

PATHMAKERS

LEADERSHIP REFLECTIONS FROM THE KENDEDA FUND ATLANTA EQUITY PORTFOLIO



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A MODEL OF RESTORATIVE PHILANTHROPY

EMBEDDING PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND HEALING IN GRANTMAKING

By Tené Traylor and Christine Hunt

The *Adinkra* symbology of the Akan people of Western Africa have a lot to teach the world about what it means to live a life of shared humanity. Established centuries ago, *Adinkra* symbols are beautiful and bold imagery that not only represent the rich Akan culture, but also point society to the core principles of justice, equity, balance, and beauty.

More than 30 years ago, The Kendeda Fund (Kendeda, The Fund) founder, Diana Blank, instinctively applied the *Adinkra* principle of *Dame Dame* in her philanthropic approach. *Dame Dame* summarily represents intelligence, strategy, and ingenuity. Diana challenged herself – and the Kendeda team – to think outside the box in its grantmaking. Diana’s journey

was a process of unlearning, learning, and acting. In the first phase of Kendeda’s grantmaking, The Fund supported a vital mix of local nonprofit institutions. Those early Atlanta grantees tended to be established civic institutions, including arts organizations, hospitals, and parks. Yet, over time, Diana’s understanding of shared humanity evolved – and deepened. The city she had long called home was changing rapidly and those changes revealed a multitude of systemic inequities – most racially based – and generations in the making. By nearly every measure – household income, educational outcomes, access to affordable housing, health and wellness, transportation access, and more – Atlanta was a city of “haves” and “have nots.”

Compelled to act, the Kendeda team reimagined its Atlanta strategy, pivoting from civic investments to a new approach centering the urgent needs of the city's Black and brown communities. In 2016, we made an intentional pivot, creating what would come to be known as our 'Atlanta Equity' portfolio. Concurrently Kendeda hired Tené Traylor, an emerging leader whose philanthropic skills and deep community roots provided the vision, capacity, and know-how we needed to address the widening access and opportunity gaps facing Atlanta's Black and brown citizens.

Atlanta Equity is a **catalytic portfolio that seeks to invest in education transformation and economic opportunity in communities of color historically oppressed in metro Atlanta.**

The strategic direction of the portfolio is rooted in a community listening and data-centered learning process that shaped the themes, funding flow, and grantee partner prototype. The portfolio was built on and guided by our founder's commitment to support the dignity of individuals and the sustainability of communities through investments in transformative leaders and ideas.

We understood from the beginning that we could not possibly tackle all of the issues confronting Atlanta's most vulnerable populations, nor would we ever resolve the harm caused by generations of marginalization in the region. We sought instead to engage and lift up a group of "changemakers and pacesetters" – emerging community leaders who could leverage their individual and institutional skills to disrupt the status quo by influencing policy makers and funders, challenging long-held assumptions, and incubating bold, innovative ideas. We resolved that by the time we completed our spend out, we would have helped establish a series of substantive community-wide conversations wherein grantee partners have defined seats at the tables of power, and institutional voices that are clear, convincing, and resonant. Our responsibility was not to pretend that we, Kendeda, were doing the work; our responsibility and commitment was to facilitate and support those on the front lines of community building who truly were.

Kendeda's Atlanta Equity strategy was centered around four broad goals:

- Promote and support the voices and actions of emerging leaders in and around Atlanta who were actively advancing equitable economic opportunity and education transformation.
- Elevate the transformational work happening in Atlanta to the regional and national stage where other funders might be convinced to engage and support it.
- Support partnerships and alliances where Kendeda's reputation could make a measurable (or perceptual) difference in advancing equitable outcomes driven by our grantee partners.
- Lend Kendeda's voice and profile in situations where our presence could help elevate critical community conversations about equitable economic opportunity and education transformation.

In service of those goals, our attention was focused on three discrete audiences:

- Those whose lives we hoped to ultimately **impact** (direct beneficiaries);
- Those whose decisions or authority we hoped to **influence**; and
- The geographies that one program could realistically expect to **reach** and affect.

Between 2016 and 2023 Kendeda awarded more than 185 grants totaling \$37,500,000 in support of racial equity in Atlanta. The collection of stories that follows features interviews with eleven of the core grantee partners who led that work – a cohort that came to be known, affectionately, as ‘The Justice League.’ Each profile reveals a leader who understands the importance of pushing big ideas while pulling others along to join the fight.

We were honored to work alongside such a remarkable group of entrepreneurial, committed, passionate, and grounded leaders. Their stories have resonance beyond the geographic boundaries of Atlanta or the American South; they reveal strategies which we hope can inspire and motivate others doing similar work throughout the nation. While Kendeda was present at an inflection point that we could not have predicted a few years prior, we witnessed extraordinary fortitude from a cohort composed primarily of first-time leaders, guiding organizations and bodies of work that were unproven, underfunded, and often misunderstood.

We hope their stories will motivate and inspire others to continue this vital work long after we are gone.

THE FIGHT TO REIMAGINE PHILANTHROPY IN ATLANTA

Black realities and futures within the city of Atlanta are in jeopardy as the gaps to access, inclusion, and equity continue to widen. Despite millions of dollars of investment from the philanthropic sector – investments made to overwhelmingly white-led nonprofits with overwhelmingly white senior staff and boards – the overall quality of life for Black Atlantans has not improved. Tené Traylor has served as both general and warrior within Atlanta’s philanthropic sector for over two decades. Her approach to philanthropic leadership – a historical-

Tené Traylor

Fund Advisor, The Kendeda Fund

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ly ‘good ole boys and girls club’ – has been to trust and invest in Black community leaders and community-based solutions to solve intractable systemic issues like affordable housing and gentrification, access to quality education, mass incarceration, and generational wealth-building.

The battle to center the voice and contributions of Black leaders and communities in philanthropy to solve systemic inequity has not been without pushback, setbacks, and minefields. Nevertheless, Traylor’s tenacity, organizational acumen, and willpower have been defining trademarks of her activism. From 2016-2022, Traylor served as Fund Advisor of The Kendeda Fund during which time she developed the Atlanta Equity portfolio – a fund specifically designed to advance flourishing, stable, and generational wealth within Atlanta’s Black communities.

By her own admission, Traylor did not seek out a career in philanthropy. Her vocational path – from student activist at Georgia State University to Kendeda to her current role as Vice President of the Center for Nonprofits and Philanthropy at

The Urban Institute – has been an organic push for justice for Black and brown communities in Atlanta, a city she was born in, raised in, and loves. “As a student activist, I lost all my jobs and I needed to pay my rent. I applied for this job at an organization called the United Way. My journey started there because I didn’t even know these types of organizations existed,” Traylor says. “At United Way, I was an assistant to a wonderful group of people and learned how this world of nonprofits and grantmaking actually worked.” After years of strategic grantmaking within a family foundation followed by a long tenure at the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Traylor joined Kendeda. It was Kendeda’s emphasis on equity that piqued her excitement for a new era of grantmaking. “I had never seen a job description that had the word ‘equity’ in the title,” Traylor says. “I immediately sent it out to other people, then one of my colleagues said, ‘I think you should apply for this.’”

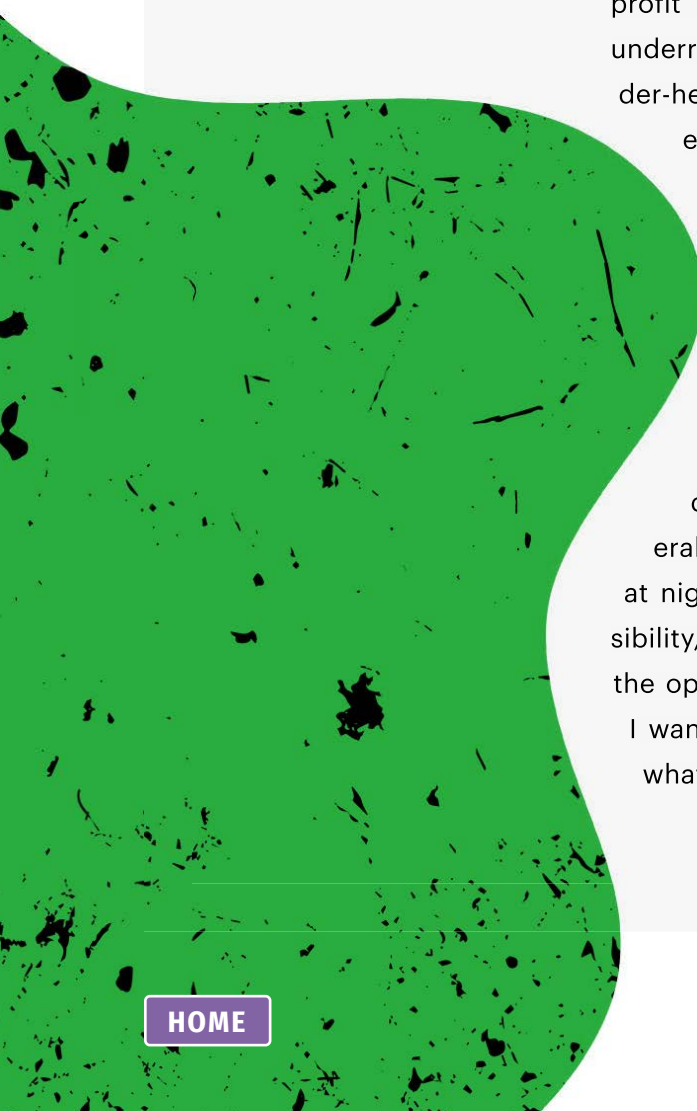
Traylor would merge aspects of her grantmaking experiences to develop Kendeda’s Atlanta

