



FREEDOM FUNDERS

PHILANTHROPY & THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

1955–1965



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The year 2014 marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most far-reaching emancipatory reforms of American history: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (CRA). In the coming days, the heroes of the civil rights movement will be justly celebrated and its history discussed and debated. This paper examines a mostly overlooked dimension of the civil rights struggle: the handful of foundations that provided modest but useful financial support to the movement’s leadership organizations. Their courageous and ingenious grantmaking offers urgent lessons for a philanthropic sector that today is witnessing a renewed assault on American democracy and constitutional rights.

To appreciate the wisdom and determination of these philanthropies requires a brief review of the history of the civil rights movement from 1955–1965, a review that will show that, despite the movement’s momentum, reform

seemed very unlikely for almost the entire period this paper examines.

I. **The Need for Sweeping Federal Civil Rights Legislation**

Severe, endemic and intractable white racism has characterized American society from its origins and by the 1950s, it still pervaded almost all aspects of American life. Very few states or localities outside the South had passed meaningful laws to outlaw segregation of public facilities and to safeguard voting rights for people of color. In the South, racism was much worse, where the Jim Crow regime was nothing less than a white supremacist reign of terror.

Executive orders by Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower had, in purely formal terms, desegregated the military and a few other aspects of the federal government. How-

ever, employment in these sectors constituted a small sliver of American life. These executive orders resulted from the contradictions made evident by the civil rights protest among African American military servicemen and women and later veterans. These orders and their progeny set the basis for later legislation.

By the mid-1950s, federal court decisions had set important precedents but had not substantially secured equality under law for racial and ethnic minorities. The Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ordering public school districts to end legally mandated segregation was historic and important. But the federal government's lax enforcement of the court's mandate meant that southern public schools were complying at a rate of only 1 percent per year in the decade following *Brown* – i.e., it would have taken a century to end legal school segregation in the South.¹ Before 1960, there were few federal court decisions limiting racial segregation or strengthening voting rights,² and federal enforcement of these few court decisions was lax.

Clearly, then, only sweeping federal civil rights legislation with strong enforcement provisions could ensure equality under law for Americans of color. But as of the 1959, there was no indication that federal lawmakers would enact such legislation. During prior decades, civil rights legislation had either died in Congress, usually without a vote in Senate committees controlled by powerful Dixiecrat chairmen, or were passed with killer amendments rendering them largely inoperative, such as the 1957 Civil Rights Act.³ It was understood that these same Dixiecrats could filibuster to death any serious bill that might ever reach the Senate floor in the future.⁴

The hopes of reformers rose briefly with the 1960 election as president of John F. Kennedy, who espoused a strong civil rights platform on the campaign trail. Soon after his inauguration, however, Kennedy failed to follow through on those promises, making it clear he would pro-

pose no legislation and instead merely enforce federal court orders.⁵

II. Prerequisite for Federal Legislation: A Powerful, Mass Civil Rights Movement

Only a massive, exogenous force could oblige President Kennedy to champion civil rights and also break down the Senate barrier to reform. That force was the heroic phase of the civil rights movement, which began with the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 and achieved overpowering momentum after 1960. A mountain of historiography on this movement, notably the magisterial accounts by David Garrow and Taylor Branch, agree that leadership of the movement was provided mostly by four non-profit advocacy organizations that together achieved a sometimes tense yet effective division of labor:

- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organized and worked through the minority of southern Black ministers willing to participate personally in the movement and recruit their own parishioners to do so. SCLC also staffed King's hectic, seven-day-a-week work and travel schedule as the movement's de facto public leader and spokesman.
- The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), composed mostly of southern, Black college students and recent graduates, provided most of the tactical leadership for local sit-ins, Freedom Rides and voter registration drives, and also played an important leadership role in other demonstrations and marches.
- The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was a biracial group that pioneered the Freedom Rides and had enough membership outside the South to recruit helpful battalions of Black and white northern college students to provide

useful ancillary help on the front lines in Dixie.

- The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the oldest of the civil rights groups, was a mass membership organization organized into local chapters. It rarely activated this mass base for direct political action, concentrating instead on civil rights litigation and won several important victories in federal courts, notably *Brown v. Board of Education*. After 1960, as the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF), under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall, broke away to form a separate organization, the NAACP focused ever less on litigation and was drawn ever more into numerous, spontaneous and local grassroots protests spreading like wildfire across the South, where its local chapters often played a useful role. As prospects for federal legislation grew brighter in 1963, the NAACP also assumed the lead role as the movement's day-to-day lobbyist in Washington, D.C.

What united these diverse organizations was Black leadership, an ironclad commitment to nonviolent tactics and, after 1960, the goal of inducing the federal government to enact civil rights legislation.

The Nation of Islam also sought to empower African Americans, but not through the civil rights movement. Nominally led by Elijah Muhammad, the group's most famous and charismatic spokesman was Malcolm X (also known as El Hajj Malik Shabazz). The Nation of Islam preached that whites were inferior "devils" and advocated that African Americans should live separately from them. This was because the organization believed that African Americans could better prepare for a return to Africa, the only place where they could live free of American and European aggression, if they maintained complete separation from whites. African American nationalist self-determination has

always co-existed in tandem with civil rights advocacy seeking racial integration and inclusion. Eagerly covered by the national media, Malcolm X derided King and other civil rights leaders as "chumps," the movement's goal of racial integration as delusional and nonviolent tactics as cowardice. The Nation of Islam grew rapidly during these years and Malcolm X was a major public figure. His incendiary pronouncements almost certainly had the unintended effect of advancing the civil rights movement by making it look comparatively moderate and "reasonable" in the eyes of white Americans. In 1964, Malcolm had a change of heart; he left the Nation of Islam, adopted a more mainstream interpretation of Islam, forswore racism, but continued to reject integration in favor of Black nationalism. Malcolm X's oratory and insight elevated the concerns of urban Blacks confronting structural inequality and poverty. Malcolm X also connected the Black struggle within the United States to national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and South America. He was assassinated in 1965 by gunmen associated with the Nation of Islam.⁶ Other Black power movements, such as the Black Panthers, came to prominence later in the 1960s, after the period this paper examines.

To be clear, much of the civil rights movement's impact came not from the four leadership organizations listed above but from hundreds of spontaneous, local protests, often spearheaded by students, such as the early lunch counter sit-ins. And some of the leadership of these grassroots actions was provided by local Black elites independent of the civil rights organizations. As hundreds of these actions spread across the South after 1960, they certainly got the attention of federal lawmakers. But without at least some guidance by the leadership organizations, they came nowhere close to generating enough pressure on federal lawmakers to oblige them to legislate a systemic solution (nor did these protests even make such a demand). In short, the movement's effectiveness flowed from the felicitous collaboration of these thousands of

volunteers quickly trained and loosely led by the nonprofit organizations.

The movement, which had languished after the last of the bus boycotts in 1957, came back to life in 1960 and gained ever more momentum thereafter for two reasons. First, in early 1960, southern, Black college students invented a new and powerful tactic: mass civil disobedience designed to provoke white violence and police arrest. Hundreds of local, nonviolent sit-ins, Freedom Rides, pickets and demonstrations across the South landed thousands of demonstrators in jail. These new tactics represented a much more confrontational approach to Jim Crow than the bus boycotts had. The international media eagerly covered these dramatic protests, which put the movement back in the headlines and transfixed a global audience with shocking images of nonviolent, respectably dressed college students being harassed and beaten by white mobs and police. But the protests were uncoordinated and lacked a single demand that might induce federal lawmakers to solve the problem through legislation.

