Wall St. & Business Wednesdays: Black Philanthropy — Past, Present and Future—Depends on Long Traditions of Giving Time, Talent and Money by Karen Gray and Nora Hall

"Black philanthropy has a very pragmatic character. It is shaped both by needs in the black community and limitations imposed by larger forces in the society."

—Emmett Carson, CEO, The Minneapolis Foundation

When opera singer Marian Anderson, boxer Jack Johnson and trumpeter Louis Armstrong visited the Twin Cites in the 1920s and 1930s, they all contributed to and benefited from black philanthropy. At the time, many hotels were not open to black guests, and performers and others found overnight accommodations at private homes and black settlement houses. In return, they gave back. For Anderson, Johnson and Armstrong, that meant performing for youth at black settlement houses.

Archie Givens, Jr., CEO of Legacy Management & Development Corp. of Minneapolis, remembers family stories about Marian Anderson's performance at Phyllis Wheatley House, where many entertainment and recreational activities were held. These included plays, poetry reading, organized sports for boys, women's basketball, cooking classes, senior activities and camping. Phyllis Wheatley was a safe place for blacks who were politically, economically and socially

segregated from mainstream society in the years prior to the 1950s to 1960s civil rights movement.

The kind of charitable giving provided by performers and black settlement houses is a strong tradition in the Twin Cities black community. “It’s not something we aspire to; it’s something we’ve always done,” Givens said. His family has lived in Minnesota for a century and holds the distinction of being the state’s first black millionaires.

Time, Talent and Money

Black philanthropy takes many forms: the giving of time, talent and money, including charity within families and among friends; the giving to churches; establishing social, political or economic organizations; and planned giving such as creating funds during one’s lifetime or by will. All are ways of building and maintaining community, and of taking care of community members.

In the Twin Cities, it may be called giving back, cultural reciprocity or the spirit of giving. Billy Collins, longtime St. Paul resident and Pan African Fund Committee member, said that the Oxford playground in St. Paul, now the location of the Jimmy Lee Center, started as a black philanthropic project. When city funds were unavailable, community members donated time, energy and money to create the playground. They removed boulders, donated blacktop for the basketball court, created the baseball and football fields, and annually conducted fundraisers for athletic equipment and team uniforms. Community members also coached the teams. A booster club established in the early 1950s continues to raise funds for the playground today.

Minneapolis resident Bill English, who co-chairs the Coalition of Black Churches, grew up with 12 siblings. He learned the value of charitable giving from his mother, who provided food and a place to rest for the black homeless who traveled from city to city in the 1940s and 1950s in search of employment. English has passed the family tradition on to his children, who cannot recall a time when they did not bring gifts to nursing homes and community organizations on holidays.

Similarly, Pastor Louise Britts of River of Life Lutheran Church in Minneapolis recalls many days when her father paid Boy Scout membership fees for children at Lincoln Junior High in Minneapolis where he worked as a principal. Her family has lived in Minnesota for seven generations.

Some Minnesota institutions would not have been established were it not for black philanthropy. The Givens Collection of African American Literature, housed at the University of Minnesota, is one example. Community members advocated

and raised money for a permanent collection that would preserve black literature. It took only a year to raise the first $150,000 from black Americans to establish the collection.

The Local Black Community

Minnesota is home to about 200,000 people who identify themselves as black, African American or black plus another race. Their numbers are about 3.2 percent of the state's population. In contrast, there were just 35,000 blacks identified as Minnesota residents in the 1970 census, which was 1 percent of the state population. More than 90 percent of Minnesota's African Americans live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, primarily in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center. Population growth is linked to high birth rates, migration from other states and African immigration.

Black history in Minnesota dates back 200 years, to the early 18th century when the British controlled the region's fur trading. At the time, most blacks in North America were here involuntarily as slave labor for the growing agrarian economy. Recent studies of descendents of those early black Americans indicate that they give 25 percent more of their discretionary income for charitable purposes than whites do. Whites give 6.4 percent of their discretionary income to charity.

A study based in New York found that blacks gave more annually than other groups of color, with churches receiving more than two-thirds of all black charitable dollars. Black churches are integral to the black community in Minnesota, especially because of before- and after-school programs, youth work and homeless prevention projects. They also are viewed as the only truly independent institutions. Black philanthropy scholar T. Williams said that the black church is the only community institution in Minnesota that was made solvent by black philanthropy. Other black organizations, such as settlement houses and community centers, were started by black philanthropists, but relied on other donors for survival. Some churches have nonprofit development corporations that provide housing, education and other programs. The level of giving in black churches has made it possible to leverage other funding sources.