Equity portfolio. “For 10 years, I’d led a grantmaking program called the Neighborhood Fund at the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. We were providing micro grants to communities. We would go to them and learn about what they were doing, and then invest in their work. I took the approach of, if we can do this for micro grants, then we can do this for big grants.” Her strategy was to meet people where they were, hear their ideas, and invest in their vision. Because of her training, she “had the science. I knew what to look for in terms of budgets and audits and boards.”

Kendeda’s Atlanta Equity portfolio remains revolutionary for Atlanta’s funding community. The portfolio is a universe of nonprofits and emergent leaders with shared passions and commitments utilizing intersectional methods to catalyze innovative solutions for the city’s Black communities. Traylor developed the criteria for the Atlanta Equity portfolio after several months of listening. “I talked to everybody. I wanted to do it right.” Traylor was listening for common themes and, more importantly, she was listening for leaders with a hunger to create, test, and enact new

solutions and theories. “When I presented the portfolio, I created a level of findings and recommendations. I put together a portfolio that had two strategies: economic opportunity and education transformation.” At the time, Atlanta “did not have a lot of organizations primed for this. I knew this was going to be a heavy lift. [Either] I was going to give all the money to the Atlanta [Community] Food Bank or the Woodruff Arts Center or we were going to have to grow some organizations pretty quickly. We took the path that was the hardest, but we knew we would have the greater reward.”

Traylor’s journey to embrace the full breadth of the opportunity for bold action did not happen overnight. In addition to pushback from peers and colleagues, Traylor found herself pushing through to lead as her most authentic self. “When I launched this portfolio, I kept hearing ‘you don’t want to be the brown girl funding brown groups.’” She was encouraged to “just play the game, don’t ruffle any feathers. This was coming from prominent Atlanta leaders who knew the size of the portfolio I was creat-




ing. This was happening at every meeting. It was hard because these were folks I had grown up with, that I respected tremendously.” Yet, Atlanta’s philanthropic community had not changed outcomes for Black communities. One of Traylor’s critiques was to challenge over-used non-profit jargon like “marginalized communities, underrepresented, socially marginalized, under-heard, under-voiced” – words that distracted from what her research had made plain – it was Black communities who were becoming a permanent underclass.

Traylor’s external journey paralleled an internal one – to follow her own moral and ethical compass. “How do I do what’s right and help these groups do what’s right? It was getting worse. Literally getting worse. How would I go to sleep at night knowing that I have this big responsibility, and I didn’t even try to be bold? I had the opportunity to do something different and I wanted to do this body of work. And that’s what I tried to do.”

Through Traylor’s leadership, Kendeda seeded nearly \$40 million in ideas, solutions, and leaders to catalyze generational change in Atlanta’s Black and brown communities. Kendeda’s investment was more than funds. Traylor brought thought partnership, wisdom, and courage to help nonprofits shape their programs, organizational capacities, and methods. Kendeda’s grantee partners experienced Traylor as a collaborative partner throughout the gestational processes of innovation as they grappled with new theories and solutions or scaling programs and impact.

“In spite of philanthropy’s challenges, there are people who have reinvented the way that you think about philanthropy. The Kendeda Fund, to me, was a form of protest in philanthropy,” says Rohit Malhotra, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Civic Innovation. “Kendeda challenged everything we know, everything we believed in [about philanthropy]. Who you invest in, how you invest in them, and the way that you invest in them. It changed the power dynamic and long-standing traditions. It really



demonstrated to me what philanthropy could look like.

Kendeda was run by brilliant women who found a way to do that – even though there was an easier way – they chose the right way.”

“My approach, in hindsight, was a venture capitalist approach,” Traylor says. As portfolio manager, Traylor organized the equity funding into three buckets: seed, catalytic, and growth funding. “For the seed funds it was who had the vision and needed initial dollars to get started. The catalytic funding took organizations to the next level. And then growth capital.” The ongoing funding that many of the nonprofits received from Kendeda allowed them to “continue that boldness. They’re no longer grassroots – these are multimillion dollar organizations at this point and not all funded by Kendeda. That is the thing – they went out and got more money.”

“Some of these nonprofits, like the Partnership for Southern Equity and the Atlanta Land Trust, were still in their formational stages. The Atlanta Land Trust was mainly volunteers wanting to

rebuild the organization.” Grantee partner The Georgia Justice Project had been around for over two decades yet Kendeda’s investment elevated them “from doing good work to doing the work that they were built to do.”

Grantee partners like Janelle Williams, Co-Founder and CEO of the Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative, emphasize Traylor’s embodiment as a Black woman executive within Atlanta’s majority white philanthropic sector who led with courage, conscience, and boldness. “Tené Traylor has shown up as a strategic advisor. She showed up in listening mode. She’s shown up as a fearless advocate. She showed up as [both] a student and an expert.”

The impact of her work at Kendeda, specifically her commitment to Black communities and her reliance on her own moral and ethical compass will continue to evergreen through the leaders, visions, and organizations of Kendeda’s Atlanta Equity portfolio. “Atlanta now has a group of leaders who can be explicit about what they’re doing and who they’re doing it for. That was not the case before. That’s transformational.”

FORGING HOPE

THE ATLANTA LAND TRUST INNOVATES SOLUTIONS TO COMBAT GENTRIFICATION

Amanda Rhein

Executive Director, Atlanta Land Trust

The Phoenix Rising. The City Too Busy to Hate. The Black Mecca. Hotlanta. ATL. The city of Atlanta boasts several dazzling monikers recognized the world over. These monikers are the result of a series of branding campaigns – from Reconstruction til now – meant to distract from the hard history of the city and the region. It is a history not unlike other cities in the South that owe white generational wealth, land and agricultural development, and civic infrastructure to its active participation in the slavocracy. A history that continues to disenfranchise African Americans from home ownership opportunities within their own communities.

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 **ATLANTA
LAND TRUST**
STEWARDS OF PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

According to Amanda Rhein, Executive Director of the Atlanta Land Trust (ALT), knowing this history is a crucial starting point to understand the true impact of gentrification and the affordable housing crisis disproportionately impacting Atlanta's African American families. "Having an awareness of the history of housing policy in the United States – how discriminatory it is," says Rhein. "It is important to donate to organizations like ALT, but equally as important is understanding and supporting policy solutions that can help to address [all of] these issues."

Rhein has served as ALT's Executive Director since 2018. At that time the organization was closing in on its decade mark as an institution established to identify sustainable affordable housing options for African American families who were being financially pushed out of their homes, a result of ambitious development projects such as the Atlanta BeltLine.

"You're seeing white families moving into historically Black neighborhoods because there are very few affordable options left in the city.

They are willing to move into neighborhoods that they historically were not willing to move into," Rhein says. "The BeltLine exposed people to neighborhoods that they historically never would have visited, never would have been aware of, which is good in some ways. But at the same time, it's had this unintended negative consequence of people pushing into neighborhoods that are historically Black and were affordable and making them less so today."

ALT advances community land trusts (CLTs) as sustainable pathways to affordable homeownership within the city's limits. CLTs use various sources of capital to acquire and develop homes in a geographic area that are then sold to income-qualified residents. Residents own the houses but lease the land from the CLT. When, and if, the owner decides to sell, the CLT sets a market selling price that accounts for equity accrued but keeps the price at an affordable rate for a future income-qualified resident to purchase. "We're focused on creating permanently affordable housing for both legacy families as well as people who currently can't afford to live in the city," Rhein says.

