
FOREWORD



What does it take to help an entire population to achieve? What does it take to make that possible while also counteracting systemic

obstacles, built over generations, that seek to hold back that same population? *Building a Beloved Community: Strengthening the Field of Black Male Achievement* is more than your typical philanthropic research analysis. It is more than a call to action; it represents more than analysis and encouragement, theories of change and multidisciplinary approaches. It represents the full potential and hope of philanthropy and civil society. It represents what Martin Luther King, Jr. called The Beloved Community—a global vision in which injustice will not be tolerated because we as a people will not allow it.

The report inspires us to think about the positive opportunities created by reframing norms and shaping new conversations. It calls for understanding success and spreading it, for leveraging powerful voices (such as that of the President of the United States), for informing our work with data and looking for intersections across sectors. All of that is right and exciting.

But this report does more. It presents philanthropy with a radical challenge simply by putting black male achievement at the center of the discussion. Though there have been generations of efforts focused on African-American men and boys, and generations of those efforts have been asset-based, the general philanthropic community does not usually approach this work in this way. When the center of the frame is success it sheds new light on the relationships, dynamics, and edges of the work that surrounds this goal.

For those in philanthropy and communities who dedicate their talents and resources to black male achievement, this report offers a networked energy and new choices. By highlighting strategic options that extend beyond asset-based approaches to shifting whole narratives, the report encourages a big vision. By recognizing the committed nature of thousands of community groups and the episodic interventions from institutional funders, the report reveals one way this work is similar to many other social change efforts. By noting that black male achievement is an agenda item for mayors, governors, presidents, corporate CEOs, and major living donors, the report hints at the extraordinary opportunity of this moment—to go beyond episodic attention to sustained effort, beyond lip service to real change, beyond punctuated action to sustained focus.

The report also holds forth a real opportunity for the majority of philanthropists and civic actors for whom black male achievement is not at the center of their frame. My hope is that we will all take the time to consider our actions in light of this centrality. How does this frame influence your work? How do you fit into a picture that draws on high-achieving black men as an expectation in our society, as the norm in our communities, as an assumption informing your own professional strategies?

On a matrix of race and gender, I, as a white woman, would be placed in a box other than black men. At each stage in this research when the authors and funders reached out to me I asked myself, and them, why me? I am an ally in this work, so what are my responsibilities in that role? What I contribute to this report is a question I have given a great deal of consideration. I know that I can help more

black men achieve, that I can help change and defeat some of the barriers we've created to that success, and that I have thoughts to add and insights to consider when developing philanthropic strategies. Being an ally is more than just supporting the work of others. It involves extending my self and my networks so that they take on a new shape.

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Let's be honest—that's a big task. Why might you do this? What if your success depended on it? The words of the ancient sage Hillel come to mind: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?” These words were not informed by modern-day data analysis, policy reflection, or financial systems mapping. But they still hold true—our success as a society is relational.

This report requires us to reconsider all of our work. Reading it is not just an exercise in learning about the strategies of building sustained networks of funders and organizations committed to black men. It requires me to consider the direct relationship between my own work and the success of these strategies. How do I contribute to or stand in the way of these strategies? How do my pursuits of social change—be they environmental action, health access, thriving families, or community development—accelerate the goals for black men or throw up obstacles to them? And how do

my visions of a fair and just society depend on the widespread achievement and participation of black men?

These are not small questions. They have no one-off answers; they require constant attention. And they are by no means limited to a small group of identified funders or community groups. For more black men to achieve and for those achievements to be recognized as the norm that they should be, we need adjacent allies as well as movement leaders. We need positive opportunities and narratives from all sectors, all domains, and all walks of life. We need to make sure we are not omitting opportunities or making accomplishments invisible.

Doing so requires a steady focus on the goal, the people, and the institutions dedicated specifically to black men. We must also be willing to find and to be allies. Over time, if we are successful, we will find those allies among an ever-expanding network of unexpected, untraditional, and emergent partners.

This report offers a challenge that many have already accepted. For those readers to whom the challenge is new, or seemingly ancillary, I would encourage you to look for ways these goals and strategies intersect with your own. What I can offer, through the words of others, is a reminder of the “why” for making connections between our own frames and the one offered by this report. It comes from the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Beloved Community, and it comes from a medieval sage, Hillel, who noted for posterity the simple and powerful connections that bind us—and our pursuits—to the other.

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