effort at creating collective black philanthropy. A participant noted being aware of an effort by African American athletes during this time to create a charitable fund relying largely on their social

capital without making any significant financial contributions. The effort failed to mobilize significant gifts from others in the African American community, as stated in the following:

“Their orientation [the athletes] is not that I write the check to be philanthropic, but it’s that I create a framework to push out a philanthropic effort, and I’m going to receive the public benefit for that. I’m going to get applauded for that, but it’s not going to be my money because I don’t have wealth yet.”

Several examples were given of African American athletes, at various times, seeking gifts for their charitable causes without being willing to fund the effort sufficiently while, at the same time, being unaware of established nonprofit organizations addressing the same causes.

Black Lives Matter was itself a nationwide response by the African American community and its allies to George Floyd’s murder, which was reminiscent of how the community harnessed its collective black philanthropy during the Civil Rights Movement. Although the Black Lives Matter movement occurred during low external systemic threats and the Civil Rights Movement during high systemic external threats, it is perplexing that there was not a greater philanthropic response from the African American community to George Floyd’s murder.

A range of reasons was given for the limited financial support from African Americans. One was that the murder of an African American male by a police officer was, regrettably, an all too frequent occurrence. George Floyd’s murder was “a wake-up [call] for white folks. It was not a wake-up [call] for the black community.” Another participant felt that wealthy African Americans were not yet comfortable making major gifts because “they earn a little bit of money and think we’re not there yet; we better hold off on this.” One participant observed, “It’s a lack of education. It’s a lack of modeling.” Another person said, “There is fear of being seen; fear that 10 people are now going to come and ask me for money; I don’t know if I have enough for my own children and my own prosperity.”

Post-DEI America

The Supreme Court’s ruling that race-based affirmative action programs in college admissions are illegal has led to government, corporations, and foundations eliminating their DEI programs. Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina, and Texas, among other states, have scaled back or eliminated their DEI programs. In addition, national companies such as Ford Motor Co., Lowe’s, John Deere, Molson Coors, Tractor Supply Co., Boeing, and Toyota, as well as countless smaller companies, have been dismantling their DEI programs. It also has been reported that foundations are eliminating grantmaking

programs focused on racial justice and that some are considering eliminating their internal DEI programs.²³

The Wall Street Journal found:

"Many businesses are unwinding programs that they launched or expanded in response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd and the COVID-19 pandemic. ... Of more than 60 small-business grant programs that in 2023 included race or ethnicity in their criteria, more than 40% no longer exist or appear moribund. ... Another 27% no longer use race or ethnicity in making awards."²⁴

Several participants felt that companies, foundations, and individual donors were using the perceived threat of potential litigation as an excuse for no longer supporting DEI efforts that they were not fully committed to anyway.

One participant recounted how frustrating it has become to seek funding for social justice initiatives in the post-DEI environment: "There has been a backlash. I can't raise any money." Grantmakers have been clear that they no longer fund social justice initiatives that focus on communities of color. However, they provide little clarity on what social equity initiatives they will support.

Others talked about how they have been advised against explicitly mentioning race or social justice in their proposals and instead are focusing their proposals on broader interest areas – such as health, education, or homelessness – that disproportionately affect the African American community. The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Justice found a similar pattern:

"Organizations have been asked to scrub from websites and documents key language related to racial justice, an explicit focus on Black and brown people, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.... Some donors have gone so far as to tell grantees to remove language about 'Black-led' work or building power in communities of color from their proposals."²⁵

Participants were asked if they were seeing an increase in African American giving in response to the elimination of DEI programs, the passage of voter suppression laws, and the removal of books on African American history from libraries and public schools. None of the participants were aware of any large-scale responses by the African American community to the current crises. They were then asked, "Why?"