“We’re focused on creating permanently affordable housing for both legacy families as well as people who currently can’t afford to live in the city.”

–Amanda Rhein

When Rhein first began, she says there was not a lot of support for affordable housing in Atlanta. “Kendeda really took a chance on us. They supported us in a way that I would love to see other funders do. They understood that this was an innovative solution that, quite frankly, needed to be tested.” Rhein would love to see the philanthropic sector “trust their grantees to do the work and know the solutions.”

The problem of affordable housing and injurious gentrification is “overwhelming,” says Rhein. But the collective working to advance solutions gives her hope. “Kendeda has created a coalition of organizations doing equity work in Atlanta. It isn’t just about allocating money, but creating a group of organizations that could support each other and be resources in similar mission driven work.”



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'FOR THE CULTURE'

THE VILLAGE MICRO FUND OPENS FINANCIAL PATHWAYS FOR BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

According to a report published by the Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative¹, on average, white businesses in the city earn \$600,000; Asian businesses earn \$700,000; Hispanic businesses earn \$400,000; and Black businesses earn \$58,000. The report, and the gross disparities it revealed, affirmed what Harriett Williams and Donte Miller already knew: Black business growth is in crisis.

*Donte Miller and
Harriett Williams*

Co-Founders, Village Micro Fund

¹ Racial Wealth Gap," Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative, <https://www.atlantawealthbuilding.org/racial-wealth-gap>.

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In 2012, Williams and Miller co-founded the Village Micro Fund (VMF), a social impact fund that offers education, resources, technical assistance, and cultural support to African American entrepreneurs of small businesses in Atlanta's Westside communities. Black-owned businesses in Atlanta's Westside are suffering due to a lack of infrastructure and support from the finance, philanthropic, and civic sectors. Both Miller and Williams bring corporate experience to VMF – and use it to advance Black business growth within a rapidly gentrifying community.

While earning his BA in accounting and finance at Morehouse College, Miller served as an intern at legacy institutions like Goldman Sachs and the Federal Reserve Bank. Those early career experiences laid bare the history of white supremacy as a functioning framework for modern wealth building. “It was an enlightening experience,” Miller says. “You realize that the systems are functioning exactly the way they’re supposed to – and there’s nobody here building these types of systems for us.”

Williams agrees. “The community has been important for us to help because we live in it. We are very clear to say the word ‘Black with a capital B.’ We help Black people.” Williams has been told that this approach is “divisive” and yet, “once I share the AWBI statistics, people begin to understand.”

VMF supports African American entrepreneurs on Atlanta's Westside with a variety of financial pathways to capital and shared resources. VMF's first loan was a \$6,000 crowdfunding campaign for a new oven for Westy's Pizza Café. “They ended up becoming Marddy's Shared Kitchen and Marketplace. You can see them at Pittsburgh Yards if you go there today.” VMF is currently advancing a Workers Equity Fund that will allow employees to invest in their place of business for future ownership.

Growing up Miller says the only thing he knew about money was all the things you couldn't do without it. “I always felt like my family was brilliant and given the right opportunities would have had a lot of success.” He is particularly

“You realize that the systems are functioning exactly the way they’re supposed to - and there’s nobody here building these types of systems for us.”

– Donte Miller

proud of his grandmother’s entrepreneurial savvy – and dedicates the work of VMF to her. “My grandmother used to literally feed an entire community – everyone always said she should have a restaurant. To us it just made sense. But my grandmother was a poor Black woman in a poor Black neighborhood. Who is going to take the risk and invest in her? No one would ever take a chance on her— except for somebody like me.”

Miller and Williams are grateful to The Kendeda Fund for its early investment in its vision and strategy. “Kendeda was the first institution to take a substantial bet on us,” says Miller. “It was a multi-year commitment that allowed me to hire myself, hire my business partner. I will forever be grateful.” Williams hopes that Kendeda’s investment catalyzes awareness and action. “Black-owned businesses now have more than one place to learn and to be able to fund their business. The ecosystem that we’re creating with other organizations is the hope that I have – that we can continue to partner and really help more people.”

I AM, BECAUSE WE ARE

DOUG AMMAR AND THE GEORGIA JUSTICE PROJECT'S FIGHT TO END MASS INCARCERATION

Doug Ammar

Executive Director, Georgia Justice Project

The mass incarceration of Black and brown people is an insidious and overt systemic practice of democratic, societal, and economic disenfranchisement, an enduring mechanism embedded within the 13th Amendment of the American Constitution designed to oppress freedom and enforce free labor post-Civil War and Reconstruction. For 37 years Doug Ammar, Executive Director of the Georgia Justice Project (GJP), has been a leading – and, at times, lone – advocate for excessively incarcerated, wrongly incarcerated, and previously incarcerated citizens throughout Georgia, the South, and the nation.

GJP has a bi-lateral mission: to reduce the number of individuals under correctional control

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GEORGIA
JUSTICE
PROJECT

in Georgia and the barriers to re-entry for previously, excessively, and wrongly incarcerated individuals. “We’re much more practical than we are philosophical. Some people believe that making a statement makes a difference. We believe that making a difference makes a statement,” says Ammar. “For us, justice means making a difference in someone’s life. Justice means making a difference in changing the structure. It means that people are made aware that there’s a movement and community.”

The GJP advances its work employing a three-pronged correlating strategy that has evolved over time: legal defense services, policy and systems change, and community engagement. It was the impact of the advocacy component that birthed its third strategy of community engagement. “I naively thought that once you got a law passed, you’re sort of done. But it turns out, it was only as good as people know about it, how it’s being used, and if it’s being used appropriately,” Ammar says. “So, we spend a lot of time educating, training, and putting the word out to all kinds of groups.”

Doug began his tenure as a GJP volunteer before even attending law school. He would later join the organization as its second full time hire then, in 1995, he became executive director. “I’ve been doing this a long time, when nobody – nobody – cared about criminal stuff,” Ammar says. However, a pivot in GJP’s work has been to challenge the “us versus them” psychology of the criminal justice system. “We’re expanding the dimensions. If you go to court, you notice it’s often very one dimensional. We’re trying to get the judge, the prosecutor, and our client to work together to elongate and expand the dimensions [of community],” says Ammar. “That’s one reason we get amazing results. For several years now we’ve had 80% of our clients on the criminal offense side leave court with no conviction. That’s exactly the inverse of the national number – almost 80% or more have a criminal conviction once charged with a felony. And it’s not because all our clients are innocent. It’s because we are approaching “us” in a way that eliminates “them” and loosens up the boundaries.”

A driving euphemism of Ammar's has been: "We don't so much fight *against* something as we fight *for* something. When we fight at the individual case level, down at the state Capitol, we are not just saying 'Don't do something' we're saying 'Affirm the movement. Affirm the support. Affirm this kid's worth'."

One of the things Ammar finds encouraging is the landscape of activists trying to reform and re-engineer the criminal justice system in this country – activists like The Kendeda Fund. "It hasn't been just a funding relationship. I've been running a nonprofit for a long time – but just

because somebody drops a big bag of money, it doesn't mean you're gonna know what the heck to do. One of the most thoughtful things they did was to facilitate a planning process – and provide the wisdom we needed to prepare for growth, bigger projects, and advancing our board, staff, clients, and communities," says Ammar.

If you ask Ammar about the future – of mass incarceration, equity, or philanthropy in Atlanta and the South – he will reroute you back to his philosophy of practicality. "We are sitting here in the shadow of Dr. King's reign – [the Southern Christian Leadership Conference building] is directly behind our offices. The Civil Rights movement was about pointing out what was wrong and trying to change it, but it was also a generative notion of the beloved community. It was about removing barriers so that we can be together. That's part of the equation a lot of people forget. We've got to keep remembering what it is we're trying to achieve – and not just the barrier that's in front of us."

"I naively thought that once you got a law passed, you're sort of done."

