

Black Lives Matters, the Ford Foundation, and the Black Movement Oligarchy

Part Three:

The Ford Foundation and the Black Movement

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Post-WWII an anathematized Ford family listened in horror to calls for their attainder just as inheritance taxes loomed. The Fords retained control of their Ford Motor Company by transferring the bulk of company stock to the Ford Foundation: a genuinely independent entity.

For years Fords dominated the Foundation by dint of having selected the original Trustees. After the initial crew departed, however; and, after the Foundation exchanged its Ford shares for vaults of other blue-chip stock; the Fords' influence waned. A tiff between the Fords and President Bundy over funding for the family's favorite hospital foreshadowed Henry Ford II's 1976 resignation from what had become a titular Chairmanship.

Foundations must disperse 5% of their assets annually. Foundations were supposed to spend themselves out of existence with tangible gifts; not create permanent bureaucracies. Fund managers now consistently hit higher than 5% returns, hence many foundations have become perpetuities acting at odds with original donor intent.

[In 2019 the Ford Foundation declared assets of \\$13 billion and income of \\$800 million.](#) Windfall profits are made selling shares that the Foundation purchased a half-century ago. As a charity, the Foundation pays no capital gains. Most of their holdings are now overseas and managed through their Cayman Island bank. The Foundation enjoys an autonomy unseen in a non-state actor since the religious orders of the Middle Ages.

Ford's 14 Trustees usually serve six-year terms. Vacancies are filled by sitting Trustees. The [current Board](#) has 6 Blacks, 5 Whites, 2 Latinos and 1 Asian. The Foundation's first Black President, Franklin Thomas (r. 1979-1996) plotted Ford's present trajectory and composition.

The Board's tokens are Chuck Robbins (Cisco), Lourdes Lopez (ballet aficionado), Francisco Cigarroa (Board Chairman, and a surgeon with minimal attachment to Ford) and Henry Ford III (the first Ford on Board since 1976). One financial wonk on Board might be a token. The other, Amy Falls, is a titan in her own right and a devoted Black Movement sympathiser.

Trustees Ai-jen Poo, Cecile Richards and [Bryan Stevenson](#) are the field marshals.

Taiwanese-American Ms. Poo rides herd on a collection of societies moiling the grievances of immigrant women of color through her National Domestic Workers Association which receives million dollar dollops from Ford.

Cecile Richards, daughter of Texas Governor Ann Richards, and former long-serving Planned Parenthood boss, is the driving force behind Supermajority – a political action group dedicated to mobilizing two million women for the 2020 election.

Bryan Stevenson may be the richest Black Trustee and, aside from Walker, the most influential figure within the Black Movement Oligarchy. Stevenson Chairs [Equal Justice Institute](#). The son of a Federal

Government diversity enforcement officer, Stevenson joined Southern Center for Human Rights (SCHR) straight out of law school (1985); then fronted their Montgomery operations after 1989. When the 1994 Clinton Anti-Crime Bill cut SCHR's funding, the MacArthur Foundation rescued Stevenson allowing him to rename and sustain the Montgomery office.

Other notable Black Ford Trustees:

[Gabrielle Sulzberger](#) (JD MBA Princeton/Harvard) Chairs Ford's governance and nomination committees. Sulzberger ran Whole Foods Inc for years, and now co-owns a Pasadena-based venture capital firm. Her MasterCard Directorship nets her another \$346,000 a year. She serves on several non-profits; including the anti-sexual harassment powerhouse [Time's Up](#) where Sulzberger sits as Treasurer. She [married New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger](#) in 2014. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art accepted her as a Trustee in 2019.

[Ursula Burns](#) worked for XEROX for 37 years concluding with a decade as CEO/Chair. Burns is currently a Director of Exxon, American Express, Nestle and Uber. She is engaged in several youth-focussed charities and is herself a donor.

Foundation President (and Trustee) [Darren Walker](#) rules at the sufferance of his fellow Black Trustees. In their good graces Walker disburses over \$500 million a year in arts, cultural, and political activism grants.

Walker is a 60-year-old [openly gay](#) Black man who flogs his roots in small-town Texas poverty, and his reliance on government during an extended education, as a modern American Dream. Intriguingly, upon graduating (without distinction) from a Texas law school, Walker got snapped-up by a white-shoe New York firm. A year later he was working, intriguingly, in UBS's capital markets division.

Walker fell to Earth in the mid-1990s finding himself volunteering, then working, for the [Abyssinian Development Corp](#) – a Black housing charity in Harlem. In 2002 he landed a gig at the Rockefeller Foundation. He joined Ford in 2010; becoming President in 2013. He is on the Board of the National Gallery and of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Walker belongs to the Council on Foreign Relations.

Walker's \$1.1 million-a-year salary is not Ford's highest. The Chief Investment Officer makes \$2.6 million and has three subordinates earning \$1.3 million per year. Walker's seven VPs earn between \$500,000 and \$650,000. (Walker catches an additional \$301,667 as a [PepsiCo Director](#).)

Ford promotes: abortion, land conservation, LGBT rights, immigration liberalization, and climate protection.

Ford's annual USA Black Movement budget, broadly defined, hovered around \$125 million going into 2020; or, about half the total philanthropic contribution to this Movement.

For context, in [2015 Walker gave \\$125 million](#) to City of Detroit *creditors* to spare the City's *museum* the embarrassment of having to auction off some of their collection.

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Part of Ford's contribution to the Black Movement comes through their documentary film operations (which may be America's largest). By express design Ford docs spur viewers onto activism.