In response, one leader remarked: "Even though you know there is a lot of black money out there, it is in no way being galvanized the way it could be or that it once was." Another said: "You have these other things happening that will have a much greater impact on us if we

don't react to [them], but most folks are ignorant to [them]. We don't even know what to organize against." Pierce observed that the black community is less prepared than it once was to respond to the current challenges and explained:

"I kind of revisit the formula that black folks used before to get all that we got – the real Civil Rights Movement, which was Dr. King in the streets pushing for policy and Thurgood [Marshall] and his team in the courts. There's nothing like that today."

Participants broadly agreed that the African American community is more geographically and economically divided than ever before. The black church no longer plays the central role it once did in bringing the separate worlds of the rich and poor together. Integration has meant that successful African Americans could move to affluent areas and their children could attend private schools or, at the least, well-functioning public schools. All of the leaders acknowledged that they did not live in the poorest communities. The leaders also recognized that the modern age's overwhelming and varied media communication channels make it difficult to communicate across the different segments of the African American community.

The participants acknowledged the importance of engaging with black youth. However, only the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade had an active youth component. It was felt that any efforts to engage youth needed to be grounded in understanding past social protest movements. Participants also grimly recognized that the poorest black youth have little understanding or interest in voting or the electoral process. Moreover, many of these poor kids are angry at their economic circumstances and willing to take that anger out on those within and outside of the African American community.

A Fractured Black America

The question was raised whether participants were seeing any mobilization or funding efforts by either affluent or low-income African Americans. Carter suggested *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* by Eugene Robinson as a useful lens through which to view today's African American community, and others agreed.

Robinson states: "There was a time when there were agreed-upon 'black leaders,' when there was a clear 'black agenda,' when we could talk confidently about 'the state of black America' – but not anymore."²⁶ He identifies four distinct social groups within the African American community: the Transcendent (ultra wealthy), the Mainstream middle-class (successful within the American system), the Emergent (people of mixed race and black immigrants), and the Abandoned (those with little hope of escaping poverty and mired in dysfunction). One leader described the groups this way: "The Abandoned class is trying to

survive. The Middle class is trying to sustain. ... The Emergent class is trying to get over. The Transcendent class is trying to keep what they got and enjoy what they have.”

There was general agreement that the issues of DEI retrenchment, voter suppression, and the removal of African American history books from schools and public libraries have little relevance to the daily lives of the Abandoned. The availability of collegiate and legacy scholarships is not an issue of concern for the Abandoned or their children. It’s hard to imagine this group taking to the streets to engage in social protest on this issue as they did after George Floyd’s murder. The Abandoned have long since given up on voting as a means of improving their status in life. Although these issues may not be relevant to the Abandoned, it is important not to confuse their apathy on these issues with their ability and willingness to give to the issues that they do care about.

Studies of black philanthropy have consistently shown that poor African Americans give a higher percentage of their income to charity than higher income people. A study by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors found that “Black households on average give away 25 percent more of their income per year than Whites.”²⁷

Participants found no consensus on how the Emergent viewed post-DEI America and would or would not respond through either their individual or collective giving. Several participants suggested that the Emergent have the option of choosing whether and when to identify with black interests and how to use either their mixed-race or biracial marriages to their advantage in gaining access to networks or opportunities.

The lack of any significant philanthropic response by either the Transcendent or Mainstream in the post-DEI era is troubling. Companies either owned or invested in by the Transcendent benefit from contracts requiring diverse providers. The Mainstream are the primary beneficiaries of DEI hiring, and their children are advantaged by race-based, affirmative action, collegiate admission programs. The Mainstream also benefit from corporate and government minority hiring and contracting programs and are the most likely affected by voter suppression laws and the removal of books from public schools and libraries. The Transcendent can believe that their wealth will insulate them from the vagaries of politics and that their children’s private school pedigree, coupled with large charitable contributions, will ensure admission to the elite college or university of their choice.