Second, King – who had had no prior political experience when the Montgomery bus boycotters asked him to coordinate their effort – rapidly matured as a leader. Learning from setbacks in the period 1957–1961, he ceased futile negotiations with intransigent southern officials over the details of Jim Crow and instead demanded that federal lawmakers abolish it entirely. After 1962, he was determined to choose for himself the time and place of demonstrations, which he alone would lead, confident that his national fame and charisma would attract the media, induce the other groups to work

with him once the protest became a big media story and secure the partnership of local Black ministers who could supply thousands of volunteers from the pews and meeting space in the sanctuaries. This new approach succeeded brilliantly in the Birmingham campaign of early 1963, where King also deployed a new wonder weapon: the intentional inclusion of school-aged children (not just college students) in the nonviolent marches confronting Sheriff Bull

Connor’s police. The children were attacked by police dogs and pummeled by water cannons, all witnessed by millions of horrified TV viewers worldwide (including President Kennedy himself, who said privately that the images made him “sick”).⁷ This new approach produced more victories for the movement in 1964 and 1965, notably in Selma and the March to Montgomery.⁸

Birmingham, the firebombing of Black churches, the murder of little Black girls, the assassination of the NAACP’s Medgar Evers in Mississippi – all these

events in the first half of 1963 outraged public opinion outside the South. Kennedy was hearing from more and more of his political allies that he needed to “do something about civil rights.”⁹ On trips abroad, he and senior American officials almost always faced hostile questions from foreign journalists about the United States’ hypocrisy of claiming to lead the free world against communism while at home denying civil rights to millions of American citizens.¹⁰ The pressure on President Kennedy was evident in his private response to the Evers assassination: “Christ, you know, it’s like they shoot this guy in Mississippi ... I mean, it’s just everything. I mean, this has become everything.”¹¹

The movement’s effectiveness flowed from the felicitous collaboration of these thousands of volunteers quickly trained and loosely led by the non-profit organizations.

Finally, on June 11, the civil rights movement broke President Kennedy's resistance to legislation. That morning, he told his startled aides that he would submit sweeping civil rights legislation to ban segregation in public facilities and announce it that evening in a live, national TV and radio broadcast.¹²

Tragically, Kennedy never lived to attempt to move his bill through Congress. But his successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson – had come to the conclusion that the civil rights movement was too strong to oppose. He thus embraced it and shortly after taking the oath of office began planning with King and other civil rights leaders how to advance the Kennedy bill. In his first speech to Congress, he announced the legislation was his top priority.¹³ The “Master of the Senate” personally and obsessively oversaw the lobbying effort, coordinating hand-in-glove with civil rights leaders to generate outside pressure on persuadable lawmakers. They succeeded in enacting the historic legislation in August 1964 – only a few days before the Republican Party convention nominated right-wing insurgent Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona, a fierce opponent of the bill.¹⁴ President Johnson was rewarded handsomely for supporting civil rights, trouncing Goldwater in the biggest landslide of the 20th century.

One year later, passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) followed this same basic script, except the legislation had behind it the added force of Johnson's landslide victory plus the historic March to Montgomery, which showed once again the incontrovertible need for the federal government to safeguard non-majority voting rights.¹⁵

III. Foundation Support for the Civil Rights Movement

The preceding review shows that securing equality under law for African Americans (and in particular vanquishing Jim Crow in the South) seemed improbable until Kennedy's address

announcing his intention to support a civil rights act in June 1963. In the preceding 10 years, meaningful federal court decisions were rare and enforcement was sporadic at best. All previous civil rights legislative efforts had failed. Thus, anybody serious about eradicating the most obvious evil afflicting mid-20th century America had to face the unpleasant reality that – like victories earlier in that century for female suffrage and the right to unionize – securing civil rights for communities of color would be a multifaceted affair of massive street protests strong enough to show reluctant federal lawmakers that their own reelections depended on enacting sweeping legislation. The nonviolent protests that spread across the South after 1960 did just that by generating newsworthy controversy and exacerbating white supremacist violence.

“Long shot,” “street protests,” “violence,” “legislation,” “elections” – too many foundation executives, more concerned about avoiding controversy than achieving mission, shied away from these words. A foundation could fund such a movement and still clearly comply with IRS law, but too many executives in philanthropy then (and now) suffered from the misconception that injustice can be overcome entirely by private charitable service provision and without grassroots pressure or capacity investments in grassroots institutions.

It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of the 12,000 foundations operating in mid-20th century America¹⁶ ignored our society's most obvious evil, even though many of them had mission statements pledging to help the needy. A very small number intentionally targeted their philanthropy to Americans of color. However, the vast majority of those dollars went not to organizations seeking civil rights reform, but instead to groups seeking to ameliorate some of racism's pernicious effects, for example by promoting Black educational opportunity and economic self-help.¹⁷

Philanthropy had an opportunity to build on its history of supporting racial equity and justice. In 1938, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching provided substantial funds for a study of race relations in the United States. The study was commissioned to Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish Nobel-laureate economist and was published in 1942. It played a pivotal role in establishing the groundwork for the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* by identifying the problems of racial inequity as structured by white privilege to keep African Americans in disadvantaged positions and denying them the opportunities needed to achieve the American dream. The foundation's work built on its founder Andrew Carnegie's legacy of providing funds to African American organizations, and his close alignment with the Hampton Institute and the Tuskegee Institute that worked to empower Blacks. The Carnegie Corporation made grants of more than \$2.5 million from the time it was established in 1911 until 1938.¹⁸

The following section profiles four foundations that made modest but helpful investments in ways that benefitted the civil rights organizations examined above in the years between 1955–1965. A handful of other philanthropies, such as the Fund for the Republic and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, also made helpful investments in the movement.¹⁹ It is more than likely that other foundations provided important funding to build the movement that led to passage of the CRA. But the four foundations reviewed below were clearly among the most important and accounted for a substantial portion of the foundation dollars helpful to the frontline groups listed above during the time period that this paper covers. What follows is an examination of each foundation, followed by a review of the historic project they funded together and that for most of them constituted their single biggest investment in the civil rights movement: the Voter Education Project (VEP).

The New World Foundation

The New World Foundation (NWF) was created in Chicago in 1954 with a \$7 million endowment by Anita McCormick Blaine, the elderly heiress of a big fortune whose forebears had founded the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company.²⁰ Ms. McCormick died the same year she endowed the foundation, but she put her stamp on the institution very strongly.

“When Anita chartered the New World Foundation ... she was starkly aware of the enormous societal injustices of the time – racial segregation, voter disenfranchisement, unsafe working conditions resulting from the industrial revolution, disease, educational disparity, the languishment of dissenters under the oppressive shadows of McCarthyism and the overall inequitable experience of those Americans who were most flagrantly and persistently denied full participation in society. ... Under Anita's pioneer leadership, the New World Foundation became one of the few foundations then willing to support beleaguered southern efforts to further civil rights and desegregation.”²¹

After her death, her sole heir and granddaughter, Anne Blaine Harrison, took charge of NWF and stuck to Anita's goals, as did executive director Vernon Eagle, who served from 1957–1974.²² At a later date, NWF moved its offices to New York City.

Based on the description of its “Purpose and Activities” in the 1960 *Foundation Directory*, NWF set as its goal “promoting mutual understanding among persons of different racial, cultural and national backgrounds as a means toward the elimination of intergroup and international tensions and conflicts.”²³

From its inception, NWF funded civil rights advocacy organizations, notably the LDF's civil rights litigation. NWF also helped start LDF's

soon-to-be-famous internship program, which supplied legal firepower to a movement constantly battling southern officials in court, especially to free jailed comrades. The internship program helped launch the careers of a number of distinguished civil rights lawyers, many of them persons of color, such as Marian Wright and Julius Chambers.²⁴ NWF also funded the useful work of the Southern Regional Commission (SRC), one of the few multiracial institutions in the South. SRC documented the abuses of Jim Crow and provided leadership training for movement activists, among other activities.²⁵

NWF funded conferences in the South that were vital gatherings for the frontline organizations, especially SNCC, to compare notes and coordinate strategy.²⁶

Since the 1960s, NWF has embraced the civil rights era as a model for how progressive social change can happen. In the 1970s, it funded watchdog groups, training centers and policy research. It also provided seed funding for the Children's Defense Fund. In the 1980s, it became one of the first foundations to add to its board of directors leading activists in the communities where NWF funded. The foundation also was one of the first U.S. foundations to shift its grantmaking toward multi-year and general support grants – philanthropic strategies that research finds to be most effective.²⁷ In 1994, the New World Foundation leveraged the resources of its endowment by converting to a grantmaking public charity. Today, NWF continues to fund grassroots organizations in underserved communities working to improve public schools, safeguard voting rights, foster economic fairness and protect the environment. Recent grantees include Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, among others.²⁸

