

**Living Our Commitment to the Dream!**  
**Keynote Address**  
**September 8, 2007**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel –Atlanta, Georgia**  
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I would like to acknowledge to Board of the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation and the Board of the Southern Partners Fund, and express my appreciation for their ongoing commitment to improving the quality of life for citizens in the Deep South. In addition, I want to extend a warm thank you to a few of our co-hosts: Cynthia Renfro, who is here tonight from the Margarite Casey Foundation; Milano Harden with the Genuis Group; Martin Lehfeldt with the Southeastern Council on Foundations and all of the members of the Southeastern Network of African Americans in Philanthropy; several of whom are here tonight (Lesley Grady and Atiba Mbiwan, among others).

I want to take a moment to highlight two of our co-hosts: The Honorable Nan Orrock, State Senate District 36. Senator Orrock got her start in politics through the civil rights movement beginning on August 28, 1963, when she joined the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. She has continued her fight to support women's issues, civil rights and civil liberties and environmental protection, human services, among other issues. I also want to acknowledge, The Honorable John Lewis, representing the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Georgia; in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1987. Congressman Lewis is a preeminent leader of the modern civil rights movement. At the age of 23 he was putting his life on the line in the struggle for equal rights. Along with Dr. King, Congressman Lewis was a speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. And many may remember a pivotal turning point in the civil and human rights movement on a Sunday afternoon in March of 1965; when as a 25 year old, young Lewis led a group of over 600 protestors across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. It was a protest that was intended to highlight the unfair practices that kept minorities off the voter rolls.

Lewis along with hundreds of others was beaten in what became known as "Bloody Sunday". The brutal response showed America why a march was necessary. When the marchers reached the far side of the bridge, they were met by state troopers and civilian posse bearing billy clubs and whips -- weapons they did not hesitate to use. The images of policemen using night sticks on peaceful protestors were carried on television screens across the country, and they stung the conscience of a slumbering America.

People were outraged. These senseless acts helped create a consensus in the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act later that year. These are important points for us to revisit now, as just a little over a week ago, August 28<sup>th</sup>; marked the 44<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his, "I have a Dream" message. Congressman John Lewis was recently interviewed on the 44<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March on Washington and had this to say: "I often think about that day. I often think about the leaders of the march who are no longer here today. They were ordinary men and women with extraordinary vision who helped transform America. That is why those of us who remain, must do all we can do to inspire a new generation to fulfill the mission of equal justice, peace and kinship of all humankind that are the legacy of the Civil Rights movement."

Please join me in thanking all of our co-hosts for this celebration event!

Inspiring new generations to fulfill the mission of equal justice, peace and kinship; acting as a leading force in the rural south to connect the voices; magnify the accomplishments and tell the story.... this describes the twenty year commitment of the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation and the ongoing work of the Southern Partners Fund. Because of the commitment of 18 grassroots leaders and the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation, the Southern Partners Fund stands today, as a

foundation that advances social, economic and environmental justice across the rural south. Our organization was born out of faith; belief in the power of democracy and what ordinary citizens can do when they come together to create change. We believe in self-determination: meaning that people whose lives are affected should be at the table. Our aspirations are to provide a different kind of analysis of the conditions in the south; one that is given from the perspective of diverse, disenfranchised from all racial/ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation. One of my board members said yesterday, "we can find our humanity in rural places...people take the time to know who you are... inside the circle of life." We know that it is possible through collective beliefs...to create a new reality. We also know that it often takes a stimulus or a force to create change. Some would say that change is impossible without agitation.

To describe Gandhi's method, he coined the expression— *Satyagraha*, literally, "holding on to truth" or, as he described it, truth force, love force or soul force. He disliked the English term passive resistance because *Satyagraha* required activism, not passivity. If you believed in truth and cared enough to obtain it, Gandhi felt, you could not afford to be passive. You had to be prepared actively to suffer for truth.

There is a story about creation which goes something like this: The Creator gathered all of creation and said, "I want hide something from humans until they are ready for it. It is the realization that they create their own reality. The eagle said, "Give it to me, I will take it to the moon" – The Creator said, "No. One day, they will go there and find it"- The salmon said, "I will bury it on the bottom of the ocean" – "No. said the Creator, " they will go there too" – The buffalo said, " I will bury it in the great plains"- the Creator said, "they will cut into the skin of the earth and find it even there." Grandmother Mole, who lives in the breast of Mother Earth, and who has no physical eyes, but sees with spiritual eyes said, "Put it inside of them" – and the Creator said, "It is done!"

The ability to create a new reality is already inside of us. With wisdom, benevolence, courage and a collective belief; a new reality is possible. I want to share a little about myself to bring this point home. One of the things that I get teased about is being from Kansas. I was actually born and raised in Kansas. So when you are from Kansas, you can imagine that every year, I would be in front of the television to see the 1939 film version of the Wizard of OZ. There were six of us and our mother worked two jobs, but it was a struggle. We always had...we just never seemed to have enough. So for me, as a child, those moments of fantasy took me away to Munchkinland, out of our circumstances and left me with a vivid imagination. What stands out in my memory, are the lessons learned from three prominent characters in the film: The Scarecrow, who wants a brain; the Tin Man who needs a heart; and the Cowardly Lion who longs to be the King of the Forest. In a twist of fate, we see that each character "unknowingly" has the attribute for which he is seeking. Remember when the Scarecrow got the diploma, the Tin Man received the ticking heart clock and the Cowardly Lion received the Medal of Courage? (Never mind that Toto pulled the curtain back and we all discover that the great OZ was just a man)...So what do we learn? In essence, what we learn are three virtues (1) Wisdom- or philosophic knowledge and learning...or as one of my board members said yesterday, we have to teach knowledge, compassion and "lift"; (2) Benevolence- which is goodness of the mind and spirit and the kindness to do good; and (3) Courage- the ability to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty and intimidation. Each of these virtues has been consistently present in great leaders. We see them in Senator Nan Orrock, Congressman John Lewis, Dr. Martin Luther King, the Board and grassroots leaders of the Southern Partners Fund and the of Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation; and many of you, the freedom fighters, whose accomplishments we celebrate tonight!