There are at least six reasons that may help explain why the Transcendent and the Mainstream have not engaged in either individual or collective black philanthropy to respond to the growing systemic threats in post-DEI America:

1. The anecdotal nature of this research and the small sample size of the participants have failed to discern the mobilization of significant individual African American giving or collective black philanthropy by these two groups. Although possible, this answer is highly unlikely given the breadth and depth of participants' experiences.
2. The events are too recent, and their implications are still being felt and understood to have generated a response. Although plausible, this argument is not compelling because of the immediate response following the murder of George Floyd and the immediately felt consequences of the dismantling of DEI programs.
3. The DEI concept, as suggested by a participant, has grown to encompass too many disparate groups: African Americans, women, people of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual, other sexual orientations) community. "We don't know what it [DEI] means." If people do not know what DEI means, then it is difficult to organize a coalition to fight for it.
4. Americans are generally less likely to engage in social activism than in the past. People's lives have become too busy, and the Transcendent and the Mainstream are unlikely to engage in public acts of social protest or boycotts as their first response.
5. The fear of personal attacks on social media and/or the fear of jeopardizing ongoing business and social relationships is real. If the largest corporations and foundations are afraid of being labeled "woke" in support of DEI efforts, how much greater are the risks to individual African American donors, especially those who are Transcendent or Mainstream? To speak out in America's highly charged and polarized political environment to champion the continuation of DEI efforts is to put oneself at risk of being socially ostracized, potentially physically attacked, and subject to being prevented from business and job opportunities. The harm that could befall individuals and their families and/or groups putting their names on philanthropic efforts to challenge the eradication of DEI efforts and the social media barrage that they would face cannot be understated. There was a reason why black church leaders could advocate for desegregation and take on the threats of violence. The ministers' salaries were paid by black churchgoers who could remain (at times) in the background, keeping their jobs and providing for their families while funding social protest. Collective black philanthropy provides safety in numbers that individual African American giving does not.
6. The disintegration of black America has severely limited the ability to activate collective black philanthropy across all groups. The issues that once bound most African Americans together are far more limited than they once were. Police and criminal justice reform may be among a handful of remaining cross-cutting issues

(i.e., the union) where African Americans of all segments are still judged by the color of their skin.

This last possibility is the most concerning and may help to explain the immediate and broad-based reaction to George Floyd's murder, as Lewis observed:

“George Floyd – anybody could relate to that. You see a man getting murdered.... You can organize around that. How many people in the Abandoned class have an idea about what the Supreme Court ruling [on eliminating race-based criteria in college admissions] was to say this is something we need to organize around?”

Without question, a combination of reasons may explain why there does not appear to be more collective black philanthropy in post-DEI America. However, the implications of a disintegrated African American community on the future of individual African American giving and collective black philanthropy require a new framework. The idea that the African American community has diverse interests representing different socioeconomic groups is not new. Booker T. Washington's “cast down your bucket where you are” strategy of attaining job skills to create economic independence differed from the “talented-tenth” focus on civil rights as espoused by W.E.B. Du Bois, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael each advocated different approaches to addressing the common problem of segregation. In the past, while the strategies for addressing high systemic existential threats to the African American community might have been different and appealed to different socioeconomic groups within it, the problem they wanted to address unified them.

What appears to be emerging is the disintegration of the African American community. Specifically, the vastly different life experiences of each group – is leading each group to develop and support strategies aimed at addressing its specific problems from its own unique social and cultural lens. Carter stated, “Each one of those groups is forming their own group, and these groups do not talk across groups.” In this environment, marshaling collective black philanthropy across all segments of the African American community will be increasingly difficult. However, it is likely that collective black philanthropy will eventually manifest within each segment of the African American community.