The Field Foundation

The Field Foundation was established in Chicago in 1940 by Marshall Field III, publisher of the

Chicago *Sun-Times* and grandson of the founder of the Marshall Field & Company department store. Until his death in 1956, the foundation invested mostly in child welfare, but also some in civil rights, especially litigation.²⁹ Field was one of the few foundations to fund LDF in the 1950s. As LDF's then-deputy director Jack Greenberg recalls, "[A] big contribution was \$100, and \$1,000 was a tremendous gift. The typical giver was ... 'a New England abolitionist type.' A few smaller foundations like Field and New York and, soon, Norman contributed as early as the 1950s. These were relatively small family foundations that typically made grants not much larger than \$5,000 or \$10,000 in those days."³⁰ Greenberg recounts that LDF was especially cash-strapped as it litigated the historic *Brown* case and that Field Foundation came through with a \$15,000 grant (Marshall Field III himself donated another \$50,000 of his personal money). Thereafter, throughout the 1950s, Field gave about \$15,000 per year, making it LDF's largest foundation supporter in that decade and one of its biggest single donors.³¹ In 1962, a Field grant of \$25,000 helped start LDF's internship program described above.³²

After the death of Marshall Field III, his widow, Ruth, became the guiding force on the board of trustees and significantly increased its focus on civil rights, especially leadership training.³³ The *Foundation Directory* of 1960 described the Field Foundation's "Purpose and Activities" as: "Incorporated for broad charitable purposes, its major current interests are child welfare and intercultural and interracial relations."³⁴ By the late 1950s, the foundation had become a major supporter of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, which was started in the 1930s with a focus on training labor organizers in the South, and for decades thereafter, Highlander, along with SRC, were the region's only interracial leadership training centers. In 1953, Highlander began to focus more on civil rights and over the next 15 years trained thousands of movement activists including, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer and John Lewis. The Field Foundation was perhaps the biggest single funder of High-

lander during this period.³⁵ Lewis, one of the original Freedom Riders, SNCC director and an influential member of Congress for almost 30 years, attests to the effectiveness of Highlander, where his training in 1958 as a college sophomore taught him skills, widened his contacts and deepened his resolve to go into the movement. "I left Highlander on fire," he recounted.³⁶ In many ways, SNCC was an outgrowth of Highlander in that most of SNCC's founders trained there and SNCC thereafter frequently used Highlander as place for conferences and staff retreats.

By 1960, Field's endowment had grown to a considerable \$33 million.³⁷ Field used its burgeoning wealth to increase investments in the civil rights movement. When Tennessee authorities closed Highlander in 1961 on trumped-up charges, the Field Foundation gave Highlander a special grant of \$40,000 to move to new facilities.³⁸

The new facilities would not permit Highlander to continue one of its major initiatives, the Citizenship Education Program (CEP), because Highlander was under attack. In an effort not to allow the program to perish, and because of concerns about its own tax exempt status, Field helped fund transfer of the program's administration to the American Missionary Association of the Congregational Church³⁹, most of which's chapters eventually became part of the United Church of Christ (UCC). CEP taught literacy to African American community leaders from across the South so they could pass Jim Crow hurdles to voting, but focused equally on leadership training in nonviolent organizing. A young UCC minister named Andrew Young oversaw the project, but his able deputy Septima Clark appears to have managed the program on a daily basis, which freed Young to simultaneously work as one of King's key lieuten-

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ants at SCLC. Years later, Young would serve as the United States' U.N. ambassador and then mayor of Atlanta. CEP worked closely with SCLC and graduated a disproportionate number of the Black ministers who formed the backbone of SCLC's power in the South. Decades later, Young recalled of the program, "We trained more than 6,000 people from 11 states to run classes and learn the tactics of nonviolent action, and they became the heroes of the civil rights movement."⁴⁰ Leslie Dunbar, who as head of SRC, worked closely with all the move-

ment's leadership organizations, agrees that CEP was very effective. Dunbar estimates the Field Foundation invested up to \$140,000 per year into the program during the early 1960s.⁴¹ When Dunbar became the executive director of the Field Foundation in 1965, he increased those investments and worked with UCC to transfer administrative control of CEP to SCLC, where the program became a major source of King's budget during the final two years of his life.⁴²

Perhaps the simplest proof of the Field Foundation's positive impact on the civil rights movement was the decision of movement hero John Lewis to work there in 1966 as associate director, the first job he took after leading SNCC.⁴³

In 1988, the Field Foundation, by design, spent down the last of its funds and closed its doors.

The Stern Family Fund

The Stern Family Fund (SFF) was a family foundation based in New Orleans that operated from 1936–1986. The Stern family of New Orleans was wealthy, but most of the foundation's endowment came from the Rosenwalds of Chicago. Julius Rosenwald was a part owner of Sears, Roebuck and Company and heavily funded Black colleges and schools through the

Rosenwald Fund under de jure segregation. Julius' daughter, Edith, married Edgar Stern in the 1930s and brought with her to New Orleans the bulk of the money that SFF would subsequently dispense. As the family patriarch, Edgar controlled the fund. He was relatively liberal by southern standards in that he spent much of his philanthropy on charity for African Americans. But as a son of the South (and indeed president of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange), he basically supported segregation, so the fund made no civil rights investments during his lifetime.⁴⁴

Edith was much more progressive than her husband. She was a public leader in New Orleans for cleaner government (through activism in the League of Women Voters), integration of public schools and voting rights for minorities, and was an activist in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party both locally and nationally. Over the years, she hosted Eleanor Roosevelt, Sen. Adlai Stevenson and Sen. John F. Kennedy. Her activism flowed from a passionate belief in democracy – that it can work only when all citizens may fully participate and especially vote. She persisted in her outspoken support for civil rights despite hate mail to the family's home.⁴⁵

When Edgar Sr. died in 1959, Edith and her children changed the direction of the fund by investing in the civil rights work Edith had publicly supported for many years.⁴⁶ They hired a young staffer from the Ford Foundation, David Hunter, as SFF's executive director. According to Hunter, Edith's ideals guided the foundation thereafter: "Although the direct objects of its philanthropy have changed with changing times, it has, from the beginning, been concerned with fostering democracy, helping to improve the life of people in the lower reaches of our society."⁴⁷

The *Foundation Directory* summarized SFF's "Purpose and Activities" thus: "Grants have supported city and regional planning and public administration, including studies of voting records, nominating procedures and money in politics; the fine arts; higher education; and

community and other welfare funds."⁴⁸ This mission statement aligned with one of SFF's biggest investment in the civil rights movement: the Voter Education Project (VEP), examined below.

The fund practiced a kind of philanthropy that would be recognized today as best practice. In terms of process, SFF performed significant due diligence before dispensing a grant. Explains David Stern, Edith's grandson, on the foundation's tradition of face-to-face interviews with applicants:

"Unlike many foundations, the Stern Fund had grant applicants attend the meetings and make presentations to the entire board. There was lots of give and take, with board members asking tough questions, such as, 'The problem you describe is enormous and we make relatively modest grants. What difference will our grant make? Explain why our grant would not just be a pea under 127 mattresses?' Discussions among multiple generations and with multiple grant applicants brought forth new approaches for young philanthropists to gain a deeper understanding of the issues their funding supported."⁴⁹

In terms of grantmaking strategy, SFF's philanthropy was exemplary in that it focused on high impact, systemic solutions to empower marginalized communities and refrained from micro-managing grantees.⁵⁰ The Sterns also used their considerable social clout in New Orleans to promote civil rights locally, working to persuade the city's white elites that integration lay in the city's own economic self-interest.⁵¹ The Sterns paid a price for their idealism, especially for promoting school desegregation in New Orleans; they faced social pressure and sometimes ostracism from other city patricians and even received anonymous threats of violence. "We couldn't let our kids out of the house," recalled Edgar Stern Jr. "We had to have our phone taken out."⁵²