– Doug Ammar

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

**REDEFINED ATLANTA BUILDS COMMUNITY
FOR A NEW GENERATION OF LEARNERS**

Ed Chang

**Founder and Executive Director
redefinED Atlanta**

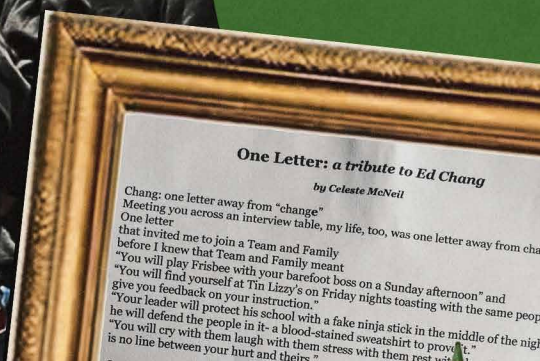
Ed Chang's path to redefinED Atlanta, an education-focused nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that every child in every Atlanta community has access to a high-quality K-12 public school option, is a reverberation of his own memories of access, exclusion, and outcomes. A second generation US citizen, Chang's parents immigrated to the US during a time when the United States had begun to right historic wrongs like the Chinese

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ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Exclusion Act, one of the country's first significant laws restricting immigration. At that time, "The US only allowed 'good Asians' into the country – the ones with a strong educational background," Chang says. "Both of my parents had PhDs, but when they came to New York they could only get jobs as dishwashers and restaurant workers. This is a pretty typical immigrant story."

From New York to Florida, Texas, California, Wisconsin then, finally, Illinois, Chang's family advanced over the years to middle class citizenry. Nevertheless, the lingering impact was that while "education was important to break barriers and move families and generations forward – it's not enough, because this world isn't designed for somebody who looked like [us]."

Chang, a former physical therapist, became a career educator focused on systems change. "It shocked me when I became a teacher in Atlanta and saw what our students were facing in terms of outcomes. Not only did I have to be a science teacher, but I had to be a litera-

cy teacher, a counselor, a caretaker. This is not what education should be for our children. A lot of our kids had doors closed to them before they even realized the door existed."

Prior to becoming the Founding Director of redefinED Atlanta, Chang served as Founding Executive Director and Principal of KIPP Strive Academy. KIPP's success was a radical culture shift – including extended day and year calendars. "We needed more time," Chang says. "And we needed better teaching and better learning." In addition to regular cycles of coaching and feedback, KIPP Strive established "excellence, joy, love, and care – a healthy family culture. Within 4 years we were a top middle school in the district. In the fifth year, we were a National Blue Ribbon School," says Chang. "We sent upwards of 80-90% of our students to college."

In 2016, a group of Atlanta funders came together to create and launch redefinED Atlanta, an organization established to serve as a throughline between families and the shifting realities of education. Ed's time at KIPP taught

him that the one constant in education is change and without a strong throughline, sustainable change would be impossible. That's where redefinED came in. "We wouldn't exist without The Kendeda Fund to be honest. Kendeda has been a key funder, thought partner, and critical thinker in the history of this organization."

redefinED Atlanta innovates education models and delivery systems and challenges embedded inequities that have not historically supported the growth and development of Black and brown students. "We have been able to support the launch of community-centered, parent-led empowerment organizations. Parents can now have a direct audience with the superintendent and demand change. They are training other parents and saying 'You aren't invisible. You do have a voice. Here's how to talk to your principal. Here's how to advocate for your child. Here's how to speak to the school board. Here's how to advocate for systems change. This didn't exist in our city before."

**"We needed more time...
And we needed better
teaching and better
learning."**

– Ed Chang



ENDANGERED IDENTITIES, POTENTIAL REALITIES

GROVE PARK FOUNDATION AND THE FIGHT TO RESTORE A COMMUNITY

Gavin McGuire

Executive Director, Grove Park Foundation

For many years, the city of Atlanta has been at a significant moral and ethical crossroads related to African American economic growth, housing affordability, and the displacement of communities within the city limits. Citywide economic development projects like the Atlanta BeltLine, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, and the Emerald Corridor – designed to bring innovation, jobs, and vibrancy to the city – have inadvertently continued to advance inequity between the city's white and Black residents.

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GROVE PARK

Matilda Pl

Hawthorne PKWY NW

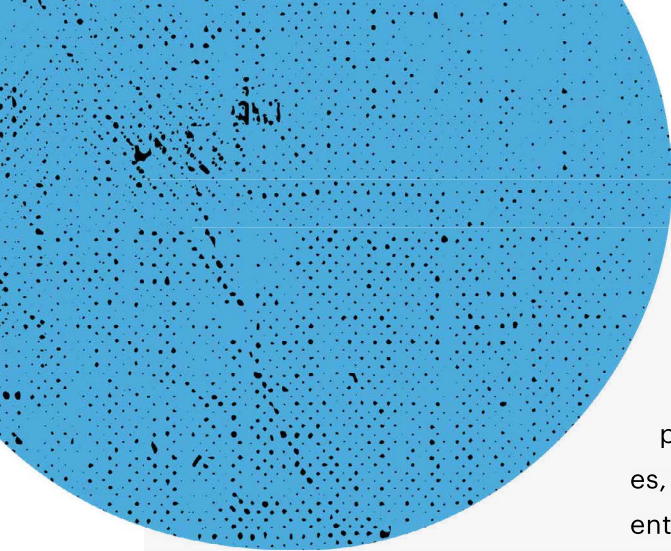
FREE GROCERIES

EMERGENCY

COMMUNITY

RESOURCES

GROVE PARK



Principles of progress and expediency have forced African American families out of the communities that many have lived in for generations. The long-term impacts on these communities – tax increases, predatory investors, and a surge in new entrepreneurship that often displaces African American businesses – is also ironically derailing incoming Black families from their desires to participate in the heritage and legacy of these communities through home ownership.

Areas like Grove Park – a node on the west-side of Atlanta located within the community formerly known as Bankhead on Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway – was considered undesirable to white families for decades. It is now a battleground for the soul of the city.

Gavin McGuire, Executive Director of the Grove Park Foundation, is hoping to mitigate these impacts on existing and future African American community members. “When people heard of Bankhead they thought about crime and poverty, which was true, but the essence of this community was not captured.

The resiliency of people and the doctors, lawyers, teachers, and great individuals who contributed to Atlanta’s culture.”

Grove Park Foundation’s mission is to fight gentrification, but also to create the optimal conditions for the community to thrive. Its strategic focus areas include mitigating displacement and disruption; preparing residents for current and future opportunities; and building the internal and external capacity and infrastructure to “sustain the change that the community would love to see.” As executive director, McGuire is also investing in affordable housing options for residents and a system of support for African American entrepreneurs.

Many of the residents who have lived within the Grove Park community for decades – some for generations – were unaware that Grove Park was the original name for an area they generally referred to as Westlake or Bankhead. “The first thing is to build the future with respect to the past,” McGuire says. “Often, when people come in to make a community better, they forget about the contributions or the voice of

“The first thing is to build the future with respect to the past.”

– Gavin McGuire

people who are living here. We are developing a collective impact framework so that we can see success in perpetuity. We have respect for the nonprofits who have been here for years, who may not get the notoriety or have the marquee on the door, but they’ve been doing the work.”

McGuire brings a background in youth and community development in Atlanta and elsewhere to the role of executive director, a position he has held since 2021. Grove Park Foundation has leveraged McGuire’s skills in partnerships with the Atlanta Public Schools, KIPP Schools, the YMCA, and other unique nonprofits like the Whitefoord Clinic.

Reflecting on the relationship between The Kendeda Fund and the Grove Park Foundation McGuire noted the impetus and impact on the growth and evolution of both the community as well as himself. The Kendeda Fund was the “catalyst for a lot of great momentum within the community,” Maguire says. “The investments Kendeda made provided the confidence for the funding community and other stakeholders to see the vision.” The partnership has been more than an investment in the work in the community – it has also been an investment in its leadership. “I participated in a retreat, and even the retreat Kendeda led was not conventional. There was a holistic focus on health, self-care, and wellness – for us as leaders.”

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THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

THE ATLANTA WEALTH BUILDING INITIATIVE AND THE MOVEMENT TO BUILD BLACK GENERATIONAL WEALTH

Janelle Williams

**Co-Founder and Executive Director
Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative**

In Pulitzer Prize winner Trymaine Lee's contribution to The 1619 Project, he writes "Today's racial wealth gap is perhaps the most glaring legacy of American slavery and the violent economic dispossession that followed." The journey to Black economic emancipation has been riddled with systemic land mines – the empty promises of Reconstruction, mismanagement of the Freedman's Savings Bank, massacres of thriving communities like "Black Wall Street," the discriminatory policies of Jim and Jane Crow. Lee writes, "wealth was taken before it had an opportunity to grow."