Emmett Carson, CEO of The Minneapolis Foundation, has defined black philanthropy as occurring in three stages:

Stage 1: Church and organizational giving in the 1700s and 1800s helped develop education and social programs and black owned-businesses.

Stage 2: The work of 1960s black and civil rights organizations initiated payroll deductions previously limited to the

United Way.

Stage 3: Giving through estates by wealthy black entertainers, sports figures and others became more popular in the 1990s.

Affluent black households with assets of more than $100,000 make up 5.9 percent of black households in the state. Persistent poverty exists among 57.8 percent of Minnesota's black population that earns less than the median state income of $35,000. However, within the black community there is a strong sentiment toward all income levels participating in philanthropy regardless of income.

There is clear evidence that Minnesota has moved through Carson's continuum of black philanthropy. Giving among black Minnesotans is a communal tradition and many give despite meager resources. St. Paul native Yusef Mgeni, whose family's charitable giving goes back to the 1850s when Minnesota was still a territory, said those with meager incomes, such as porters, meat packers, post office and hotel workers, donated part of their wages to community-based causes as often as neighbors who held jobs in professional occupations.

Beverly Propes, community liaison, has a similar family lineage. She sees Twin Cities black philanthropy as a culture of services and sharing. "When I was growing up, we had a giving circle for winter coats. Black philanthropy means building communities and building the capacity of black families," she said.

A considerable amount of black charitable giving is viewed as spontaneous assistance to those in need. Mgeni indicated that black Minnesotans traditionally respond to appeals for help. He carries a $100 bill in his wallet for such emergencies, which he frequently replaces after giving to someone in need. In recent months, several Twin Cities community members have pooled resources either for professionals who have lost jobs and/or for support to the financially strapped campaigns of black politicians. In such situations, it is not uncommon for a few people to raise $1,000 or more. Mgeni credits his mother for modeling spontaneous giving. Growing up in a large family with very limited resources, he saw his mother share hard-earned resources, such as family cars, which she gave to neighbors in need. She saved money specifically to buy run-down vehicles, which she would have repaired before giving them to someone in need.

Church and Organizational Giving

The earliest black philanthropy in Minnesota was the development of Masonic Lodges, dramatic clubs and churches in

the 1800s. Those institutions provided charity, food, shelter, education, entertainment, human services and sanctuary for families who were segregated from mainstream society. These efforts fostered a tradition that continues more than 100 years later.

In 1966, the Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Minneapolis founded Sabathani Community Center. In 1950, St. Peter Claver Church in St. Paul established a school. Greater Friendship Church, once called Sabathani, constructed a building that included space for youth activities, such as a bowling alley and a gymnasium for basketball. The gym also served as the sanctuary. The church raised the first $25,000 from the black community in $5 to $100 increments. Then two white citizens contributed $200,000 and paved the way for United Way funding.

Churches continue to pool the resources of those with modest incomes. Atum Azzahir, director of the Powderhorn Wellness Center, said, "My mother staunchly supported the church. When she had $2, she'd give $1 to the church."

Minnesota blacks, like others around the country, have deep connections with the church. An estimated 50 black churches and more than 100 organizations in the Twin Cities today have missions to serve black communities. The nonprofit Model Cities in St. Paul was conceived at St. James AME Church in 1967 with a mission to provide health services to blacks. In the 1960s, church collections supported Freedom Riders and the March on Washington.

Black college fraternities and sororities in Minnesota include Delta Sigma Theta and Alpha Kappa Alpha, which provide college scholarships. So do social clubs, such as the BoulÈ and Monitors, and women's organizations such as the Links, Inc., and Limited Thirties. Sororities and fraternities have established unparalleled philanthropy since the first generation of middle-class blacks. Community organizations such as the Urban Leagues have programs that support educational and economic achievement.

Black and Civil Rights Organizations

The 1960s civil rights movement highlighted issues of fairness and equity that black Minnesotans faced. St. Peter Claver's Sodality was the biggest contributor to the state civil rights fund. Historian David Taylor said that legislation and special programs were created during that period, but there were few gains for undereducated and unskilled blacks that comprised the bulk of Minnesota's black community. Maurice Nins, the chair of the Pan African Community Endowment Fund and a Minnesota native, said the social context faced by black Minnesotans in the 1960s forced them to help each other grow and prosper.