The fund was a spend-down foundation, a strategy it inherited from Julius Rosenwald's philosophy of giving, and closed its doors in 1986.⁵³

The Taconic Foundation

Stephen Currier and Audrey Bruce, granddaughter of Andrew W. Mellon, met while undergraduate students at Harvard and Radcliffe, respectively, and married in 1955 during her senior year. Audrey was one of wealthiest women in America, with a fortune estimated at \$700 million, and Stephen had inherited significant wealth in his own right. After graduation, they decided to donate, while living, the bulk of their vast wealth to philanthropic causes, especially to promote civil rights. Stephen made most of the grantmaking decisions and Audrey mostly concentrated on raising their three children. They personally fundraised from their wealthy friends, and also made grants through the Taconic Foundation, which they created in 1958 with an endowment of \$7 million.⁵⁴ The couple's decision to use Audrey's inheritance to fund civil rights caused tension with her conservative parents.⁵⁵

The 1960 *Foundation Directory* describes Taconic's "Purpose and Activities" as: "Grants for charitable, educational, scientific and religious purposes; to conduct studies concerning the above matters and to push or distribute on a nonprofit basis the results of such studies to tax-exempt organizations and to the general public. Present grants emphasize child welfare, mental health and intergroup relations."⁵⁶ Taconic's mission statement explains its pioneering status in policies to promote the welfare of poor children during the same years as it funded civil rights work, notably a program in Harlem that became precursor for Head Start.⁵⁷ As for civil rights, Taconic was the most important philanthropic partner in VEP, a project that fit Taconic's emphasis on "studies concerning ... intergroup relations."

John Lewis describes Stephen Currier as the man "who had steered so much money toward the movement through the Taconic Foundation."⁵⁸ In 1961, Taconic pledged to LDF one of the biggest grants it had ever received: \$75,000 to be paid over three years – a grant exemplary not only for its size but also for the fact it was multi-year and general operating support.⁵⁹ Currier also solicited other foundations to donate to civil rights organizations and succeeded in raising about \$200,000 this way.⁶⁰ But Taconic's main contribution to the movement was the personal leadership role Currier played in coordinating VEP, examined below.

With the exception of LDF, none of the other most important civil rights groups were (501)(c)(3) (hereafter c3) nonprofit organizations and thus they relied mostly on non-c3 funding. For this reason, Currier also raised significant non-c3 dollars for SCLC, SNCC, NAACP, CORE and the National Urban League (even though the latter organization did not engage in civil rights advocacy). As a first step, Currier convened a meeting in June 1963 of donors and organizations at the Taconic Foundation's New York office, at which he recommended formation of a Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL) to raise and apportion big non-c3 contributions among the organizations. "No one dissented from his plan," reports Garrow. "It was all but certain to provide each of the organizations with funds they otherwise would not receive."⁶¹ Thereafter, Currier organized regular fundraising breakfasts at the Carlyle Hotel. Greenberg, by this time the executive director of LDF, underlined the importance of these gatherings:

"In mid-1963, when an assassin murdered Medgar Evers in Jackson and bombs went off in Birmingham, Stephen [Currier] held a fundraising breakfast for the principal civil rights organizations at the Carlyle, one of New York's most elegant hotels, inviting people to whom we would not otherwise have had access. The event was at-

tended by wealthy people we had never seen before, and others who represented corporations and foundations; the goal was to raise \$1.5 million. Nothing of this sort ever had come out of the 'establishment.' Heads of civil rights organizations took turns at the podium and explained the situation of Black people to a group who, until then, had been largely oblivious to the problems ... the breakfasts introduced us to new audiences and raised the level of giving."⁶²

Pledges at the breakfast and soon thereafter amounted to \$565,000.⁶³ During the next two years, it seems that CUCRL raised another \$1 million or so (for a cumulative total of about \$12 million in current dollars).⁶⁴ After each breakfast, the organizations divvied up the morning's take, which unavoidably caused tensions, as John Lewis of SNCC relates:

"A series of 'civil rights breakfasts' were set up by a man named Stephen Currier, who was president of the Taconic Foundation. Currier was married to a member of the Mellon family, he was very wealthy and he was very enthusiastic about the cause of civil rights. [James] Forman [of SNCC] and I went to the first of these breakfasts. Currier had raised \$800,000[,] which was pledged to all our organizations collectively under the banner title of the Council on United Civil Rights Leadership. A formula was worked out, mainly by Roy Wilkins [executive secretary of the NAACP] that determined each group's share of the money based on its existing budget. This, of course, guaranteed that the groups that already had money – groups like Wilkins' NAACP – got the biggest chunks. As for us, well, we were at the bottom of the barrel. We were considered the kids, the upstarts, and we were given peanuts compared with what the others received. Every other

group there, from the Urban league to the SCLC, wound up with at least \$100,000. We on the other hand, received \$15,000. Then again there was always a current of distrust about money in SNCC. Along with an understanding that we needed it, there was always a certain concern about strings that might be attached, about control over ourselves versus control by others. If it ever came to a choice between money or our independence there was no question which we would choose."⁶⁵

To his credit, Currier did not impose allocations but respectfully let the groups work them out among themselves. Lewis terms the money "significant," admits SNCC needed it, and states that the strings SNCC feared might be attached to it were in fact nonexistent. In short, the philanthropy was certainly helpful.

After passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, funds began to dry up and CUCRL disbanded in 1966.⁶⁶ Normally, an unincorporated coalition that lasts only three years and raises about \$1.6 million would not attract much historical attention. But some of that money unquestionably represented funds that would not otherwise have gone to the civil rights movement and that \$1.6 million (\$12 million in today's dollars) helped the cash-strapped leadership organizations in the decisive years of the struggle.

Tragically, Audrey and Stephen Currier died in a plane crash in the Caribbean in 1967.⁶⁷ Zunz writes, "In their short lives, they had shown how philanthropists could change the American political landscape."⁶⁸

Most of Taconic's grantmaking was funded not by the endowment but by annual contributions from the Curriers into the foundation. Consequently, following the Curriers' death in 1967, Taconic was forced to decrease its grantmaking by roughly 75 percent.⁶⁹ With a shrunken budget, Taconic continued to fund some na-

tional organizations but narrowed its focus to mostly community development in disadvantaged neighborhoods in New York City. By design, the foundation spent the last of its endowment in 2012.⁷⁰ One of its final grants funded “Taconic Fellowships” at various New York and national organizations to promote community development⁷¹ and social justice.⁷²

As noted earlier, it is likely that there were many other grantmaking institutions that provided important funding for the Civil Rights Movement. However in researching the time period examined in this writing, these four grantmakers made significant contributions that were documentable. Many foundations have internal documents that were inaccessible. The summary of the Norman Foundation, a family foundation that provided much-needed funding to the Civil Rights Movement, that follows was one of the few examples found from documents that are not publically available.

The Norman Foundation provided support for civil rights as early as 1935. Groups that received funding included the NAACP, the Urban League and the ACLU. The foundation’s small grants provided crucial monies to the Movement in its formative stages. It also continued funding the NAACP at a higher level over the next 50 years and provided the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) with a \$35,000 loan fund administered by the organization in 1961. In all, the foundation made over \$100,000 in grants to CORE. The Norman Foundation also provided critical funding to SNCC, the SRC and the Voter Education Project (VEP – see below). Southern Echo, one of the most prominent civil rights institutions in the South, was founded in part by funding from this grantmaker. The foundation continues to build on its tradition of supporting equity and justice and supporting community organizing. It’s vision is perhaps best summarized in its public guidelines: “We support efforts that strengthen the ability of communities to determine their own economic, environ-

mental and social well-being, and that help control those forces that affect their lives.”

