July 2020

Special Edition: Focus on Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Note from the Executive Director

It is such an honor to present this special edition of The Ally featuring stories and writings that are poignant, timely, and inspirational. There is no question that underlying each of these pieces there is a “call to action.” Each of us as readers and challenged to examine our own personal and professional stories and, more importantly, to move from examination to a commitment for positive change. The Alliance stands ready to support you and your organization as we all come together to make a better world for all people.

Our sincere thanks to each person that contributed to this special edition — we are grateful. And, thanks to each person reading and thinking about these writings because we are all called on to make a positive difference.

Sammy Moon
Executive Director
MS Alliance

Moving Forward Together:
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

As a daughter of the South, I have a love relationship with Mississippi. I consciously decided to move home over 13 years ago to play my small role in helping to create a state where all could grow and thrive together. Like most Mississippis, I have found the last few months unsettling. The twin pandemics of the coronavirus and our country’s deep and longstanding racism have made it abundantly clear that we do not know each other. Especially in the conversations about how we “move forward,” we seem to highlight how little we know about where people are, about who they are.

Part of how we heal these wounds, part of how we move towards something better, is by getting to know each other. This latest edition of The Ally is an effort to further that knowing, that seeing, that understanding.

This special edition is our attempt to offer stories that will help us know each other a little better, offering perspectives that we might not otherwise have heard or considered.

At the Mississippi Alliance for Nonprofits and Philanthropy, we recognize that only as a community can we continue the hard work needed to create communities where all Mississippians have access to opportunities in life, school, and work. There is an African proverb that states, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” This simple proverb succinctly sums up the power that can be found in partnerships. Let us work to listen to new stories and perspectives so that we can go further together faster.

Anita Nwando,
Ph.D.
Alliance Board Chair

Deliverance.

This morning
I cried
When I remembered
They came for my brown body
They removed him
They took him
They delivered him
They said it was for his own good
He had grown too large for the space they said he could occupy
His dreams too expansive for their imaginations
His silent excellence too brazen for their insecurities
So they came for his brown body
They removed him
They took him
They delivered him back to the Spirit from whence he came
Back to Ghana to Guinea
To Sudan to Sierra Leone
To anywhere but here
They suspended him in time and space as his first or last cries and gags and tears fell to the earth that browned from the reservoirs of dried bloodshed by his brothers and uncles and fathers and mothers and aunts and sisters and cousins
And they told me that you could be next
This morning
I cried
When I remembered
That my wife now holds a brown body in her belly
And when he becomes too large for the space they say he can occupy
They will come for his brown body
They will remove him
They will take him
They will deliver him
Into a Hell that we cannot control and are powerless to protect him from

Jason Thompson
Principal
Fahrenheit Creative Group
What Happens When People of Color Are Not in Leadership Roles in Nonprofits and Philanthropies

Philotropic organizations have come a long way since their inception. Within the last five years it has become commonplace to participate in sessions centering on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Lately, there has been a greater interest in amplifying voices of people of color in philanthropy. While diversity, equity and inclusion now serve as standards within the nonprofit and philanthropic communities, their actual implementation amounts to lip service, as long as there are few people of color within the critical structure of the organization.

Over the last fifteen years, the number of people of color occupying nonprofit leadership positions has remained flat at under twenty percent. Additionally, people of color in philanthropy are often subject to different standards than their white counterparts. People of color often face questions and doubts about their ability to lead and fundraise and have limited access to wealthy philanthropic circles. Many times, the person of color is the only connection the organization has to that specific group. The lack of diversity in service organizations, and in leadership positions, has a detrimental effect not only on the organization but also on the communities the organization is committed to serve.

Click here to read the full article.
Moving Past Conversations: Challenging Nonprofits and Philanthropies to Deal with Race

"Understanding is the greatest thing in the world," said Mr. Sherman Norwood. In middle school wood shop, learning the value of measuring twice and cutting once was critical - especially if one goal was to leave enough wood for the next class to make their oven-rack pullers.

Mr. Norwood wanted us to assess our needs precisely and repeatedly so that when we engaged with our work, we would get it right, not be wasteful, and produce something for which we could be proud. It was not the measure twice, cut once rule that he wanted us to take from his class, but rather the principle that understanding and fidelity was critical to input, process, and outcome.

In my professional community, we call ourselves capacity builders, consultants, and strategists. We prioritize sincere dialogue and collaboration in our work. Our goal is to have our work lead to community self-determination, understanding of agency, and collective action.

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I teach English literature at a majority-white liberal arts college, and I am part of this majority. What can I do to ally with nonwhite students and colleagues and work with them to advance anti-racism on campus and in our community? Many things, of course, but chiefly perhaps this: I can help my white students learn to use their imaginations. Lest this response seem naïve, ineffectual, or unnecessary, consider James Baldwin, writing in 1953: "By means of what the white man imagines the black man to be, the black man is enabled to know who the white man is." In her 2014 book *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Claudia Rankine gave this insight an even finer point: "because white men can't/police their imagination/ black people are dying." On the facing page, Rankine has placed a list of lives lost to police brutality. She has left it open-ended. Were it reprinted today, the list would contain too many names for its page. Rankine's metaphor is searing, its irony terrible, its point clear: irresponsible white imaginations cost black lives.

[Click here](#) to read the full article
The Path Forward

If you are from Mississippi, live in Mississippi, work for Mississippians, or have adopted Mississippi as home, as I have, you cannot deny the racial injustice that our Black neighbors have endured for centuries – and the impact it has still today. We live on stolen land from the Choctaw and others, and for centuries used stolen Black labor to maximize profit. Today, we see a vicious pandemic inequitably harming our communities, and we must, as philanthropists, nonprofits, and individuals, break this cycle. No more kicking the can down the road.

Growing up in West Los Angeles, the 1992 Uprising was a crucial moment in my childhood. I saw white police nearly beat to death Rodney King, a Black man, then get acquitted. I saw a popular uprising by mostly Black Angelinos – but the direct target was often the mostly Korean shop owners. So while white people were the perpetrators of both the physical and systemic crime, we faced no consequences. This narrative has played out again and again since 1992. Sometimes we hear the stories, like that recently of George Floyd, but most often we don’t.

Click here to read the full article.
As a person of color, I have had many experiences with nonprofits who came to my community to provide aid. I grew up in some of the most impoverished communities in not only the state but also the world. While these organizations did contribute positively to the community, there was this apparent disconnect in who delivered the aid. It’s a painful experience to watch people from outside that look nothing like you, sound nothing like you, that know nothing about you, come to help you.

The problem starts at the top in terms of diversity within charitable organizations and general leadership roles among nonprofits. In all honesty, as a child, I did not believe that there were minorities capable of helping others, as I only saw white people helping us.