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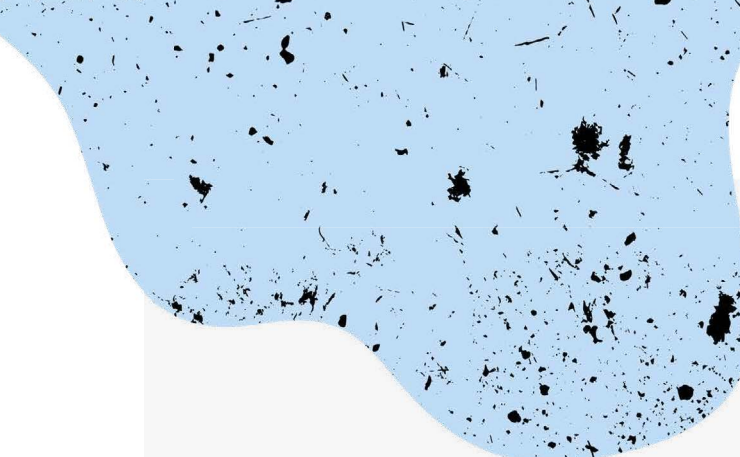
***HERO**

**ADDRESSING
THE RACIAL
WEALTH GAP**

DEMOCRATIZING
ECON

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RIGHT



If existing practices remain the same, “by 2053 economists are predicting that Black wealth will be zero,” says Janelle Williams, Co-Founder and CEO of the Atlanta Wealth Building Initiative (AWBI).

“Black wealth continues to aggressively erode in this country. This is not only a moral crisis, it is also an economic crisis. Persistent economic inequity not only compromises communities, it compromises and constrains the overall economy.”

Six years ago Williams and a cross-sector of Atlanta leadership brainstormed and established AWBI to address Black income inequality in the city. “AWBI is a catalytic nonprofit that reflects our community activists, advocates, and scholars working to build Black wealth in Atlanta and throughout the South. AWBI was designed to think about dynamic strategies through policy, research, investment, and innovative ideas and practices. Community wealth, in particular, is “advancing strategies that not only benefit an

individual, but there’s a multiplier opportunity where several residents in a given place benefit because of specific investments.”

Williams brings a background of leadership within philanthropic and economic sectors to AWBI – and the embodiment of deeply lived experiences that carry a responsibility to advocate for the communities from which she descends. “I am a daughter of the Deep South, originally from Trinidad and Tobago,” Williams says. “I am an unapologetic Black woman committed to advancing Black wealth for Black liberation. I’m a proud daughter, mother, sister, and friend. Those are the roles that really matter to me in my life and hold me accountable.”

Williams says that AWBI is “not trying to compete with other nonprofits. And we’re not trying to create an industry where the work maintains the industry instead of helping people and places. We’ve been explicit about our value proposition, where we are in this broader ecosystem. To not be redundant, but to actually lean into

our organizational values of courage and impact – speaking to the gaps and being leaders to address some of those gaps.”

In its six years, AWBI has successfully advanced groundbreaking research that exposes the demographic disparities of business performance, and what it means to have shared prosperity in our city. “Our research gives people not only data but the language to address these ideas. We can have nuanced conversations about how to grow and scale Black-owned businesses.” In addition to research and data, AWBI has leveraged and

granted millions in sponsorship, grants, and technical assistance.

While AWBI envisions eventually expanding its impact, for now its work is firmly situated within Atlanta and, by extension, the South. “Too many national conversations ignore Southern places and regions,” Williams says. “Atlanta has one of the highest concentrations of Fortune 500 and 1000 companies in our region. When you look at a southern economic engine that has all this economic activity, a history of civil rights, and is one of the most visible Black meccas of the American South, to still see the city largely characterized by deep income inequality and residential segregation— where Black children live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty – that’s problematic.”

As an organizational partner, Williams is indebted to The Kendeda Fund and partnerships with leaders like Tené Traylor. “This is not transactional work for them – Kendeda is here for the long run. I hope that there’s some documentation of a playbook – this work has made a world of difference.”

“Too many national conversations ignore Southern places and regions.”

– Janelle Williams

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ENVISIONING NEW FRAMEWORKS

ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY PARTNERS CHALLENGES SYSTEMIC INEQUITY IN ATLANTA HOUSING

Enterprise Community Partners (Enterprise) Southeast invests in solutions and people that advance thriving, wholeness, and generational wealth amongst Atlanta's Black residents. As Vice President of the Southeast office, Meaghan Vlkovic "brings what Enterprise has in terms of capital and solutions to increase the affordable housing supply and advocate for racial equity at the local level." Enterprise Southeast has four correlating priorities: the preservation of affordable housing in Atlanta; a coordinated investment initiative to provide organizations with affordable

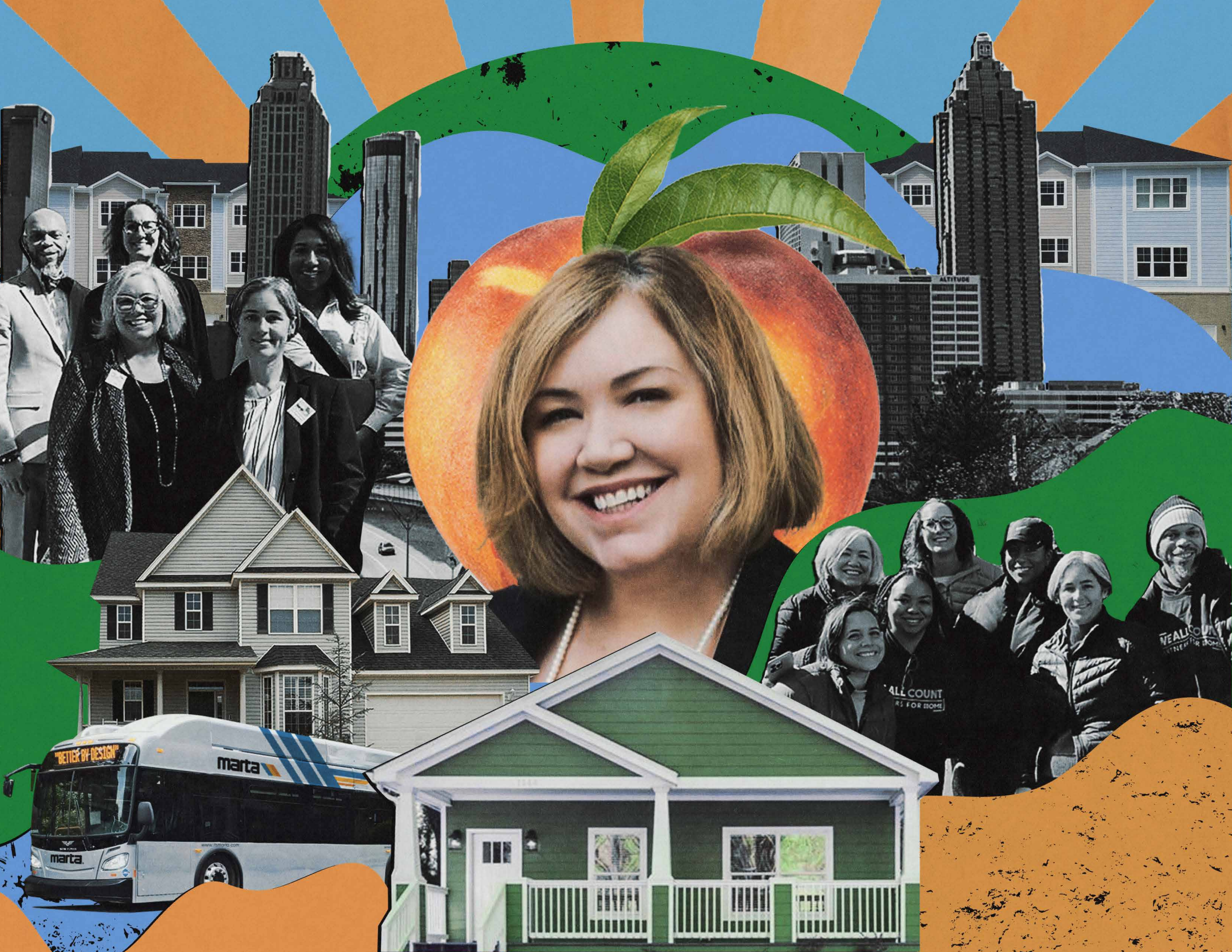
Meaghan Vlkovic

**Vice President, Southeast Office
Enterprise Community Partners**

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housing programs with a central access point to funders; a faith-based component that provides technical assistance to houses of worship that desire to innovate their assets to include affordable housing; and affordable housing policy advocacy.