One way to think about this new framework is to envision four overlapping circles, with each circle representing the Transcendent, Mainstream, Emergent, and Abandoned (Diagram B). On any given issue, one or more of the circles may overlap, indicating agreement between two or more of the groups. When all of the circles have substantial overlap, they form a collective union. Consequently, the subject is of significant interest to the entirety of the African American community, such as the case of policing and criminal

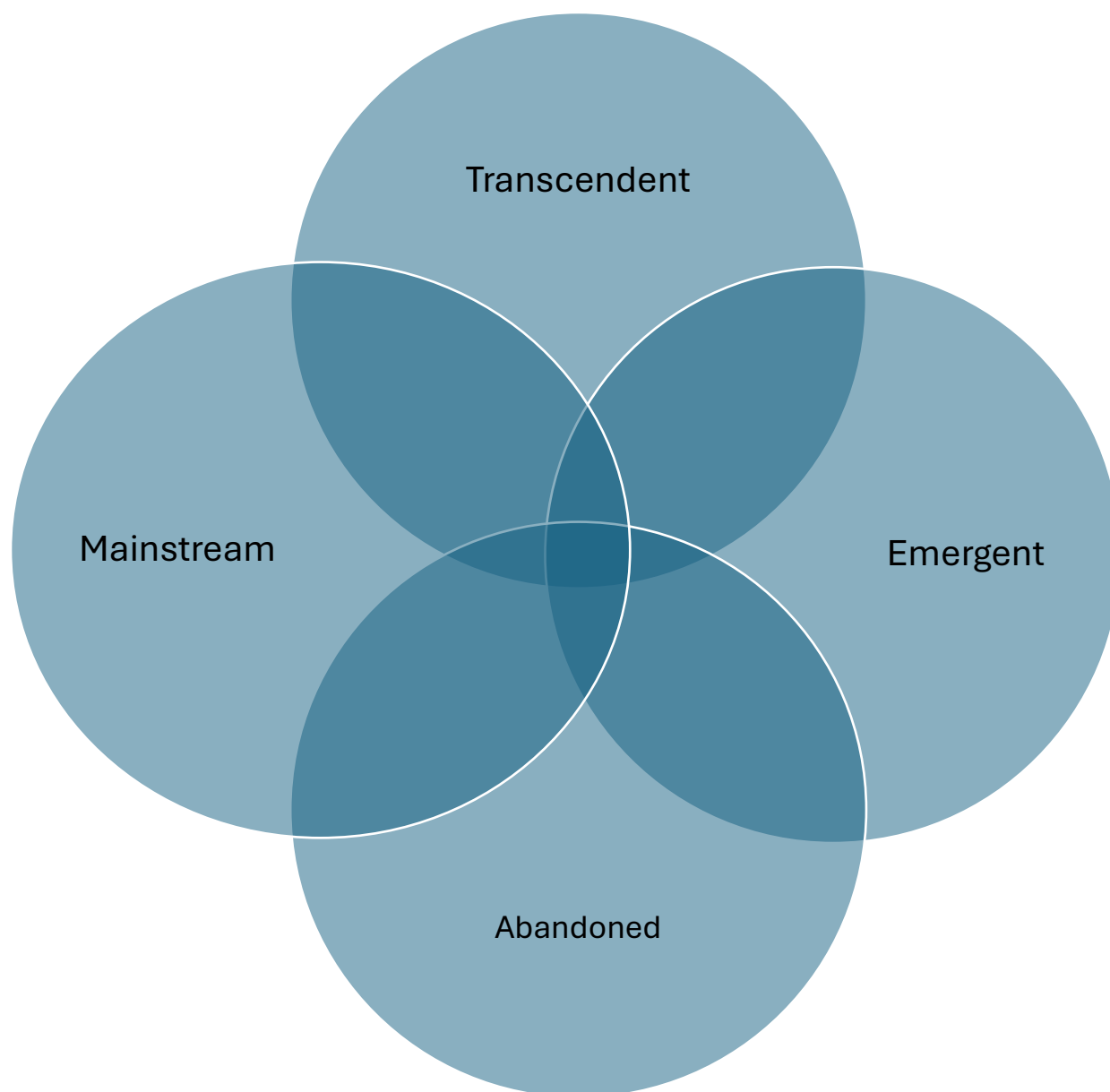
justice reform. In some cases, the interests of two of the groups may be in substantial alignment, and in others, there may be no alignment among any of the groups.