The Voter Education Project (VEP)

These four foundations were the major backers of a very important, collaborative initiative of

It is likely that there were many other grantmaking institutions that provided important funding for the Civil Rights Movement.

the civil rights movement called the Voter Education Project (VEP). As noted above, when Kennedy took office in early 1961, he had no intention of pushing civil rights legislation. But during his first six months in office, the frequency and intensity of white racist violence against peaceful Freedom Riders and against nonviolent sit-ins across the South created enormous pressure on the president to do more for civil rights and to protect nonviolent protesters. It was in this context that, in June of 1961, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and his team at the Justice Department reached out to the leading civil rights organizations and to these four foundations, especially Taconic, urging them to put less effort into protests and more effort into a collaborative voter registration drive in the South.

Unstated in Robert Kennedy’s pitch to the groups was his expectation that Black voter registration, unlike demonstrations, would not provoke white violence, which in turn would take political pressure off the administration to “do something about civil rights.” Also unstated was the attorney general’s assumption that most newly registered Black voters in the South would probably vote Democratic, at least in

presidential elections. Robert Kennedy argued to the groups that voter registration would strike at the root cause of the problem – Black political disenfranchisement – as opposed to symptoms like segregated lunch counters and bus terminals. And he pointed out that the federal government had more legal tools to enforce voting rights than integration, so such efforts would enjoy more federal protection in the unlikely event of violence.⁷³

The funders enthusiastically agreed to the attorney general’s proposal and thereafter Currier played the role of coordinator among the foundations.⁷⁴ The civil rights groups also agreed to participate for three reasons.⁷⁵

First, they agreed that voter registration, by building Black political power, would advance the goals of the movement. But contrary to Robert Kennedy’s hopes, they had no intention of letting voter registration divert efforts from the sit-ins and other nonviolent protests they were already staging with so much success.

Second, they understood the South much better than did the Bostonian Kennedy and thus knew that voter registration drives in Dixie would provoke at least as much newsworthy white violence as did sit-ins, marches and Freedom Rides.⁷⁶

Third, all the groups desperately needed money. SCLC was chronically short of cash.⁷⁷ SNCC was in even worse shape. As John Lewis relates, when he was promoted to director in the spring of 1963, “SNCC had no money to speak of. We had one full-time staffer [in SNCC’s Atlanta headquarters], a student from Kentucky State named Ed King, who manned a tiny, dingy one-room office.”⁷⁸ Outside headquarters, “SNCC staff members [in the field] commonly only had \$30 per month for all personal and office expenses for a countywide [voter registration] pilot project. Payroll checks, which were sent out sporadically at best, often went to the wrong person.”⁷⁹ VEP offered about \$1 million to these groups over the three

years from 1962–1964 (roughly \$8 million in current dollars), which was tremendously helpful for organizations struggling to meet payroll and cover legal costs. VEP funds covered fully 25 percent of SNCC’s total budget in 1962.⁸⁰

The funders and organizations decided that the grants should be administered by the SRC. From a legal standpoint, nonpartisan voter registration was clearly lawful c3 activity and perceived as such at that time. Thus, the four foundations were much more comfortable funding it than more controversial activities such as sit-ins.⁸¹ But none of the frontline organizations were c3s and there seems to have been confusion among the philanthropic community about whether or not foundations were allowed to fund non-c3 organizations directly (under current law, it is clear that foundations can fund non-c3 organizations). The foundations thus believed there needed to be a c3 intermediary that could disburse the money to the groups, not as grantees but as contractors. All parties involved believed it would be legal for SRC, as a c3 organization and the sole grantee, to do so. Nevertheless, the attorney general obtained from IRS Commissioner Mortimer Caplin a “special dispensation” for SRC to disburse foundation money to the non-c3 contractors. There was nothing furtive about this approach: the parties acknowledged it publicly, and SRC’s Leslie W. Dunbar discussed the matter personally with IRS officials in advance of the project as part of the approval process.⁸²

Another reason the SRC was chosen as the sole grantee was that it added value to the project. Dunbar insisted that not all the money automatically go to the four national organizations, and he in fact gave some to smaller, local groups he thought better able to register voters in specific localities.⁸³ Moreover, the project was conceived from the start to have a strong research component – exactly SRC’s forte. Vernon Jordan, who was hired at SRC shortly after VEP’s launch and later headed the National Urban League and became an influential adviser to President Bill Clinton, reports that,

“The VEP funded national and local groups that were trying to register Black voters. Those groups would then report back to us on their efforts: how many people were successfully registered, how many tried and were thwarted, and why and how they were turned away.”⁸⁴ This strong research component made the project consonant with Taconic’s mission statement emphasizing “studies concerning ... inter-group relations.”⁸⁵ While VEP did not succeed in registering as many voters as planned, its meticulous research findings helped make the case for the 1965 VRA and informed specific provisions of the act because it provided lawmakers with more hard facts about the worst localities and the mechanics of voter suppression.⁸⁶

Third, foundations and organizations all viewed SRC as an honest broker to disburse and administer the money.⁸⁷ During his many years at SRC, Dunbar, a white West Virginian, had built a multiracial staff and won the trust of the heads of the frontline civil rights organizations.⁸⁸ Lewis of SNCC described Dunbar as “a political scientist with a tremendous interest in race relations – just a good, decent human being.”⁸⁹ That VEP would be directly managed by Wiley Stanton, the Black Arkansas lawyer who had won fame for his skillful legal representation of the “Little Rock Nine,” the teenagers who had integrated Central High School in 1957, added to the groups’ confidence in SRC.⁹⁰ At the key meeting of funders and organizations where VEP was launched, King himself made the motion to give SRC the role of project administrator.⁹¹

The funders – mostly northerners with limited knowledge of the South – had the good sense to delegate oversight of this complex grant to an indigenous, mostly Black organization with deep knowledge of and contacts in the region. The funders made no effort to micromanage SRC. “I didn’t take direction from foundations,” reports Dunbar. “I can truthfully say that the Field Foundation and Taconic left me completely alone.”⁹²

Taconic, Field and SFF put up most of the money for VEP⁹³ and NWF also contributed.⁹⁴ Dunbar estimates VEP’s total funding at about \$325,000 annually from 1962–1964. These same foundations also funded SRC with general operating grants (as did the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which gave a single, small contribution to VEP to help terminate the program in 1964).⁹⁵ Foundation grants accounted for VEP’s entire budget and about half of SRC’s budget at that time.⁹⁶

Dunbar wanted to achieve the goals of the project in a way that built power for the movement. “Anything we did at SRC was predicated on the conviction that the leadership [of the project] was Black, and that our role was to be supportive of their leadership, but somewhat independent of it, in the sense that we could be critical, and also in the sense that we could sometimes help avoid mistakes. ... From the time we set up the Voter Education Project, it seemed very clear to me that the Southern Regional Council’s main role, during the tough days of the early sixties, was to help the Black organizations, specifically through VEP, but in other ways too.”⁹⁷

In its first year, it appeared that VEP might fail because the groups had little experience in voter registration, did a poor job tracking results and faced ferocious white resistance and violence. The last was especially the case in Mississippi, where dozens of activists were beaten and some murdered. Thus, the VEP contractors had paltry results to show by the end of 1962 in terms of newly registered voters. To its credit, SRC worked with grantees to improve performance and reporting, even temporarily cutting off SCLC’s payments until it improved its administration.⁹⁸ King thereafter made VEP more of a personal priority,⁹⁹ a fact that almost certainly helped improve SCLC’s overall management.

VEP’s experience in Mississippi offers a good example to today’s funders about the importance of eschewing rigidly numerical definitions

of a project's success. At the outset of VEP, Stanton worked with the groups to divide voter registration territory based on local organizational strength. But Mississippi was a special case because the national leadership of the strongest group there, NAACP, opposed trying to register voters in Mississippi, presumably because they viewed it as dangerous and futile work. Yet, NAACP's own local chapters, led by state branch director Medgar Evers, were already working closely with SNCC and, to a lesser extent, CORE to register voters. So these local actors, at the urging of VEP, created in 1962 a new nonprofit organization in that state, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), to accept funding from VEP to register Black voters and in this way evade the veto of the national NAACP.¹⁰⁰ After all, how could the national staff at NAACP object if some of its unpaid Mississippi members put on a COFO hat to accept VEP money to register voters?