I shared a quote earlier from Dr. King who once said, "*Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which makes philanthropy necessary.*" Professionally, I have served as a grantmaker for over 17 years. In that capacity, I have learned from a few great thinkers in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, most of whom were grassroots and neighborhood leaders. I would like to share a few things that I learned early in my philanthropic career. First: treat people with dignity, respect and act with

humility. Second, the first law of philanthropy is like the first law of medicine: Do no harm. And third, philanthropy's most dynamic role is to serve as the risk capital for social change.

Philanthropy is the act of giving your time, talent and treasure; or as Robert Payton, the author of the book titled, *Philanthropy* (1998), would describe it: "philanthropy is voluntary action for the public good".

Philanthropy and foundations are not synonymous. Anyone can become a philanthropist. You don't have to be a millionaire to be philanthropic.

We want to inspire a new generation of leaders to fulfill the mission of equal justice, peace and kinship of all humankind. We want to inspire each of you to become social justice philanthropists and freedom fighters.

Forty four years ago, Dr. King said, "There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights; and I would add...human rights, "When will you be satisfied?" I would like to try answering that question...we can never be satisfied as long as:

We can sit in front of our televisions and watch with horror, while poor coastal communities in Mississippi and Louisiana are practically wiped away; and poor residents are dispersed in an unforeseen Diaspora and thousands who want to go home...still can't make it home.

No, we will not be satisfied as long as there is a failure to recognize our brown brothers and sisters in the immigrant community who are contributing to our economy; often working for next to nothing, and being offered no protections...in a country that was built on the back of slaves and immigrants....

No, we will not be satisfied as long as poor black, white and brown children and their families in the rural south are more at risk of diseases than other children, have inadequate access to health care, poor housing, inadequate education and limited economic mobility....

As Dr. King said, on August 28, 1963, we say tonight on September 8, 2007: "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream".

Let's create a new collective reality...together....

Bring your wisdom, benevolence and courage...

Partner with the Southern Partners Fund to inspire a new generation to fulfill the mission of equal justice, peace and kinship for the citizens of the rural south...

*Satyagraha!*  
HOLD ON TO TRUTH!!

*The Southern Partners Fund is emerging as one of the most significant civil and human rights grantmaking organizations in the United States; which provides funding, capacity building, operating support and technical assistance to rural organizing efforts in the Deep South. Headquartered in Atlanta, GA, the birth community of one of the greatest civil rights leaders in modern times, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; SPF was founded in 1998 by a coalition of 18 grassroots community organizers with the belief that it is the birthright of every American to enjoy basic rights, privileges and a quality of life; to be preserved and create a legacy for future*

generations. For more information, please contact: [info@spfund.org](mailto:info@spfund.org) or visit our website at: [www.spfund.org](http://www.spfund.org); or call 404-541-9091 ext. 12.

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I stand here with a deep sense of humility and a great sense pride, to have the opportunity to provide leadership to the Southern Partners Fund. What moved me about this foundation and its vision was its commitment to community organizing toward social change, and its belief in self-determination: meaning that those people whose lives are affected should be at the table helping to craft the solutions. These groups represent people of all racial/ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation in communities throughout the southeastern United States. It gives me great pleasure to work hand in hand with the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation on a social change agenda, with a belief that it is the birthright of every American to enjoy basic rights, privileges and a quality of life: to be preserved and to create a legacy for future generations!

We stand here tonight, in Atlanta, Georgia; the birth community of one of the greatest architects of social justice in modern times; a man who gave his life on behalf this struggle, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King once said, *“Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which makes philanthropy necessary.”*

Are we overlooking the circumstances of economic injustice that make philanthropy necessary?

Noted as one of the greatest speeches in modern history, the I Have a Dream speech, was delivered on August 28th 1963, under a nearly cloudless sky, more than 250,000 people, a fifth of them white, gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, to rally for “jobs and freedom”; that was 44 years ago.

Remember the Dream? Dr. King dreamed that one day this nation would rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: (you all know it, say it with me) “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.” “This is our hope, he said. “This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, pray together, struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

We need you to continue to live your commitment to the Dream. Every time you say the Pledge of Allegiance, you are making a commitment, think about this: *one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

How many of you live in the south? How many of you have family in the south? Granddaddy, Grandmama, Cousins? Then you have roots in the south....remember your roots. Much has been accomplished, but we have a long way to go. We all stand on the shoulders of giants, who have given their tears, their blood, and in some cases, their lives to bring us this far. Tonight we celebrate over 20 years of such commitment from the Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation. Let's rest tomorrow and begin again with a sense of renewal.

One of my favorite poems is a poem titled, On the Pulse of the Morning; which Maya Angelou created for the inauguration of President Clinton in 1993. I would like to close with just a small excerpt from that poem:

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage, need not be lived again. Lift up your eyes....upon the day breaking....FOR YOU!!

Give birth again.....TO THE DREAM!

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