This last initiative has become an urgent priority and active engagement with partner-funders like The Kendeda Fund. Enterprise's relationship with Kendeda has evolved over many years. Even prior to Vlkovic's tenure in the southeast, Kendeda invested in Enterprise's Enterprise Green Communities certification, a green and energy certification of multifamily rental properties. More recently, Vlkovic has partnered with Kendeda to gain support for its coordinated investment initiative – the “funder collective” – and its policy work.

Enterprise Southeast lobbies for policy protections that will support renters – a significant percentage of whom are people of color – from long-term housing instability. In addition to capped security deposits and warranties of

habitability, the organization fights for eviction provisions. “In Atlanta, if I'm a renter and I don't pay on the day it's due, the landlord can file for an eviction immediately,” Vlkovic says. Even if the renter pays within the week “that eviction filing stands and will remain a problem when they want to leave.” For the past several legislative sessions, Enterprise Southeast has advocated for a bill that would require landlords of multi-family properties to provide a seven day written notice before filing for an eviction. Unfortunately, the bill, which passed the House, never made it to a vote. “The Georgia Apartment Association distributed a flyer [against the bill]. A coalition of landlords derailed what we thought was going to be historic renter protection in Georgia. Those are the barriers and challenges we are up against.”

Despite setbacks, Enterprise Southeast continues undaunted to advance its mission. Programs like Equitable Path Forward allows them to support wealth-building through its affordable housing development platform. “The program ensures that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) developers get a fair

chance at becoming an affordable housing developer. It is a funding source to invest in BIPOC developers' for-profit and nonprofit buildings. It allows them to move their real estate pipeline forward whether it be acquisitions, predevelopment, or other." The loans range from \$750,000 to \$3 million.

Enterprise Southeast's relationship with Kendeda has been an essential partnership. "Tené Traylor was a real partner. She was a thought leader in a lot of what we shaped and moved forward, and she took a risk investing in a vision that we had around the funders collective and the policy work. It was an incredible partnership."

"The program ensures that BIPOC developers get a fair chance at becoming an affordable housing developer in the contract."

– Meaghan Vlkovic

A WORLD OF SHARED HUMANITY

THE ATLANTA VOLUNTEER LAWYERS FOUNDATION
EXPANDS ITS BOUNDARIES TO REALIZE JUSTICE

Michael Lucas

**Executive Director, Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers
Foundation**

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* – a worldview that functions throughout the continent of Africa – is a deeply communal one. It is loosely translated as “my humanity is inextricably bound within yours” or, more popularly, “I am, because we are.” *Ubuntu* is a stark contrast to an epistemological worldview of domination, Manifest Destiny, and imperialism – ideologies

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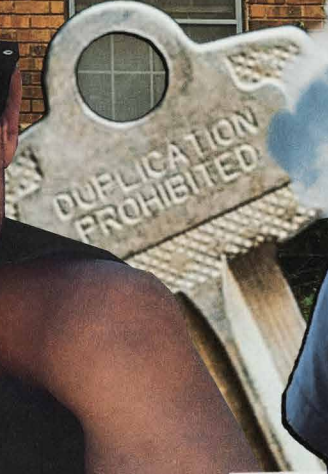
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EVICCTIONS
HURT MY
SCHOOL

TURN UP
&
TURK OUT

STABLE HOMES
SCHOOLS

diversity
volunteer
lawyers
foundation



The best
legal representation
money can't buy



that foreground the establishment of the United States. This fundamental difference – power versus community – lies at the core of moral and ethical dilemmas that have not only become entrenched within the social fabric of this country but have come to define it as a nation.

There are few industries that define power in the United States more aptly than law, particularly when used amorally. However, Michael Lucas, Executive Director of the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation (AVLF), and his team embody the spirit of *Ubuntu* not only in its mission delivery, but also in the practical makeup of its organization. AVLF’s holistic team of lawyers, social workers, and community advocates who provide free legal services to low income tenants and survivors of intimate partner abuse support their clients by providing them with a diversity of perspective and a cabal of advocates.

Lucas has been at AVLF for 14 years, serving as executive director since 2020. In his previous role as Deputy Director, Lucas led the effort to expand the organization from one that was a “staff of 10 and pretty focused [internally] on

creating opportunities for volunteer lawyers to an organization that is now solely community and client-centered with 11 satellite offices in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) neighborhoods where our services are needed, two offices within the courthouse, a mobile advocacy unit to reach survivors wherever they are, and a staff of almost 60 – as many social workers as lawyers.”

This shift has enabled Lucas as executive director to “connect our work to things that resonated beyond the courthouse – like the impact of these issues on neighborhoods and on schools – and how we not only reach those folks, but actually put our organization into those communities physically.”

AVLF held strong convictions around the transformational power of working in ways that were authentically and physically connected to the community, but partners who understood and shared this long-range vision were a rarity. “I’ve always appreciated The Kendeda Fund for recognizing the setup needed for that kind of transformation. We were making generation-

al commitments to a neighborhood and really asking for their trust when we put our teams full time in those offices,” Lucas says. “In the usual nonprofit funding world, that’s risky. Year after year unrestricted funding that gives you the flexibility to do that kind of thing is rare. We felt a lot of risk going into a community asking for their trust and then being one of those organizations that, despite good intentions, disappears after a few years. Finding sustainable funding for that kind of growth and to keep those commitments was the biggest challenge.”

Lucas finds hope – and kinship – for an equitable Atlanta amongst Kendeda’s grantee partners. “The Center for Civic Innovation, and Rohit [Maholtra], are part of a generation of civic leaders who are unafraid to call out a lot of what I call out, but much bolder than I am,” says Lucas. “To call out racism in philanthropy and the way [we] give lip service to issues. That gives me hope. It feels like there’s a little more space and respect for listening than there was before. I hope I’m not naive about that. That credit goes to those in the community, many of whom are Kendeda grantees, who are insisting on being heard and doing it so well that it can’t be ignored.”

“My humanity is inextricably bound within yours.”

– Ubuntu Translation

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AN AKOBEN FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SOUTHERN EQUITY
ADVANCES JUST FUTURES FOR ALL ATLANTANS

Nathaniel Smith

**Founder, Partnership for
Southern Equity**

A *dinkra* are the religious-cultural symbology of the Akan people in Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire. A compendium of more than 200 symbols – each with its own meaning – *adinkra* are proverbs that guide the Akan people through the cycles of life. The *Akoben* is symbolized as a war horn. It has historically been interpreted as a rallying cry, a call to amass resources

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Zone 6

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Atlanta
CITY LIMIT

and prepare for battle. The *Akoban* functions across the African Diaspora as a clarion call to remain vigilant in the face of systemic injustice and oppression.

Nathaniel Smith, founder of the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), embodies the *Akoban*'s urgency for action – especially on behalf of Atlanta's homegrown residents who remain perpetually disenfranchised from the region's economic and quality of life gains. A child of Southern Freedom Movement activists, Smith possesses the lifeblood of a soldier for justice. "We can't be afraid to advocate," Smith says. "We will never negotiate our way into equity. It's not going to happen for everyday people. So, what do we do? Allow the transformational power of love to lead the way, and the way that you choose to show up, even when your voice is shaking. I think now we're in a time where we need more people to be courageous."

Since 2012, PSE has advanced and supported transformational place-based equity outcomes across sectors of energy, health, development,

and economic opportunity by centering equity as the foundational starting point for justice. A proud Atlanta native – "I am from Zone 6. A graduate of Morehouse College. A husband and a father with a deep love for Atlanta and the South" – the places and communities Smith loves are endangered. "Working class Black people are hurting in the city of Atlanta, no matter where they live," Smith says. "There are major issues related to quality transportation and affordable housing. They have been sequestered within the southern part of our region because they can't afford housing in the northern part where most of the jobs are. Their communities are being gentrified. Representation is now found on murals, and not within the communities that they lived in, because they can't afford to live there anymore."

Smith believes in the power of the South – with Atlanta leading the way – to advance just and equitable realities for its disenfranchised communities, but it will take consistency, deep commitment to change, and maximum effort. "Equity won't be realized through pretty re-

ports. Or eloquent speakers. We have to work on investing in organizations like PSE, and other organizations, in order to continue to run this race. You have some funders that expect for organizations like PSE to undo structural racism in a grant cycle, and that doesn't happen. You need time, support, and a deep commitment to institution-building and systems change, which is a long-term proposition."

