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# FOREWORD



## AN URGENT CALL FOR FOUNDATIONS TO WALK THE TALK

**IT'S CLEAR TO EVEN THE MOST CASUAL OBSERVER** that race relations are fast deteriorating in America. We see recurring video images of African-American boys and men killed by rogue police officers, often with no consequences. Peaceful demonstrations by a multiracial coalition proclaiming Black Lives Matter result in a national debate over the coalition's name rather than in serious discussions over police brutality. Similarly, the silent protest against police violence by kneeling National Football League players during the National Anthem to protest police misconduct has been turned into a discussion about patriotism. We see alt-right/white nationalists advising a sitting U.S. president who equivocates in condemning the violence perpetuated by white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

America is uncomfortable talking about race and we are reaching a boiling point. If this situation

is not quickly addressed, the current racial strife has the potential to undermine and irreparably harm our democracy. The question confronting every U.S. foundation is whether to be a bystander to these events, leaving the outcome to chance, or find the moral courage to use their voices and their financial resources to ensure that America's unfulfilled promise of equal opportunity for all becomes a reality. While a handful of foundations have found such courage and their actions are consistent with their words, they only number in the dozens. Tens of thousands of foundations remain silent and uncommitted.

Foundations can no longer espouse mission statements that commit them to pursue a better world as it relates to some particular endeavor and turn deaf, blind, and mute on issues of social injustice that threaten our democracy.

In nearly every area—education, housing, health, employment, income, access to financial capital, or incarceration—we see evidence that black and brown lives are faring significantly worse than those of white Americans. However, the most distressing area of social injustice continues to be police violence against African-American boys and men of color.

As uncomfortable as it may be to read, and for me to write, African Americans have always been canaries in the coal mine when measuring racial progress in America. We simply don't see repeated videos of any other group of unarmed Americans being killed by those whose duty it is to serve and protect. It is irrelevant that these acts aren't committed or condoned by most police. The fact that it happens with such regularity that every parent of an African-American child, regardless of income or education, must give his or her child "the talk" out of fear that a routine police encounter could result in the loss of the child's life is the reason that police shootings of African Americans must be regarded as domestic terrorism. Regrettably,

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such incidents are likely to continue until the legal standard for judging police conduct is changed from whether the police officer felt fear to whether a reasonable person would have been fearful.

The causes for the deterioration of race relations after the two-term tenure of the first African-American president, Barack Obama, are complex. But it is important for foundations to understand those causes as they help close the racial divide. At least part of the tension can be traced to a backlash to President Obama's very presidency. American history is replete with examples of how after taking a step forward toward racial progress, the country takes a half-step or more backwards. But this pattern only partially explains the current racial climate.

When the economy is doing well, racial tensions are often minimized because all boats are rising. When the economy is doing poorly and opportunities are limited, racial tensions are likely to rise. During the Great Recession that began in 2007, 5.4 million or 33 percent of all U.S. manufacturing jobs were eliminated.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, over 10 million Americans lost their homes due to foreclosure.<sup>2</sup> For many Americans, especially non-college-educated, working-class white Americans, these events signaled that their American dream had ended.

In addition, many of the children in the aforementioned households grew up watching their parents' lives upended and believing that their American dream would consist of a gig economy of multiple low-paying jobs without health benefits. One sign of just how disaffected young people are with American democracy is that fewer than 30 percent of U.S. millennials believe it's essential to live in a democracy, compared to 72 percent of those born before World War II. A total of 24 percent born in the 1980s or later believe that democracy is a bad or a very bad way of running a country.<sup>3</sup> Our country is at real risk.

When dreams are taken away, people need something or someone to blame. This explains



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why the false narratives of undeserving African Americans and people of color, or of undocumented immigrants from Mexico unfairly taking jobs they don’t deserve, or of bad trade deals with India, China, or Mexico have gained traction. While other racial and ethnic groups also lost their jobs and homes, they do not assume an innate privilege or entitlement to success that is held by many white Americans due to America’s legacy of institutionalized racism.

Foundations have a critical role to play in three ways.

First, too often foundations are reluctant to say aloud what they profess to believe. They fear being criticized for their values and beliefs at a time when social media provides anyone with a megaphone to critique the actions of others. Foundations have become so accustomed to seeing their role as investors working quietly behind the scenes that they have become uncomfortable with the idea of being activist investors who promote a point of view that will likely be subject to intense criticism. This must change.