For example, public education might be a top priority for the Mainstream who are tied into the American system for their success, but less so for the Transcendent whose children are in private schools, or the Abandoned who are struggling every day to meet basic needs such as food and shelter. Alternatively, the Transcendent may support increased immigration as a net positive because it expands the available labor for their businesses and lowers labor costs. This is true not only for farm and factory labor but also for highly skilled tech workers.

The Abandoned, however, are likely to view increased immigration as competition for their low wage jobs, driving wages down, and increasing demand for already limited housing and other social safety-net resources. Both the Emergent and Mainstream likely have divided views on the issue of immigration.

Adding another layer of complexity, within each segment of the African American community, there still exists the continuum between collective black philanthropy and individual African American philanthropy. As one segment of the African American community feels threatened by systemic issues, it will engage in more collective black philanthropy whereas when it does not, it will engage in more individual African American philanthropy. Another implication of this complex continuum is that the Abandoned group will need to rely on the aggregation of small dollar donations from a large number of its members, whereas the Transcendent only need the social and financial capital of a few of its members to have a disproportionate impact on the charitable causes that they choose to champion.

Diagram B



Black Philanthropy's Future

In thinking about the future of individual African American philanthropy and collective black philanthropy, the participants expressed both sober and sanguine observations:

“As a people we are getting complacent.”

“We have to elevate our game.”

“We’re playing checkers, and they’re [monied interests against DEI efforts] playing chess on a level that we don’t ever see happening.”

The range of issues that different segments of African Americans will be motivated to respond to has become narrower as the socioeconomic, political, and cultural divide between the segments has become more rigid. As a result, it will be more difficult to organize collective black philanthropy going forward. This likelihood is perhaps not to be lamented but rather celebrated as the inevitable culmination of becoming part of the larger melting pot that enables individuals to achieve the American dream. Of course, the problem is the substantial number of Abandoned who have limited social mobility and live in isolated, troubled neighborhoods.

The future of individual African American giving is likely to become even more pronounced, especially among the Transcendent and Mainstream, as they continue to reap economic success. The challenge will be how to direct their giving to black nonprofit organizations and causes as their lives more closely mirror those of their white counterparts. Black Philanthropy Month (BPM) is held every August and primarily encourages individual African American giving. BPM also enables black nonprofit organizations to promote their programs to attract individual and collective black philanthropy. In this way, BPM is similar to Giving Tuesday, which is held in May as a National Day of Giving. There may be opportunities through BPM to encourage greater individual African American giving directed toward black nonprofit organizations.

Reactivating greater collective black philanthropy will be more difficult. As stated, the African American community has never been homogeneous, and throughout history, its leaders have differed on the strategies for achieving the agreed-upon goals of social equity and racial justice. What is different today is that each segment of the African American community is divided from the other segments in terms of defining the problem and how to solve it. Those interested in strengthening collective black philanthropy will need to develop new ways to create communications across the African American community using varied social media platforms and other communication vehicles.

Lewis remarked, “We may no longer have geographic community, but we can create virtual community. We need to reconceptualize community.” Carter described the new community as an opportunity:

“How do we bring us even more together? Maybe we no longer have the central church or community, but where can we start? I think our philanthropic dollar is a good place where we can have these cross-pollinated conversations of understanding rather than regret.”

More than one participant commented on the need for better communication among and training for black nonprofit organizations. There has been at least one early effort at convening black grantmaking organizations together, and it will take time to see what forward-looking agenda might be developed from their early conversations. One leader thought that such convenings should be held quarterly. The need for training was also emphasized. As McCreary noted: “We’ve learned a lot [referring to the social equity grants following George Floyd’s murder], but I’m not sure how we’re putting these learnings into practice.” There is an opportunity for one of the academic centers on philanthropy, such as the Valdry Center, to offer online training to black nonprofit organizations for a better understanding of the responsibilities of good stewardship.