During PSE's formational days, challenging a long history of inbred systemic supremacy within the region's civic, corporate, and philanthropic sectors was not popular or well received by potential PSE partners and/or local philanthropic entities. Smith is grateful to partners like The Kendeda Fund as comrades in the struggle. "Kendeda provided a level of unconditional support. They were willing to leverage their dollars in ways that would disrupt the status quo. They were willing to speak out. They looked at us – the grantee – as a partner."

**"I think now we're
in a time where we
need more people
to be courageous."**

– Nathaniel Smith

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

THE CENTER FOR CIVIC INNOVATION AMPLIFIES A NEW GENERATION OF VOICES

Rohit Malhotra

**Founder and Executive Director
The Center for Civic Innovation**

The Center for Civic Innovation (CCI) is an incubator that generates equity-driven models of engagement for the next generation of Atlanta's civic, philanthropic, and nonprofit leaders. CCI Founder and Executive Director Rohit Malhotra is a leader of leaders – a drum major for a cadre of community leaders who “really gave a damn about the city but were

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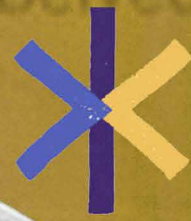
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Atlanta

EAST LAKE

DEVELOP



SOUTH ATLANTA

THOMASVILLE
HEIGHTS



VENETIAN HILLS

SOUTH ATLANTA

THOMASVILLE

Gresham Park

Candler

Pant

EAST LAKE

EAST LAKE
TERRACE

also very concerned about where it was going. We wanted to create a place where we could reinvent the conversation.”

In 2013, “we were this ragtag group of folks who would get together in an abandoned building on the southside of downtown Atlanta,” Malhotra says. “Atlanta needed a place to have honest conversations about what’s going on. At the time, if you wanted to have an honest conversation about Atlanta, you had to go to the top floor of the 191 building, in the Commerce Club, with a jacket on.”

CCI’s core work is research and data-gathering on social and economic inequality in Atlanta. Its community-based initiatives and impacts all flow from the well of this initial stream. “We use this information to strengthen civic participation, community participation, and engagement in Atlanta,” Malhotra says. CCI’s research amplifies the trajectories of wealth, housing, and income inequality that continue to stagnate the city’s BIPOC residents.

In addition to a fellowship program, which invests in the solutions of community leaders and advocates, CCI has had a direct impact on local public policy. “We did the first evaluation of Atlanta’s Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system since 1978,” Malhotra says. “It took us three years. The recommendations that emerged have changed the way that the city’s Department of Planning thinks about neighborhood empowerment work.”

“Civic engagement is about centering the voices who have the most to lose in a city that is changing by using their narrative but not meeting their needs,” Malhotra says. “In Atlanta, that means how do we center the voices of Black communities who designed the playbook for what makes Atlanta the center of culture and civics yet are on the chopping block for decisions that are going to be made that will affect their lives and generations to come? How do they have a seat at the decision making table? It isn’t just about quantity. It’s about ensuring that we have a representative body of people at the table helping the city of Atlanta make better decisions.”

CCI has also utilized its data to “call the philanthropic sector to task. The vast majority of relief and response dollars [during the height of the coronavirus pandemic] went to non-Black, non-community led organizations.” Yet, “I am very cognizant of the fact that in spite of philanthropy’s challenges, there are people who have reinvented the way that you think about philanthropy. Kendeda invested in folks who can be perceived as troublemakers, agitators, or disruptors,” Malhotra says. “I love that they translated our emotion as a form of necessary progress.”

“Civic engagement is about centering the voices who have the most to lose in a city that is changing by using their narrative but not meeting their needs.”

– Rohit Malhotra

A LEADERSHIP OF BELONGING

PROGEORGIA WANTS EVERYONE'S VOTES AND VOICES TO COUNT AND TO MATTER

Tamieka Atkins

Executive Director, ProGeorgia

Tamieka Atkins, Executive Director of ProGeorgia, is called to a leadership of belonging. ProGeorgia is a coalition of 60+ organizations – “the Table” as Atkins calls it – that intricately weaves voter registration and civic engagement work across the state “for deeper impact, more efficacy, and the strategic use of funds to ensure that citizens who are marginalized, most dis-



TIME FOR
CHANGE

I'm a
Georgia
Voter

VOTE

U.S. MAIL

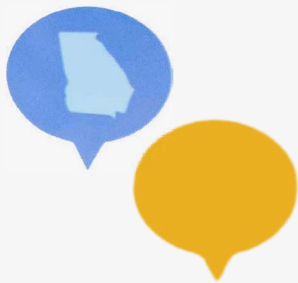


enfranchised, and not included in our democracy are engaged and involved in the electoral process.” As executive director and head of the table, Atkins guides and facilitates ProGeorgia’s strategic oversight to catalyze partnerships and circumvent practices of exclusion that have historically – and continue to – minoritize certain citizens, blocking their access and right to participate fully in US democracy.

Atkins’ introduction to her life’s work had a jarring beginning. In 1999, Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean student, was shot 41 times and murdered by New York police. The officers were acquitted of second-degree murder charges. “It was then that things crystallized for me – when I realized that our system isn’t working. It does not work for Black and brown folks,” Atkins says. “I really didn’t think [the officers] were going to be acquitted. I was 19/20 years old at the time, but it was a wake-up call.” Atkins began organizing liberation movements as a student at Hunter College in New York, then joined Amnesty International USA and later the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA).

It was during her time organizing with NDWA that she learned about “the Table” and fell organically into civic engagement work. “I started as a table partner. You don’t have to be a voting rights organization to advocate for voting rights.” In 2023, ProGeorgia – a nonpartisan organization – marked a decade as an organizational entity. “Over the past 10 years we’ve seen just a growth in how widespread our voter registration and voter education efforts can reach. We’ve been able to advance our mission by looking at our partner organizations as whole organizations, and not just what they can do for voter registration.” This has meant looking at the overall operating capacity of partner organizations and providing technical and financial support where needed. “We’ve seen the universe of people that we talk to go from 300,000 to 4 million over the course of 10 years.”

Atkins’ hope for democracy lies in the commitment of the youth. “The hard transformation always comes from young people. I have seen some of the actions that young people have taken in the last couple of years. The pushback,



the fight back. What they say – and then do – in spite of whatever fear they might be feeling. I think that’s what we rest our hope on – the out-of-the-box thinking, passion, and fire of young people.”

As a Kendeda Fund grantee, Atkins and ProGeorgia received more than money. She received mentorship, partnership, and a kinship space. “I consider good philanthropy to include thought partnership,” Atkins says. “When I started as ED, Tené Traylor reached out to me. She didn’t know

“I think that’s what we rest our hope on - the out-of-the-box thinking, passion, and fire of young people.”

– Tamieka Atkins

me, but she knew that a young Black woman was running the table and she said ‘I want to support you.’”

Atkins salutes Traylor’s holistic approach to philanthropic leadership, especially as an African American woman executive. “Kendeda gave Tené the space to honor the way she felt she needed to do the work.” One clear example for Atkins is a leadership retreat Kendeda led with Traylor at the helm and facilitated by Chrysalis Lab. “Most of my life I overlooked the importance of self-care. That’s not a coincidence since I’m a Black woman,” Atkins says. “But ultimately, we can’t have a good vision for what we want things to be if we’re not also working on ourselves or else we repeat the same mistakes. We don’t have innovative ideas and campaigns. We’re not breaking paradigms. Kendeda held a retreat – and I hate retreats for so many reasons – but this one was fun, inspiring, thought-provoking, and included elements of self-care. That retreat stands out as one of the best I have ever been to. That stands out to me about who Kendeda is.”

A MODEL OF RESTORATIVE PHILANTHROPY

CHRYSLIS LAB FACILITATES PARADIGM SHIFTS AND LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA

Kim Anderson and Lesley Grady

Co-Principals, Chrysalis Lab

Sankofa is a philosophy and practice derived from Ghana that translates as “it is not taboo to retrieve what is in danger of being lost.” The image of *sankofa* in the Ghanaian *adinkra* symbology is of a bird with an egg in its beak, its feet planted firmly forward and its head looking back. This image implies that it is critical to hold on to the lessons and wisdom of the past to build a strong and inclusive future.

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BLACK
LIVES
MATTER



Kim Anderson and Lesley Grady are the co-founders and co-principals of Chrysalis Lab, a social impact strategy firm committed to supporting organizations with developing new paradigms of thought, leadership, and process grounded in equity and justice. As vanguards of vision across Atlanta's nonprofit, civic, and philanthropic sectors, they have partnered with The Kendeda Fund (Kendeda, The Fund) on multiple initiatives throughout their careers, and applaud The Fund's bold approach to manifesting a sankofic principle in their work and interactions across its diverse portfolios.