[Ford's current Form 990](#) lists 78 grants, ranging from \$50,000 to \$2.5 million, to documentary producers. Ford also funds documentary training institutes like Brave New Films which received \$600,000 to "*increase youth involvement in social issues.*" Another \$225,000 went to the Union Docs fellowship program.

Ford docs are must-sees at major film festivals. Ford *funds* the: Detroit Film Festival, Hot Docs Film Festival, Hip Hop Theatre Fest; and has a strong relationship with Sundance. Ford docs have won countless Emmys and Oscars (yet "*Ford Foundation*" is seldom heard in acceptance speeches).

Ford's Just Films subsidiary pioneered the slick, emotive Black-Police-Conflict genre. Sample trailers:

[Whose Streets](#), [The Force](#), [K-Town 1992](#), [Always in Season](#), and [Crime and Punishment](#).

Black Student Unions and Black-led non-profits host screenings of these docs. Discussions and pitches follow each showing. Doc producers tour to attend post-show Q&A sessions; and Ford pays for that too.

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Ford gives as much to "flow-throughs" to groom and mother its Black Movement grantees as it gives to those grantees themselves.

Originally deployed by the environmental movement, "flow-throughs" are registered charities that are used as conduits between philanthropies and upstart groups. Flow-throughs launder money such that philanthropies are shielded from liability for damages arising from the upstarts' "civil disobedience."

Today's flow-throughs micro-manage frontline advocacy networks. Minneapolis-based Borealis Philanthropy, a 25-employee charity, received \$7.7 million from Ford to provide techno-training to Ford's fleet of activist non-profits. Borealis also coaches activists on how to "*strengthen communication skills*" and "*develop consistent narratives.*"

Inside Borealis' clinic we find: [BLM LA](#), [\(Colin Kaepernick's\) Know Your Rights](#), [Afrikan Black Coalition](#), [Assata's Daughters](#), [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#), [Black Futures Lab](#), [Organization for Black Struggle](#), and [Black Workers for Justice](#) et al.

Neo Philanthropy received \$10 million from Ford for similar activist mentoring. The 50-employee, Bethesda-headquartered, Burness Communications is using \$7.1 million of Ford money to provide digital communications training to Ford-funded non-profits. Ford gave the octopine Tides Foundation \$6.9 million to nurture prison reform advocacy. People's Action (\$1.85 million in Ford grants) is an activist training institute; as is Leadership Conference Education Fund (\$4.6 million). New America got \$1.75 million to provide "*cross-sectional leadership training.*"

Ford's "BUILD" plan envisions an armada of social justice orgs, no longer sustained by responses to short-term individual non-profit solicitations, but rather through long-term block grants entrusted to flow-throughs mandated to do: "*much more extensive due diligence at the front end.*"

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Ford spends millions analysing and courting other foundations. Into this expense category falls their funding of the [Association of Black Foundation Executives'](#) annual confab. ABFE is a 50-year-old venue for Black philanthropy wonks. ABFE's 16 all-Black Directors all support the Black Movement.

ABFE Chair [Karen McNiel-Miller](#), is CEO of Colorado Health Foundation (assets \$2.6 billion, annual grants: \$80 million). McNiel-Miller's "Health Equity" team cooperates with fellow ABFE Board member, [Lauren Casteel](#)'s Colorado Women's Foundation.

ABFE Director [James Head](#) is CEO of Oakland's East Bay Community Foundation (ECBF, assets: \$251 million; annual grants: \$50 million). Head has been in the philanthropic/non-profit biz for 35 years; as has his wife. ECBF pays Head \$321,000 a year.

Head's failure to shunt substantial coin to Black Movement groups indicates limited discretion. Nevertheless, ECBF's 2018 grants included: [Prison Radio Project](#) (\$10,000), [Freedom Inc.](#) (\$12,500), [Blackout Collective](#) (\$7,500), [Brothers on the Rise](#) (\$20,000), [Oakland Rising/Movement Strategy Centre](#) (\$70,000), [Ryse Center](#) (\$103,050), [Time for Change](#) (\$70,000), [Dignity and Power Now](#) (\$15,000), and [Black Organizing Project](#) (\$25,000).

Eight ABFE Directors are "VPs" or "Managing Directors" from foundations; notably: [Cory S. Anderson](#) (Winthrop Rockefeller), [Kenneth Jones](#) (MacArthur) [Wendy Lewis Jackson](#) (Kresge) and [Antoinette Malveaux](#) (Casey).

Enlivening ABFE get-togethers are Directors [Stephanie Bell-Rose](#) whose [TIAA](#) employs five to study academic trends; and [Melissa Deshields](#) whose 15-employee [Frontline Solutions](#) coaches activists and advises philanthropies.

Ford, Casey et al also participate in [Race and Equity in Philanthropy](#), a project of [Marga Inc.](#) – a 12-employee, 800-member networking enterprise piloted by Movement Oligarch, [David Maurrasse](#). Walker recently shot Maurrasse another \$100,000.

Ford and Kellogg co-fund Borealis' [Racial Equity in Philanthropy Fund](#) which last year paid \$1.5 million to 17 non-profits to: *"educate and equip funders to integrate racial equity and practises into their grantmaking."*

Shaming and badgering foundations works. In addition to the 9 abovementioned, the following 14 foundations funded the Black Movement before the Floyd riots (more have joined since):

California Endowment, Edward Hazen Foundation, Seattle Foundation, California Wellness Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, NoVo Foundation, Woods Fund Chicago, Jacob Langeloth, Lumina, James Irvine, Ben and Jerry, Rockefeller, Nathan Cummings, and Open Society.