NAACP's national leadership was proved correct about the danger of trying to register voters in Mississippi: in 1963, its state director Evers was assassinated; in 1964, CORE volunteers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were murdered there. The NAACP's national leadership was also proved correct about the impossibility of registering Black voters in Mississippi. By late 1963, VEP in effect agreed with the NAACP and decided to cease funding COFO for lack of results in terms of newly registered voters (but VEP continued to fund voter registration elsewhere in the South).¹⁰¹

Yet, COFO's seeming failures masked historic successes for the movement:

- COFO furnished yet more ironclad proof – all meticulously documented by SNCC's Bob Moses and sent to the Justice Department – of the impossibility of registering African Americans to vote in the Deep South in the face of savage white violence. The mass arrests, beatings and murders were covered by the

international media, thus keeping the pressure on a reluctant federal government to legislate a solution.¹⁰²

- The 1964 Freedom Summer was strongly concentrated in Mississippi, where hundreds of northern college students (many of them white, including Schwerner and Goodman), worked within COFO, which was dispensing the last of its VEP funds. Their presence attracted swarms of media, which in turn showed the country an idealistic, multi-racial, all-American crusade to defend constitutional rights against mob violence and Klan terror.¹⁰³
- COFO facilitated cross-organizational, cross-racial and cross-generational collaboration that germinated the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), led by Fannie Lou Hamer, and its historic challenge to unseat Mississippi's all-white, segregationist delegation to the 1964 Democratic Convention. The media circus caused by this challenge deeply embarrassed President Johnson and kept the pressure on the Democrats to go further than the CRA, which they had just enacted, by also enacting the VRA one year later.¹⁰⁴

VEP's efforts elsewhere in the Deep South met with only slightly less resistance and violence than in Mississippi. "There was no separation between [direct] action and voter registration," explains Lewis. "Southern states were riddled with legal obstacles to keep Black men and women from voting – poll taxes, literacy tests. But those states were perfectly willing to resort to terrorism as well ... We would learn almost immediately that voter registration was as threatening to the entrenched white establishment in the South as sit-ins or Freedom Rides, and that it would prompt the same violent response."¹⁰⁵ Besides garnering media attention, white resistance in the South proved to be a blessing in disguise for the movement in another respect. The experience of being denied registration often had a healthy, radicalizing

effect on volunteers. A CORE report to VEP describing work in Louisiana noted, “[The local activists] are moving beyond purely a ‘VEP outlook,’ and are beginning to see the necessity for using direct non-violent tactics against the registrar and the white power structure.” Conversely, solidarity and relationships created during direct action campaigns often led later on to coordinated voter registration efforts.¹⁰⁶

The VEP helped the movement in other ways. Voter registration attempts were key to sparking white backlash against SNCC in Selma, Ala., in 1964, a confrontation that drew King to that city and which, in turn, led to the joint SNCC/SCLC decision to launch the historic March from Selma to Montgomery in early 1965, one of the fundamental events ensuring that federal lawmakers would enact the 1965 VRA. Voter registration drives were also the main sparks that started mass actions in Albany, Ga., and Greenwood, Miss., both hallowed battlegrounds for the movement and heavily covered by the media.¹⁰⁷

VEP did in fact register voters. Despite its slow start in 1962 and COFO’s inability to register voters in Mississippi, VEP registered 287,000 new voters in the following two years, mostly in the Upper South.¹⁰⁸ The four foundations profiled continued their courageous support of this hugely controversial and history-making project until its scheduled termination at the end of 1964.¹⁰⁹ VEP was originally conceived as a three-year program to run from 1962 through 1964, with resumption possible after an appraisal of lessons learned.¹¹⁰ VEP was indeed restarted in 1966 and continued to operate for many years thereafter. In the late 1960s under Vernon Jordan¹¹¹ and the 1970s under John Lewis,¹¹² VEP registered millions of new voters and helped ensure proper implementation of the VRA.

Amount and Patterns of Foundation Support for the Civil Rights Movement

From 1955-65, the four foundations and, to a lesser extent, a few other philanthropies provided an estimated total of \$4 million for the civil rights advocacy examined in this paper (which in current dollars translates into \$31 million), with most of that money disbursed after 1961.¹¹³ This excludes the approximately \$1.6 million in non-c3 dollars Currier raised under the aegis of CUCRL.

These philanthropic pioneers and their modest but helpful grants were followed later in the 1960s by many more grantmakers, notably the Ford Foundation, and many more millions of grant dollars invested in civil rights not only for African Americans, but also Native Americans, Latinos and women.¹¹⁴

The four foundations demonstrated some striking similarities.

All four were small to midsize family foundations with endowments of less than \$10 million dollars (\$77 million in current dollars). Note the caveat that the Field Foundation’s endowment began in that range but grew to \$33 million by 1960, placing it at the borderline between the midsize and big private foundations of that era. This finding does not match the pattern in contemporary philanthropy of bigger foundations more often funding social justice organizations than midsize foundations.¹¹⁵ It follows that analyses of large national funders should not be considered the exclusive method of determining success in philanthropic endeavors, particularly as they relate to movement building.

The endowments of the four foundations came from northern, commercial fortunes made in the late 19th or early 20th centuries and the grants were dispensed mostly by northerners. These grantmakers, then, fall into one of the best-known motifs of American history: intermittent waves of Yankee pressure on a defiant South to abandon political arrangements the

rest of the country finds oppressive and abhorrent. This should serve as a significant incentive to regionally focused funders. Recognizing historical patterns offers a significant potential to bolster impact and address long-standing structural barriers to equity.

In three of the four foundations (Stern, Field and New World) most of the investments in civil rights advocacy became possible only after a male “head of household” died and control of the foundation passed to his more progressive widow or children.

VEP was a complex project that required considerable knowledge and intensive collaboration with the frontline organizations. Recognizing their limitations of knowledge and staff, the four foundations wisely outsourced this task to the SRC, which in turn invested the money in a manner surprisingly consonant with the best of today’s “strategic philanthropy.” SRC worked with the contractors to formulate numerical goals and then held them accountable while helping them to improve administration, performance and record-keeping.

However, at strong variance with the shortcomings of today’s “strategic philanthropy,” these four foundations invested in an uncertain and extremely controversial movement of the oppressed themselves that aimed (and succeeded) through nonviolent civil disobedience to provoke white violence in the streets as the only way to pressure federal lawmakers to enact historic, emancipatory reform.¹¹⁶

IV. Today’s Foundations and the New Assault on Voting Rights

The civil rights movement got most of its money from non-foundation sources such as membership dues,¹¹⁷ and its most effective weapons were the thousands of nonviolent protesters, overwhelmingly African American, who put their bodies on the line, in addition to Martin Luther King Jr.’s inspired leadership.

But the foundation support examined in this paper was helpful for the cash-strapped organizations that led the movement. When we consider that this funding flowed during the precise decade when systemic progress had finally become possible; that the CRA of 1964 greatly strengthened equality under law not only for African Americans but for all communities of color and women; that this same powerful movement pushed lawmakers to enact the equally historic VRA one year later; that the VRA protected the suffrage not only for African Americans but many other underserved populations; and that these two reforms together figure among the most far-reaching domestic emancipatory victories in American history, it seems clear that the courageous and intelligent philanthropy examined in this paper ranks among the most effective and strategic domestic foundation grantmaking of the 20th century.