If collective black philanthropy can now only be galvanized through a shrinking number of issues important to all segments of the African American community, which only have limited interactions with each other, then the sound from the alarm bells should be deafening. Black nonprofit organizations need to rethink how they position themselves to appeal to either a specific segment or several segments within the African American community.

There may be opportunities for an overarching issue to be in a position to appeal to different segments of the African American community. For example, maternal health outcomes affect all segments of the African American community. Similarly, a black nonprofit organization focused on music appreciation might have different programs aimed at jazz, hip-hop, and diaspora fusion that may appeal to different segments.

Opportunities may exist to leverage the significant wealth of African Americans. Lewis noted that African Americans have between \$1 trillion and \$1.4 trillion in disposable income on an annual basis, which would rank as the 12th largest economy in the world, and added, “That’s power. It’s collective power if we use it collectively.” Is it possible to create a sense of collective duty among African Americans to support black causes with minimal dollars from the Mainstream, Emergent, and Abandoned groups, matched by the Transcendent at the national level and in local communities? To be successful, such efforts

require meaningful commitments of both social and financial capital from the Transcendent. If half of the estimated 32 million adult African Americans donated just \$20, \$10 to a national black nonprofit organization and \$10 to a local black nonprofit organization, those donations would generate \$6.2 billion annually for black causes, not including the matching gifts. Such an effort could help to regenerate a sense of collective community and empowerment.

The Give Black Alliance (GBA) may be well positioned to activate collective black philanthropy. GBA organizes local communities to raise resources, develop research around a community issue, and then develop and act on plans to address local problems. Over time, GBA will be able to bring together different local communities to share their knowledge and develop a national agenda. Similarly, the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade is another local model of bringing together the disintegrated African American community to engage in collective black philanthropy. Can its model be replicated in other communities as originally envisioned by its founder, Walter Bremond, who also created the National Black United Fund?²⁸ Realizing this aspiration will require significant infrastructure investments before any organization can mobilize collective black philanthropy across the whole of the African American community.

Another strategy is to create a legal defense fund to challenge the litigious efforts to dismantle DEI and advise black nonprofit organizations on how to revise their mission statements and proposals to be consistent with the law. The contributors to such a fund would likely need to be anonymous to avoid the inevitable social media attacks. A related strategy would be to invest in programs to help educate the legal counsels of corporations and foundations on what the law does and does not require regarding advancing DEI. A model for this might be the Alliance for Justice's prior efforts to educate foundations and nonprofit organizations about the differences between lobbying and advocacy and how and when they can legally engage in those activities, as well as when they cannot.²⁹

New external systemic factors, such as the rise of fascism and open bigotry in the U.S., could accelerate the re-emergence of collective black philanthropy across all segments of the African American community. The 2024 presidential election exposed significant racist and fascist elements that exist within the American body politic that will have ramifications for the country for decades to come.³⁰ The Trump administration's early and unrelenting assault on DEI³¹ may lead the various segments to realize that their destinies remain bound together whether they like it or not. After all, if there are people looking for the imaginary illegal Haitians who are eating dogs and cats³² to deport, do they take the time to distinguish African Americans from people of different nationalities when they all share darker skin tones?

Lastly, if the leaders in this focus group are representative of black nonprofit leaders in general, there is an urgent need for them to prioritize their self-care. Most of the participants took over a decade before engaging in regular, sustained self-care. One participant only did so after having the opportunity to take a paid six-month sabbatical that required no work or contact with the office. Another participant, after yearly repeated requests from a spouse to take a two-week vacation, finally did so. Afterward, this participant realized that the time off was so rejuvenating that they committed to taking two weeks of vacation twice per year.

