

Sources of Power and Privilege in Philanthropy

Perpetuation of White Supremacy Culture

Wealth

- Foundations have wealth—accumulated over time, grown passively (unearned) and with the benefit of tax laws
- Foundations make the rules about how the money is invested and disbursed
- Foundation wealth implies that funders are discerning and wise
- Maddox acknowledges that wealth is historically extractive

Paternalism

- Foundations participate in and perpetuate Benevolent Sovereign Syndrome and White Saviorism
- Foundations hold others accountable for what they deem good, right and normative
- Foundations enjoy respectability (earned or not)
- Foundations view themselves as objective and authoritative (real or not)
- Foundations want, and even require, their language and values be mirrored back to them
- Foundations esteem and give precedence to the written word
- Foundations expect accountability (measure, control, count, report)
- Maddox has historically made one-year grants as if dolling out weekly allowances to children who can't be trusted with managing resources
- Maddox acknowledges that charity models are inherently deficit based

Social Capital

- Foundations can open and close doors (introductions, connections)
- Foundations know other sources of funding and benefit from affiliation
- Foundations are connected to public policymakers and civic leaders
- Foundations can ensure their own comfort
- Foundations seek to influence the behavior of others

Anti-democratic

- Foundations perpetuate their boards of directors to maintain power
- Foundations establish frameworks and set agendas
- Foundations ask the questions and raise the issues
- Foundations cling to authority (earned or not)
- Foundations assert that they have objective knowledge of the community (real or not)

Voice

- Foundations can advocate without repercussions on issues of concern
- Foundations fund work focused more on individuals than systems
- Foundations can choose to use their voices or stay silent to advocate for and with partners
- Foundations can choose to remain comfortable and aloof by how they use or don't use their voices

People

- Foundations have board and staff members with reputational heft who are generally middle aged or older
- Foundation board and staff members have traditional modes of power—degrees, education, work experience, money
- Foundation boards are self-sustaining and have the power to maintain the status quo
- Foundations are grounded in white dominate culture

Liberties—enjoyed more fully by white people in philanthropy

- Foundation board and staff members are free from worry
- Foundations are free from accountability (beyond IRS regulations and fiduciary responsibility) and operate with relative impunity
- Foundations can take risks with minimal fear of backlash
- Foundations face minimal consequences in response to “failure”

*“Trust me, when things get better for one group,
they get worse for another.”*

Captain America: The Falcon and Winter Soldier

*“Philanthropy is commendable.
But it must not cause the philanthropist
to overlook the circumstances of economic
injustice which make philanthropy necessary.”*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Resources

- [Equitable Grantmaking Continuum](#)
- [Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment and Guide for Equity and Justice](#) by Center for Responsible Philanthropy
- [Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens](#) by Philanthropic Racial Equity
- [Mismatched: Philanthropy’s Response to the Call for Racial Justice](#) by Philanthropic Racial Equity
- [Spectrum from Extractive to Restorative to Regenerative Philanthropy](#)—Justice Funders