But the longevity of this glorious victory is today in peril. It is cruelly ironic that in this 50th anniversary year of the enactment of the CRA – a year when Americans should be celebrating – we instead witness renewed voter suppression on two ominous fronts. First, ever more states and localities are passing laws to suppress minority voting by creating new hurdles to suffrage such as requiring valid government-issued photo ID and proof of U.S. citizenship to register and to vote, and abolishing same-day registration and voting, among many other new barriers.¹¹⁸

Moreover, last year, the Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* mostly nullified VRA by striking down its most important clause. Specifically, the court ruled unconstitutional the requirement for the nine (mostly southern) states covered by VRA to obtain “preclearance” from the federal government before instituting changes in local election law. In the majority opinion, Chief Justice John G. Roberts asserted that “largely because of the Voting Rights Act, voting tests [in the covered states] were abolished, disparities in voter registration and turnout due to race were erased, and African

Americans attained political office in record numbers."¹¹⁹ But as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg rightly points out in the dissent, these same states had a well-documented history ever since enactment of VRA of continually attempting new changes in election law that would unconstitutionally disenfranchise non-whites – gambits thwarted only by VRA. As she writes, "The court appears to believe that the VRA's success in eliminating the specific devices extant in 1965 means that preclearance is no longer needed. ... As the record for [Congress'] 2006 reauthorization makes abundantly clear, second-generation barriers to minority voting rights have emerged in the covered jurisdictions as attempted *substitutes* for the first-generation barriers that originally triggered preclearance in those jurisdictions."¹²⁰

Only an act of Congress can reinstate preclearance on these states. But the court's decision stipulates that any such reauthorization create a coverage formula different than the old one. Congress seems uncertain how or whether to revive the VRA.

Today's grantmakers must build on the legacy begun by the four foundations examined in this paper, and do their part to help repel this latest assault on our democracy.

A number of civil rights organizations, through litigation and public education, are making a vigorous case right now against voter suppression at the state level and in favor of reauthorization of the VRA. Building on its prior legacy, the Carnegie Corporation is part of a funder collaborative providing funds to the State Infrastructure Fund (SIF) housed at Public Interest Projects. Specifically, Carnegie is funding the *Shelby Response Fund* which "will promote efforts that guarantee eligible voters have equal and unburdened access to the ballot."¹²¹

However, data shows that institutional philanthropy's support of efforts to promote civil rights comprises a mere fraction of overall grantmaking: According to the Foundation Cen-

ter, in 2010, larger family foundations and independent foundation gave about 10 and 12 percent of grant dollars respectively toward social justice.¹²² These percentages likely overestimate the proportion of grant dollars that are specifically for civil rights because Foundation Center data, the only reliable information available, broadly includes all social action, community improvement and development, philanthropy and voluntarism, and public affairs in same category. There is significant need for funding direct action with and by local communities that explicitly addresses structural inequities.

Additionally, there is a lack of data around giving by small-to-midsize foundations in support of civil rights. To effectively support today's civil rights movement, the sector must work to track giving from many grantmaking entities as possible to provide a holistic picture of current trends in institutional philanthropy.

There are three approaches that today's foundations can learn from the Freedom Funders in our ongoing fight to protect civil rights. First, grantmakers should intentionally prioritize underserved communities in developing and implementing strategy. Second, they should involve those most affected by injustice, such as by funding organizations committed to grassroots organizing and advocacy. And third, they should utilize tools such as equity analysis to examine structural barriers that keep certain communities from equal life opportunities. Anything less and foundations risk reinforcing the very inequities they claim to address.

About the Author

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Image information:

(Clockwise starting from top left) Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. [Leaders of the march posing in front of the statue of Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln Memorial], courtesy of the [U.S. National Archives](#). Volunteers assist with voter registration in Americus, Georgia, on August 9, 1965, [courtesy of the U.S. State Department](#). "Freedom Riders" hang anti-segregation signs from bus windows, [courtesy of the U.S. State Department](#). Congress of Racial Equality march in Washington DC on 22 September 1963 in memory of the children killed in the Birmingham bombings, [courtesy of the Library of Congress](#). President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act, [courtesy of the National Park Service](#).

Endnotes

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⁴ Caro, *Master*, Chapters 1-3.

⁵ Branch, *passim*, especially pp. 414–415, 469–470; Roy Wilkins, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Viking, 1982), pp. 272–295; John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 129–198.

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⁷ Branch, *Parting*, p. 673ff.

⁸ Branch, *Pillar*, p. 560ff.

⁹ Branch, *Parting*, p. 801ff.; Branch, *Pillar*, p. 88ff.

¹⁰ Branch, *Parting*, p. 786; Branch, *Pillar*, p. 69ff.

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¹² Branch, *Parting*, p. 822ff.; Branch, *Pillar*, p. 114.

¹³ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 2012), p. 405; Branch, *Pillar*, p. 178, 210.

¹⁴ Caro, *Passage*, pp. 452ff., 465, 488ff., 564ff., 668–669.

¹⁵ Caro, *Passage*, pp. 115 ff., 569 ff.; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 65ff.

¹⁶ Ann D. Walton and F. Emerson Andrews, editors, *The Foundation Directory, Edition 1*, prepared by the Foundation Library Center (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), p. X.

¹⁷ In the 1950s and early 1960s, 2.5 percent of the Ford Foundation's total grant dollars went to "minority rights," but it appears little or none of that went to civil rights *advocacy*. Instead, this program at Ford invested mostly in education for African

Americans, Black economic self-help and incubated anti-poverty programs that later influenced (and went to scale in) President Johnson's Great Society. After 1965, when McGeorge Bundy took over as president, Ford invested in civil rights advocacy (and indeed on a massive scale) and also greatly increased its investments in other programs to benefit Americans of color. Mary McClymont, et al., *Many Roads to Justice: the Law-Related Work of the Ford Foundation Grantees Around the World* (New York: Ford Foundation, 2000), p. 91; Ford Foundation, *Civil Rights, Social Justice and Black America: A Review of Past and Current Ford Foundation Efforts to Promote Racial Justice for Black Americans in Employment, Housing, Political Participation and Other Areas* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1984), pp. 5–10. For a more critical perspective on Bundy's presidency, see Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Penn. Press, 2013), p. 64ff.

¹⁸ http://archive.org/stream/AmericanDilemmaTheNegroProblemAndModernDemocracy/AmericanDilemmaVersion2_djvu.txt.

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²⁰ New World Foundation, "Milestones: Founding Story", <http://newwf.org/milestones/founding-story/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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²⁸ For NWF's post-1960s grantmaking, see New World Foundation, "Milestones: Founding Story," <http://newwf.org/milestones/>. NWF's grantee list on its IRS Income Tax Form 990 posted by GuideStar, <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2012/131/919/2012-131919791-0969d837-9.pdf>.

²⁹ Kathleen Teltsch, "Field Foundation, Civil Rights Pioneer, to Die at 49; Survivors Will Be Legion", *New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/19/us/field-foundation-civil-rights-pioneer-to-die-at-49-survivors-will-be-legion.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>. See also description of the Field Foundation's archive at the Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/00091/cah-00091.html>.

³⁰ Greenberg, 23.

³¹ Greenberg, pp. 23, 179, 211.

³² Ibid, p. 375.

³³ Teltsch; Briscoe Center for American History.

³⁴ Walton, et al., p. 358. The 1960 edition was the first iteration of the *Foundation Directory* and was published by the Foundation Library Center, which had been created a few years previously. The *Directory* was the first private effort to compile comprehensive and reliable information about the approximately 12,000 foundations operating in the U.S. at that time. It reviewed public records, sent the foundations questionnaires and then sent the *Directory's* galley proofs back to those foundations for edits before publication. Thus, in many cases, the *Directory's* information about each foundation's "Purpose and Activities" is as close to a Mission Statement as one is likely to find today because many of those foundations' mid-20th century tax forms and foundational documents are impossible to obtain.

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³⁸ Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 40.

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⁴⁰ Teltsch; Briscoe Center for American History.

⁴¹ "Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar, December 18, 1978," Interview G-0075, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007),

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⁴³ Lewis, p. 379.

⁴⁴ Institute for Media Analysis, *The Stern Fund: The Story of a Progressive Foundation* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1992), pp. 1–15.

⁴⁵ Gerda Weissmann Klein, *A Passion for Sharing: The Life of Edith Rosenwald Stern* (Chappaqua, NY: Rossell Books, 1984), p. 204ff.

⁴⁶ Klein, p. 215ff.

⁴⁷ Klein, p. 224.

⁴⁸ Ann D. Walton and Marianna O. Lewis, eds., *The Foundation Directory, Edition 2*, (prepared by the Foundation Library Center) (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), p. 444. Here I quote from the edition after the inaugural 1960 edition because the latter probably did not reflect SFF's changed priorities only one year after the death of Edgar, Sr.