It is obvious that the black community's ongoing needs resulted in charitable giving among friends and family and focused attention on the importance of maintaining organizations to address the social, economic and political concerns of blacks. Such giving continues today.

Estate Giving

Studies conducted throughout the country suggest that people of color as a whole are participating in philanthropy through more ways than in the past. In New York, the number of community-of-color funds at community foundations increased from 100 to 639 from 1993 to 1998. The number of givers with significant income has also increased. New black wealth and educational and philanthropic strategies are creating visible impact in other cities. In Minnesota, many who give do so anonymously or through third parties. Some call this quiet giving.

Between 1975 and 2004, at least 40 grantmaking funds and foundations were created in Minnesota black communities, including:

Dave Winfield, St. Paul native and baseball star, founded the Winfield Foundation in San Diego in 1973 with $4 million.

Following Anwatin Junior High School teacher Jean Covington's death, the Covington Foundation was started with $50,000 from her estate. The foundation has grown to $125,000 and provides two- to four-year college scholarships to promising black students from Anwatin in Minneapolis.

Two other foundations, the Sigma Pi Phi Omicron Foundation and The Monitors Foundation are valued at about $125,000 each. Both foundations, founded by black male social clubs, provide college scholarships.

Some youth would not pursue higher education without support from civic and social organizations, said Linda Garrett, who chairs the scholarship advisory committee for the Vianne L. Griffin Memorial Fund. The fund was established by her parents, James and Edna Griffin in 1975 in honor of their daughter, Vianne. Griffin said she learned about giving by working with the fund and, in recent years, has endowed a scholarship fund in her late husband's name at Michigan State University.

Wenda Weekes Moore, W.K. Kellogg Foundation trustee from Minneapolis, calls estate giving the wave of the future. She considers it vital for black Americans to create new vehicles of giving, as well as serve on the boards of

organizations and continue to support efforts to strengthen black communities. Influential blacks that do so make it easier to tell the black community story.

Looking to the Future

Social justice is still an important consideration for Minnesota, according to those interviewed for this article, but it is less of a challenge today than in the past. That makes the future of black philanthropy unclear to some. Carson, of The Minneapolis Foundation, considers Minnesota's black philanthropy to be an underdeveloped opportunity, partly due to "black sprawl." With the state's small black population, the sense of community is affected. States with larger black populations have more black-owned businesses and influential church leaders than Minnesota does, he says. Major corporations have brought blacks to Minnesota and provided the state with considerable black expertise. However, they rarely coalesce because business people often are transferred before the community connects with them.

Many agree that black philanthropists have new responsibilities today. Among them is the need to have a stronger role in the state's economic systems. According to retired business leader W. Harry Davis, Minnesota communities need more successful black-owned businesses and nonprofits, which are vital to increased black giving. Then nonprofits can establish endowments that keep community organizations solvent in perpetuity. Black Minnesotans would like to see philanthropists assume more responsibility for giving to the black community. There is concern that at this time in history, new immigrant groups are perceived to have more pressing needs.

It's time for a leadership summit to discuss the critical transition from civil rights to a more fitting direction for today, says Paul Williams, a native Minnesotan and former director of SpectrumTrust, which includes the Pan African Community Endowment Fund. Such leadership should address socially responsible ways to invest, ways to teach youth and adults about economic development and various vehicles for charitable giving. It can discuss ways churches can partner with nonprofit organizations to address today's big issues, such as homelessness, that are too difficult for one institution to address. Sharon Glover, who established the Gleason Glover Fund at The Minneapolis Foundation in honor of her late husband, believes it is vital to talk with black Minnesotans about the opportunities for different forms of giving. Most blacks don't understand what they can do in their lifetime and after, she said.

In the future it seems important to create a philanthropic mechanism that strongly supports black communities, especially one that cultivates philanthropists who are interested in ensuring that their time, money and expertise are used within black communities. Black Americans would like to see further exploration of new models of charitable giving that go beyond traditional institutional practices. "There is plenty of help available for people who are in trouble, but

little is available for those who are out of trouble," said a concerned community member.

New philanthropic models could create funding systems that are more accessible for black organizations and that bring more donor-advised funds (money that directly supports what the donor wishes to support) to foundations so they will extend in perpetuity. Stronger support for black organizations is desired. One way to accomplish that would be to better tap the significant wealth and intellect in today's black community by engaging established and emerging leaders and tapping wealthy athletes and celebrities at the level they can reasonably give.

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