"Kendeda had great appreciation and regard for the legacy and promise of true justice and equality while actively engaged in ensuring this promise manifested. Philanthropy is, at its core, making a bet on ideas, strategies, relationships, and leaders, and Kendeda recognized that its highest contribution was to hold this vision and support strong, smart nonprofit leadership that would make it a reality," says Grady. "This bold Kendeda Fund invest-

ment was intended to help build the infrastructure for a transformed civic sector in Atlanta."

As C-suite and board leaders, Grady and Anderson collectively possess decades of prolific executive and thought leadership experience. They have built bridges across industries and geographies to improve outcomes for the region's most structurally vulnerable populations. And yet, as African American women they are also members of these communities, with the same collective trauma of functioning racism and facing the same uphill battle for justice. In 2020, the long-time friends and co-conspirators received The Fund's support to launch Chrysalis Lab to "redefine and reimagine the social sector – what it can be and what it should be, particularly for Black people," Grady says.

"We were tired of wearing the mask," Anderson says, "the shackles imposed on Black leaders' capacity to contribute substantial solutions to systemic inequities – inequalities which have its roots firmly in the functioning legacy of white supremacy."

Anderson further remarks, “Funders will [typically] come into the room and tell you what they want. At that point, you’re not having a conversation about equity because most philanthropy does not want to engage in the uncomfortable conversation about ‘why’ these conditions exist. Kendeda was committed to a different paradigm; The Fund exemplified bold, caring, trust-based philanthropy that was determined to be distinct, stepping up decisively and courageously to examine and acknowledge past inequities.”

Chrysalis Lab seeks to “break the mold” for a new generation of leaders to harness their capacity – and the potential of expanded resources and relationships that could constructively co-exist between funders, nonprofits, and communities.

“If you put The Kendeda Fund [Atlanta] Equity portfolio leaders’ side by side with other non-profit leaders in this community, you can see a distinct difference,” Grady says. “Buoyed by the strategic advocacy of Tené Traylor, a passionate and very visible Black woman, these leaders

possess a strong sense of self-confidence and agency that is creatively innovating. This is because they’re not trying to please a funder and they can focus on the long-term outcomes they envision.”

The future of equitable grantmaking is a long game, and the story is still being written. “The jury is still out,” Anderson says. “We don’t know whether we’ve had the impact and ignited the change that we need and imagined. The most important thing is: how do we weave this new way of being between philanthropies and nonprofits into the fabric of the city and our communities?”

The two pioneering thought leaders offer the following thoughts as a challenge and road map for other philanthropists who are considering restorative and equitable grantmaking in Atlanta, given The Kendeda Fund’s legacy and impact.



COURAGEOUS INVESTMENTS

The Kendeda Fund provided deep and nuanced support for African American and BIPOC nonprofit leaders. “When Kendeda established its Atlanta Equity portfolio, these social justice leaders – younger, people of color, more women – had not consistently attended specialized nonprofit programs...and in many cases this was the first nonprofit they’d ever run,” Grady says. “So, while they were clearly brilliant with good ideas and a lot of passion, Kendeda took a bet on their leadership and management potential. Today, these leaders are national and international thought leaders, presenters, and influencers; and they have inspired others to step up boldly.”

UNWAVERING AUTHENTICITY

Seemingly countless leaders have made public declarations that Black Lives Matter in corporate, civic, nonprofit, and philanthropic spaces – declarations that failed to deliver on any

noticeably substantive organizational changes rooted in equity or justice. Anderson credits Kendeda with “walking the talk, with an unwavering and demonstrative commitment to dig deep – deeper than ever – to remove unconscious blinders about race, equity, and inclusion.” Several Atlanta-based family and small foundations are now pursuing a path to create more equitable access and inclusion and to reshape their relationships in the community. This is in large part due to The Fund’s initiative and influence.

SUPPORT FOR THE “WHOLE” LEADER

The Kendeda Fund invested not only in grantees’ professional achievement, management capacity, and financial stability, but also their physical, mental, and social wellbeing, recognizing that these leaders were themselves enveloped in the trauma of racism even as they fought against it. In 2021, The Fund brought its Atlanta Equity portfolio leaders together for a three-day retreat: ‘Renew, Reflect, Reimagine’.

The gathering was an opportunity for networking and collaboration and, more importantly, pathways to reconnect with their passions, deepen collegial bonds, and reflect on personal needs. Many of these leaders regard this unique and wholesome experience as a highlight of their professional path.

ESTABLISHING SOCIAL NETWORKS

Kendeda’s support anticipated that the leaders in its Atlanta Equity portfolio would enthusiastically and strategically engage in the necessary cross-sector coalition-building that is essential to addressing the thorny issues of race, wealth disparity, and discrimination bias in our educational, environmental, health, financial, and justice systems. “An enduring impact of The Fund’s investment in Atlanta has been the establishment of a working kinship group with synergistic points of collaboration – and shared investment – demonstrated by multiple partnerships and collaborations between and among grantees,” Anderson says.

WILLINGNESS TO BE DIFFERENT

Kendeda did not take the path of least resistance by aligning with metro Atlanta grantmakers, most of whom were traditionally conservative, utilizing a transactional approach to philanthropy. By being explicit about their intention to be an ally and in their humility in partnering “behind the scenes,” The Fund demonstrated that they were unafraid of challenging systems rooted in supremacist norms. Portfolio leaders and local observers credit Kendeda’s inclusive giving and learning style for bolstering their confidence and capacity to challenge and to push funders towards a new way of being.

LEARNING ALONGSIDE OTHERS

The Kendeda Fund donor has been explicit that her philanthropy practice was one of learning and growing alongside grantees. This philosophical practice signaled a power shift in tradi-

tional philanthropic relationships and went beyond money. One of the nuances of the Atlanta Equity portfolio’s crop of leaders has been “to raise the profile of other forms of capital (e.g., social, experiential, intellectual, and cultural) – not just financial – and how they all bind together,” Anderson says. “Grantees were told, ‘yes, we have financial resources, but what we’re really seeking is transformative thinking.’ That unleashed a different working relationship and impact – not just for us individually, or for our respective institutions, but for the region and its communities.”

SHARING LESSONS LEARNED

In its early years, The Kendeda Fund was a “known secret” in terms of its bold allyship with overlooked leaders and nonprofits. As a result of this approach, it took years to fully appreciate its strategic and holistic approach to grant-making. Eventually it became clear that Kendeda had pioneered “trust-based philanthropy” before the concept and term became popular.

Earlier, more deliberate and visible articulation of its approach and learnings by Kendeda may have inspired and accelerated overdue introspection in the sector.

ESTABLISHING NEW METRICS

Corporate terms and philosophies – key performance indicators, dashboards, outcomes, and objectives – have gained appeal in the civic sector and become the norm for many funders and key stakeholders. However, the work of eradicating inequity and systemic injustice will not conform neatly to traditional processes and timelines. Despite providing strategy, management, and fiscal expertise to grantees, Kendeda did not prioritize a quantitative “tally” of the impact achieved through its nonprofit partners. The Fund recognized that it will require an intensive un-learning and re-learning journey on the compounded history of supremacy and structural inequity embedded into philanthropic giving to fully intuit the collective impact of the multi-million-dollar invest-

ment made through the Atlanta Equity portfolio and to establish new paradigms of philanthropy. This journey was, and continues to be, difficult to grasp and emulate for most of the region's funders, oriented to equate quantitative metrics as the key – and in some cases, sole – indicators of success.

The Kendeda Fund Atlanta Equity portfolio leaders represented many new voices and perspectives whose efforts had been largely unsupported by the region's institutional funders. "Kendeda sought to ensure that when it was time for The Fund to 'turn off the lights' there would be resilient leaders in place equipped to create and sustain long term change, build new systems, and identify and tackle other broken, impotent systems in the future," says Anderson.

Noted poet and Black feminist Audre Lorde famously wrote: 'The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house.' Grady says, "Thanks in large part to the unwavering commitment of The Kendeda Fund, "equity" is now a philanthropic conversation in Atlanta. We are naming it and shifting towards a different kind of conversation, not in every room, but in many more. Through its Atlanta Equity portfolio, The Fund equipped leaders and organizations with new tools to fight for justice. That's the sort of "dismantling of structures" – actions large and small – that's required. But it will take will, desire, time, persistence, and great love."



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