⁴⁹ The Community Giving Resource, Neighborhood Funders Group, Smartlink: Where Donors Go for Great Ideas, "Through Multiple Generations, Rosenwald and Stern Families' Philanthropic Journey", <http://archive.is/zBaxd>. Many thanks to Larry Ottinger for supplying this source. See also Klein, p. 224.

⁵⁰ Institute for Media Analysis, pp. 42, 131. On the effectiveness of these types of strategies, see research by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), <http://ncrp.org/campaigns-research-policy>.

⁵¹ Institute for Media Analysis, pp. 55, 74.

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- ⁵² Institute for Media Analysis, p. 36.
- ⁵³ Maria Martinez-Cosio and Mirle Rabinowitz Bussell, *Catalysts for Change: 21st Century Philanthropy and Community Development* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 38.
- ⁵⁴ Robert E. Baker, "Currier Estate to Help Others", *Washington Post News Service*, February 9, 1967; Dennis C. Dickerson, *Militant Mediator: Whitney M. Young Jr.* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p. 232.
- ⁵⁵ Zunz, p. 209.
- ⁵⁶ Walton, et al., *The Foundation Directory, Edition 1*, p. 453.
- ⁵⁷ Zunz, p. 211.
- ⁵⁸ Lewis, p. 271.
- ⁵⁹ Greenberg, p. 369.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Garrow, p. 270.
- ⁶² Greenberg, pp. 369–70.
- ⁶³ Peter Kihss, "Joint Negro Council Allocates \$565,000 to Rights Groups", *New York Times*, July 18, 1963, p. 10.
- ⁶⁴ August Meier, "Negro Protest Movements and Organizations," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Autumn, 1963), pp. 437–450.
- ⁶⁵ Lewis, pp. 231–232.
- ⁶⁶ Nina Mjagkij, ed., *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), p. 173–174.
- ⁶⁷ Baker; Dickerson, p. 232.
- ⁶⁸ Zunz, p. 210.
- ⁶⁹ Harold C. Fleming and Virginia Fleming, *The Potomac Chronicles: Public Policy and Civil Rights from Kennedy to Reagan* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), p. 173.
- ⁷⁰ Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University, "List of Spend-Down Foundations (In Order of Spend-Down Date)," <http://cspcs.sanford.duke.edu/content/list-spend-down-foundations-order-spend-down-date>.
- ⁷¹ See for example the website of the Pratt Center, <http://prattcenter.net/apply-now-pratt-center-launches-new-fellowship-program>.
- ⁷² See for example the website of the Center for Community Change, <http://www.communitychange.org/real-people/fellowships/>.
- ⁷³ Branch, *Parting*, p. 479ff.; Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 154ff.
- ⁷⁴ Garrow, pp. 63, 161ff.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 162.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 163.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 149, 151, 197, 233.
- ⁷⁸ Lewis, p. 181.
- ⁷⁹ Branch, *Parting*, p. 712.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 575ff.
- ⁸¹ Zunz, p. 208.
- ⁸² "Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar."
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Jordan, p. 175.
- ⁸⁵ Walton, et al., *The Foundation Directory, Edition 1*, p. 453.
- ⁸⁶ Jordan, p. 177.
- ⁸⁷ Garrow, p. 163; Branch, *Parting*, p. 479ff.
- ⁸⁸ Jordan, p. 167ff.
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- ⁹⁰ Jordan, p. 175.
- ⁹¹ "Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar."
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: JFK's New Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 72–73.
- ⁹⁴ New World Foundation, "1954–1974 – Responsible Wealth", <http://newwf.org/milestones/1954-1974-the-founding-era/>.
- ⁹⁵ "Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar."
- ⁹⁶ Ibid. See also See Jordan, p. 176.
- ⁹⁷ "Interview with Leslie W. Dunbar."
- ⁹⁸ Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: the arrival of the Negro in Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), p. 48.
- ⁹⁹ Garrow, p. 233ff.
- ¹⁰⁰ Branch, *Parting*, p. 634ff.
- ¹⁰¹ Branch, *Pillar*, p. 163; Watters and Cleghorn, p. 48.
- ¹⁰² Branch, *Pillar*, pp. 50–75, 361–74, 389–95, 407–416.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 341–456.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 341–477.
- ¹⁰⁵ Lewis, p. 181ff.
- ¹⁰⁶ Watters and Cleghorn, p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ Haines, p. 155.
- ¹⁰⁹ Branch, *Parting*, p. 492ff.
- ¹¹⁰ Watter and Cleghorn, pp. 46–47.
- ¹¹¹ Jordan, p. 179ff.
- ¹¹² Lewis, p. 413ff.
- ¹¹³ Estimating is unavoidable due to the secrecy of foundations of that era, rudimentary public tracking

of grants during that period and poor record-keeping and archiving on the part of some of the grantees. On these and other methodological challenges, see Haines, p. 112 ff. Jenkins finds that in 1960, 10 foundations gave a total of \$268,000 in 1960-dollars (which he reports as \$874,000 in constant 1982–84 dollars) to promote “social movements,” a rubric that appears to include mostly civil rights advocacy. Jenkins finds that this amount increased rapidly every year thereafter during the 1960s and thus his finding (bearing in mind the methodological caveats above) does not contradict the estimate of approximately \$4 million in foundation money for the civil rights movement from 1955–65. See Craig Jenkins, “Social Movement Philanthropy and the Growth of Nonprofit Political Advocacy: Scope, Legitimacy, and Impact,” in Elizabeth J. Reid, Maria D. Montilla, eds. *Exploring Organizations and Advocacy: Strategies and Finances* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001), p. 53.

¹¹⁴ Haines, *passim*; Jenkins, p. 53ff. On the Ford Foundation’s massive post-1965 entry into civil rights funding, see McClymont, et al., p. 91; and Ford Foundation, pp. 5–10. For some of the problematic aspects of Ford’s investments, see Ferguson, *passim*.

¹¹⁵ Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, “The State of Social Justice Philanthropy 2011,” (Washington, DC: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2013), p.2, Fig. 3, <http://www.ncrp.org/files/publications/PhilanthropicLandscape-StateofSocialJusticePhilanthropy2011.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ For assessments of contemporary strategic philanthropy see Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, *Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy* (Washington, DC: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2013), <http://www.ncrp.org/paib/real-results-strategic-philanthropy>; Gara LaMarche, “Speech: Reclaiming the Moral Life of Philanthropy”, <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/speech-reclaiming-moral-life-philanthropy>; Phil Buchanan and Aaron Dorfman, “‘Strategy’ Is Not a Bad Word: It Is Essential Even to Grass-Roots Movements,” NCRP Blog, June 18, 2013, <http://blog.ncrp.org/2013/06/strategy-is-not-bad-word-it-is.html>. See also Susan A. Ostrander, “Legacy and Promise of Social Justice Funding: Charitable Foundations and Progressive Social Movements, Past and Present”, in Daniel Faber and Deborah McCarthy, eds, *Foundations for Social Change*:

Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 36ff.

¹¹⁷ Haines, Appendix, Tables A2 (p. 190) and ff.

¹¹⁸ American Civil Liberties Union, “The Battle to Protect the Ballot: Voter Suppression Measures Passed Since 2013,”

<https://www.aclu.org/maps/battle-protect-ballot-voter-suppression-measures-passed-2013>.¹¹⁸ For a comprehensive list of the status of proposed and passed legislation by states, see: http://ballotpedia.org/State_by_State_Voter_ID_Laws.

¹¹⁹ Supreme Court of the United States, “Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder, Attorney General, et al.” (2013),

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/12-96>.

¹²⁰ Supreme Court of the United States, Dissent, Shelby County, Alabama, Petitioner v. Erich Holder, Jr., Attorney General, et al.,

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/12-96>.

¹²¹ Raven Pease, “State Infrastructure Fund Expands: New Leadership and Resources for Voter Protection and Civic Engagement Work,”

<http://www.publicinterestprojects.org/featured/state-infrastructure-fund-expands-new-leadership-and-resources-for-voter-protection-and-civic-engagement-work/>.

¹²² See

http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/keyfacts_familyfdns2012.pdf.



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