



## The Next Step: Shaping a New Narrative



**P**hilanthropy has a historic opportunity to write a new narrative about the American South.

As we've seen throughout this report, we are at a moment in time when philanthropy is taking significant steps to build a stronger, more equitable South. We are changing the way we interact with our communities. We are raising our voices to amplify our grantmaking. And we are acting more purposefully and courageously.

Now, our challenge is to keep it up to build on our progress.

As I reflect on the turbulent time we're living through, I see echoes of the 1960s. That landmark decade saw advocates rally together to push for desegregation and protest the Vietnam War. It brought the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the landmark Voting Rights Act.

For a brief time, it felt as though everything was changing. We witnessed real progress and scored tangible victories. But the movement ultimately slowed down and we saw decades of retrenchment. Many of these hard-fought gains eroded over time.

The argument can be made that much of the progress proved unsustainable because the underlying systems—many of them grounded in racism

and oppression—remained. If our quest was to get to the proverbial mountaintop, we ultimately found ourselves snowed in at varying elevations, sometimes dangerously backsliding.

Now, as we find ourselves at a similar inflection point, what should give us all hope is that we are far better equipped to complete our ascent.

Philanthropy in the South is much stronger, much more diverse, and much more resourced than it was six decades ago. There's a lot more thinking about new models. There's a lot more thinking about who's at the table and who's making the decisions than there was before.

Importantly, there is also much more focus on systems change—an awareness in and of itself that promises to make solutions more durable through addressing underlying issues and putting in place processes to continually measure progress.

Southern foundations of all types—community foundations, family foundations, health legacy foundations, and corporate funders—are making strong and meaningful commitments to centering their work around equity, sharing their power and resources in new ways, and using all forms of capital to push for change.

But our work is not done. In fact, it is just beginning.

We must commit to getting all of this to scale and making sure we sustain and build these efforts so we can truly bring about systemic change. We must ensure that the new generation of innovative and diverse leaders who have taken the helm have the support they need to succeed. We must push against deeply entrenched systems that have been designed to maintain the status quo.

The past several years have been far from easy. And the years ahead will bring new challenges and obstacles—as well as new opportunities.

But if we persevere, we can truly write that new narrative. That story will focus on how we've created a more loving, just, and healthier South—one where we are finally able to fully actualize our power and beauty.

Robert L. Dortch Jr. is co-founder of the Ujima Legacy Fund in Richmond and chair of Philanthropy Southeast.



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- Robert Dortch Jr.

