

Philanthropy Southeast's

Inspiration

Summer 2024

Where Philanthropy Begins

Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley

LET THE WORLD SEE



WHAT TO EXPECT

This exhibit is recommended for ages 18 and older due to discussions of racially-motivated violence. The sound and light show is an immersive experience that includes loud noises, sounds of gunfire, moving images, and lighting effects.

Inside learn the story of Emmett Till—murdered in 1955 because he was Black—and discover how his mother's brave actions fueled a movement that continues today.

“Emmett’s story is not a pleasant story. It’s not a pretty story. But we need to know the truth.”

—Michelle Padden, Emmett’s mother and her friend



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On the cover: The entrance to Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley: Let the World See, a traveling exhibit presented by the Emmett Till Interpretive Center. (Photo courtesy of the Emmett Till Interpretive Center)

About Philanthropy Southeast

Mission: Philanthropy Southeast strengthens Southern philanthropy, welcoming our members to listen, learn and collaborate on ideas and actions to help build an equitable, prosperous South.

Statement of Purpose: Philanthropy Southeast strives to connect the region's philanthropic leaders with a diverse and inclusive range of information, resources, experts, innovations and best practices while promoting peer-to-peer learning and leadership development. While we may not necessarily endorse the opinions and views of those we work with, we engage with them to promote vibrant and open discussion. We believe it is necessary to have these conversations for the sake of increasing philanthropy's impact throughout the region.

About Inspiration: *Inspiration* is published four times a year by Philanthropy Southeast, for the benefit of its Members. The views expressed in *Inspiration* are not necessarily the views of all Philanthropy Southeast Members. We welcome articles, comments and suggestions – please address all communications to Philanthropy Southeast's Vice President of Strategic Communications, David Miller, at david@philanthropysoutheast.org.

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A Season of Change

By Robert L. Dortch, Jr.

This article is adapted from Adventures in Leadership: A 30 Day Quest to Elevate Your Leadership & Life by Robert L. Dortch, immediate past chair of Philanthropy Southeast's Board of Trustees and co-founder of the Ujima Legacy Fund. The book is available for purchase on Amazon or by visiting jordansydnor.com

As I sat in my tent at 1:30am on the seventh day of my mountain adventure, with a less-than-desirable oxygen level, below-freezing conditions, and three miles away from the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Emmanuel, the crew leader, looked at me and said, "Robert, we have a decision to make. How would you like to proceed?"

At Philanthropy Southeast, we find ourselves in a similar circumstance. We've weathered the storms of Amelia Island and celebrated the success of our 54th Annual Meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. Now, we unexpectedly face the grief and loss of our transformative visionary leader, Janine Lee. Yet, we know she would want us to take the lessons she's left with us and courageously continue to invest in and support our members and partners in creating a more equitable American South for all who call this our home.

Embracing Change in the American South

Just as Philanthropy Southeast is faced with opportunities and change, so is the American South, with its rich history and complex social fabric, which presents unique challenges and opportunities for today's philanthropic leaders. Our neighbors and fellow citizens invite us to be part of the change and innovation adventure that all leaders must prepare for if we expect to summit the challenges before us during these dynamic times.

Philanthropy in the American South operates under distinct conditions shaped by the region's history, culture, and socioeconomic realities. We must confront historical issues that continue to affect educational achievement, voting rights, the wealth gap, social determinants of health, earning potential, and life expectancy. Many of the region's philanthropic visionaries recognize the need for new approaches to address these issues. At the same time, they are often challenged with achieving systemic change while inspiring collaborators and critics alike to reframe our work around wellness, wealth, equity, and justice.

For philanthropic leaders in the American South, this moment represents an opportunity to see the change on the horizon, lead the change occurring, adapt to the impact of the change, and avoid becoming obsolete by being left behind by rapid change.

The Adventures in Leadership Process and Approach

After returning to my home in Richmond, Virginia, from Kilimanjaro, I was remind-

ed of the quote, "Beyond one mountain, there are more mountains." More and more leaders are expressing the challenges that regularly arise, requiring a resource and approach to help support them on their leadership journey as they navigate various societal and organizational mountains. These mountains include adapting to the five-generation workplace, political divides, technological advances – especially the emergence of artificial intelligence, economic inequality, and the weight of history that continues to haunt us in the American South. Change is a constant, yet leaders are often left feeling unequipped and uncertain about how to lead and manage it.

"Adventures in Leadership" is my effort to offer leaders a process and framework that can support their work to lead their organizations by offering insights from a variety of leaders from across the globe, asking relevant questions, and providing opportunities for leaders to continue to develop their leadership muscle while making consistent commitments that will serve as building blocks to face changes and rise to the challenge before us.

"Curiosity requires leaders who are open to ongoing learning, being vulnerable, and embracing mistakes as learning opportunities."

Robert L. Dortch
Author of *Adventures in Leadership: A 30 Day Quest to Elevate Your Leadership & Life*

"Adventures in Leadership" emphasizes the importance of seven elements: contemplation, curiosity, collaboration, consistency, commitment, courage, and compassion. These elements are essential for addressing the region's unique challenges and align seamlessly with Philanthropy Southeast's vision and mission.