When asked about smaller efforts at self-care, one leader responded about trying to golf at least once per week – alone. Another participant reported being an avid gardener, while another simply locks the bedroom door to have time alone from work and family responsibilities. The demands facing African American nonprofit leaders are only likely to increase. It is essential that they understand the importance of recharging their spirits for the difficult work ahead. As one participant said, “It saved my life.”

Conclusion

Focus group participants used the words “challenging,” “confused,” “opportunity,” “hopeful,” and “unique” to describe the systemic existential threats facing the African American community. Appropriately, their words convey the complexities of leading a black nonprofit organization and raising money from a disintegrated African American community in post-DEI America.

The future of individual African American giving is likely to continue to grow, especially among the Transcendent and Mainstream. The challenge will be how to direct their giving to black nonprofit organizations and causes as their lives increasingly mirror those of their white counterparts. The Transcendent benefit from showing they have the wherewithal to make major gifts to mainstream organizations, and the Abandoned and Mainstream believe their more limited resources are not required to help the Transcendent achieve their charitable interests.

As for the future of collective black philanthropy representing the entirety of the African American community, it is likely to be more infrequent and harder to mobilize. The range of issues that different groups within the African American community will be motivated to respond to is narrowing as the social, economic, political, and cultural divide between the segments is widening. And yet, this is the challenge that has to be overcome. Perhaps this situation is not to be lamented but rather celebrated as evidence of the African American community’s assimilation into the American melting pot that comes with individuals

achieving the American dream. Without question, the Transcendent and Mainstream are achieving greater social and economic success, but the larger number of Abandoned have little social mobility due to bad choices, bad luck, and ongoing, systemic socioeconomic injustice. Although the history and reasons are different, this is not dissimilar to the different lives led by poor whites living in poverty across 13 states in Appalachia,³³ white factory workers in Pennsylvania, the white tech titans of Silicon Valley, and the financiers on Wall Street.

When President Obama was sworn in as the 44th U.S. President in January 2009, many believed that America was in the process of realizing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that his "children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."³⁴ When President Obama was re-elected four years later, that belief was cemented.

After Reconstruction, in 1877, African Americans faced widespread discrimination and violence that ushered in the legal segregation of the Jim Crow era. Unfortunately, history appears to be repeating itself. After the election of President Obama, there has been a significant increase in open racism against African Americans and others. The threat posed by domestic violent extremists and white supremacist groups is so dire that, for the first time, the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI are shifting their focus and resources to these extremist groups.³⁵

The magnitude of the systemic challenges facing the African American community cannot be solved through individual African American giving but will require a return to collective black philanthropy. We must revitalize black nonprofit organizations as well as utilize existing institutions like community foundations to create giving circles focused on African American interests. Within the law, individual and collective black philanthropy must use advocacy, lobbying, and public policy as part of its grantmaking strategies. Engaging in charity – supporting direct services – although important, will not break down systems.

America's democracy is under assault by extremist groups who are openly attacking the rights of African Americans to enjoy the liberties and freedoms of America equally. Collective black philanthropy has, throughout history, been the socioeconomic tool to protect and advance African American interests. It is essential that collective black philanthropy be reactivated if African Americans are to push back against the extremist groups now shaping America's social and political climate.

Congressman John Lewis once explained:

"Freedom is not a state; it is an act. It is not some enchanted garden perched high on a distant plateau where we can finally sit down and rest. Freedom is the

continuous action we all must take, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society."³⁶

All segments of this generation of African Americans are better educated and wealthier than any other, and each segment shares a responsibility to ensure that the hard-won freedoms they enjoy are available for future generations. Collective black philanthropy will play an essential role in this generation's responsibility to protect and preserve the hard-won gains of past generations while further advancing the dream of equal rights for all.

Notes:

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¹⁰ Allison Espiritu, “Thomy Lafon (1810-1893),” BlackPast.org, March 3, 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/lafon-thomy-1810-1893/>

¹¹ Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker’s Gospel of Giving: Black Women’s Philanthropy during Jim Crow* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

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