Second, the long-term challenge for foundations is how to help all Americans, especially disaffected non-college-educated white Americans, adjust to a global labor market in which there will be more competition for jobs, a cycle that will likely drive American wages downward. This work will only be harder as technological advances—such as artificial intelligence—create immense community benefits, but also adversely impact jobs and exacerbate racial tensions. Moreover, the adoption of these new technologies will happen more quickly than at any time in human history. To help Americans adjust to this future, foundations need to learn how new technological advances will impact our society and work to ensure that they do not further exacerbate already inflamed racial animosity.

Third, foundations must do what they can to document, publicize, convene, and engage in systems-change to address racial inequality and injustice. This is a tall order. But foundations have the ability and the capacity—if they can find the will—to chip away at the underlying structures that prevent America from providing opportunity for all. Community foundations have a special role to play in that unlike private foundations,

they can directly lobby government. The most visible and terrorizing systems that must change are related to policing and criminal justice, but there are many other hidden areas of embedded discrimination and bias.

Let me provide one example. Imagine two teenagers of the same age who differ only in race or gender are tragically killed in a car accident. The actuarial tables that are used to determine the monetary settlement do not value the lives of both teens the same. If one teen was a white male, his family will receive far more than if the teen was a person of color or a female. The reasoning is that the institutional racism and sexism of America is expected to limit the lifetime earnings of people of color and females. Thus, their lives are valued less by actuaries because of a belief that America's bias would limit their earnings. All lives should be valued the same.

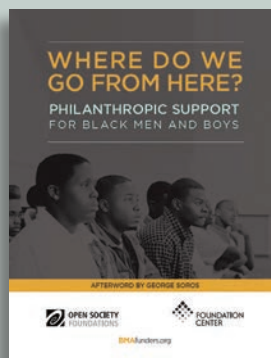
America is at a critical juncture. Foundations must help to make clear that America's promise that all will enjoy equal opportunity is incompatible with those who espouse white nationalism. While all citizens are entitled to the rights of free speech and peaceful assembly, foundations must be unequivocal in their belief in equal opportunity, and in asserting that violent protests—by any group—are unacceptable as a means to advance ideas and fundamentally incompatible with democracy.

**EMMETT D. CARSON, PH.D.**

*FOUNDING CEO*  
SILICON VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

- 1 Patricia Atkins, Pamela Blumenthal, Adrienne Edisis, Alec Friedhoff, Leah Curran, Lisa Lowry, Travis St. Clair, Howard Wial, and Harold Wolman, *Responding to Manufacturing Job Loss: What Can Economic Development Policy Do?*, [brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06\\_manufacturing\\_job\\_loss.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06_manufacturing_job_loss.pdf), June 2011.
- 2 Emily Badger, *How the Housing Crisis Left Us More Racially Segregated*, [washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/08/how-the-housing-crisis-left-us-more-racially-segregated/?utm\\_term=.e738afd2631e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/08/how-the-housing-crisis-left-us-more-racially-segregated/?utm_term=.e738afd2631e), May 8, 2015.
- 3 Rebecca Burgess, *Have Millennials Fallen Out of Love with Democracy?*, [newsweek.com/have-millennials-fallen-out-love-democracy-495080](https://www.newsweek.com/have-millennials-fallen-out-love-democracy-495080), September 2, 2016.

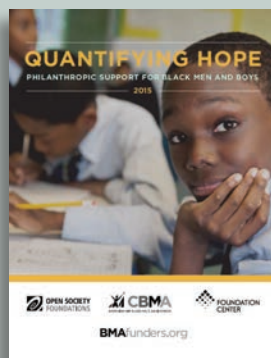
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*Where Do We Go From Here? Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys* (October 2012) provides baseline funding data and documents the wide range of activities supported by foundations.



*Building a Beloved Community: Strengthening the Field of Black Male Achievement* (May 2014) is based on interviews with 50 field leaders and maps the landscape of cross-sector efforts and offers recommendations for advancing this work.



*Quantifying Hope: Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys* (April 2015) documents growth in foundation funding for Black men and boys and highlights local efforts and promising outcomes.

**BMAfunders.org**

lifts up the role of philanthropy in supporting Black men and boys. Launched in March 2013, the site has a broad array of resources, including an interactive map showing who is funding what, where.