Contemplation

Contemplation involves taking the time to reflect deeply on the issues at hand and considering the broader context of

the challenges we face. For philanthropic leaders, this means reflecting on the historical inequities that continue to impact the American South. By understanding the roots of these problems, leaders can develop more thoughtful and informed strategies to address them. Contemplation allows leaders to step back, assess their actions, and ensure that their efforts are aligned with their values and goals.

The long shadow of slavery and Jim Crow laws continues to impact the South. Leaders can use the principles of contemplation and compassion to openly address these historical injustices. By engaging in honest contemplative conversations about the past and its ongoing effects, philanthropic leaders can build trust and create a shared commitment to equity.

Curiosity

While at the 54th Annual Meeting in Montgomery, many of us were able to experience the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, inspired by Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, who embodies curiosity. His relentless pursuit of understanding the complexities of the criminal justice system and its impact on marginalized communities has driven his innovative approaches to legal reform, education, and understanding our collective history.

Curiosity requires leaders who are open to ongoing learning, being vulnerable, and embracing mistakes as learning opportunities. This mindset fosters growth and a culture of continuous improvement and resilience. The most effective leaders acknowledge their imperfections and use setbacks as stepping stones toward greater achievements. By being curious, leaders embrace the vulnerability that comes with stepping into the unknown, which can also help build trust and create an environment where learning thrives. This is particularly important in the South, where historical and systemic issues require leaders to be curious and committed to learning in their efforts to drive change.

Collaboration

As any Philanthropy Southeast member knows, collaboration is essential for maximizing impact. Philanthropic leaders should build partnerships with community organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise. Creating networks of support and trust is critical for addressing complex social issues. Collaborative efforts can amplify the impact of individual organizations and drive systemic change. By working together, philanthropic leaders can pool their knowledge and resource-

es to tackle the root causes of inequity and build more resilient communities.

For example, educational achievement gaps are a significant issue in the South. By applying collaboration principles, leaders can partner with schools, community organizations, and policymakers to develop comprehensive strategies that improve access to quality education.

Consistency

Consistency involves maintaining a steady commitment to the organization's mission and goals, even in the face of challenges and setbacks. For philanthropic leaders, this means staying the course in addressing educational, economic, and health disparities. Consistent actions build trust and credibility within the community and ensure that efforts to create change are sustained over the long term. By being consistent, leaders and their organizations can demonstrate their dedication to making a lasting impact.

Compassion

As philanthropic leaders, we must focus on building genuine relationships with our partners and community members and understanding their needs and perspectives. These initiatives ensure that our efforts are responsive and inclusive.

Compassion involves understanding and empathizing with the experiences and struggles of others. For philanthropic leaders, this means recognizing the human impact of health disparities and economic inequality. By approaching their work with compassion, leaders can build deeper connections with the communities they serve and develop solutions that

truly address their needs. Compassionate leadership fosters an inclusive and supportive environment where all voices are heard and valued.

Courage

Janine often emphasized the importance of courageous leadership in doing this philanthropic work. Courage is required to take bold actions and make difficult decisions. This includes speaking out against injustices, advocating for unpopular but necessary changes, and leading initiatives that may face resistance.

John Lewis, the late civil rights leader and congressman, exemplified courageous leadership throughout his life. He confronted systemic injustices faced by African Americans and used his deep understanding to inform his advocacy and leadership in the fight for civil rights and equity. Philanthropic leaders need courage to challenge the status quo and push for systemic change. By demonstrating courage, leaders can inspire others to join them in the fight for equity and justice, creating a ripple effect that amplifies their impact.

Ensuring all communities have a voice in the democratic process is critical for social progress. Leaders can demonstrate courage today by supporting civic engagement initiatives and encouraging voter registration, education, and participation.

Commitment

Making clear and actionable commitments is crucial for driving progress. Leaders must set specific goals and allocate resources to achieve them. In addressing civic engagement and democracy, making commitments to support voter

registration initiatives, advocacy efforts, and policy changes can lead to significant improvements. Commitments provide a roadmap for action and hold leaders accountable to their promises, ensuring progress toward equity and justice.

Leadership in Southern philanthropy requires a commitment to innovation, diversity, and systemic change. By embracing the principles outlined in "Adventures in Leadership" and drawing inspiration from successful examples, philanthropic leaders can drive impactful change and help the region reach its full potential. As the South continues to evolve, courageous and forward-thinking leadership will be essential for building a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

Embracing the Season of Change

Philanthropic leaders must navigate the unique challenges of the American South with a blend of courage, innovation, and inclusivity. By fostering collaboration, championing equity, and embracing new models of philanthropy, they/we can create lasting change and build stronger, more resilient communities. The journey is not easy, but with dedication and vision, philanthropic leaders in the American South can lead the way in creating a better future for all residents who call the American South home.

In this season of change, we must stand committed to this adventure in leadership by supporting and inspiring philanthropic leaders across the American South and continuing to champion equity, justice, and innovation, paving the way for a more inclusive and dynamic future and this is the enduring legacy left to us by Janine Lee. ■

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