



# DERAILED

**Rising Attacks and  
Retreating Resources  
for Racial Justice**

**FIVE YEARS  
AFTER *MISMATCHED* —  
WHERE PHILANTHROPY  
STANDS NOW**

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**FALL 2025**



## SIDEBAR

# Views from the Field: Advancing Black Movement Power In a Time of Philanthropic Flux

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In the past five years, Black-led and Black-focused movement organizations have faced dramatic shifts in philanthropy, from the increased attention of 2020 to the harrowing drop in support and sharp retreat from racial justice in the years since.

From the vantage point of the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), a hub that brings together 100 Black organizations to create shared strategies and initiatives, funders' rapidly shifting strategies have often exacerbated the challenges faced by the entire Black movement ecosystem and left movement in general.

Over the last decade, M4BL has worked to move critical resources to Black-led and Black-serving power-building organizations. In the wake of the racial justice uprisings of 2020, more philanthropic funding than ever before — albeit still a small fraction of overall giving — was directed to organizations working to produce a fundamental shift in the exercise of Black self-determination. But **an age-old pattern has re-emerged in the turning away by philanthropy from the very work the field apparently deemed vital just five years ago.** The danger inherent in this retreat is starkly evident in how it was provoked, as an authoritarian federal government moves ever more swiftly and sweepingly to deform and enfeeble our democracy — a fundamental reshaping that would strip away critical power gained through our work and the philanthropic investment that work received.

Funders have the capacity to reverse this trend. The decisions they make will not only determine the future of these organizations and initiatives, but also, as it is becoming increasingly apparent, the fate of our democracy.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

### A Surge in Funding — for the Short Term

Many promises were made to defend Black life in the summer of 2020, and there was an increase in dollars specifically for racial justice initiatives. As a result, some organizations were empowered to strike out into new areas of their work that represent the fundamental changes communities want to see. Following in the lineages of mutual aid and radical Black/communal traditions, Black-led organizing efforts that received a sizable influx of new revenue used it to support other Black-led groups and initiatives. M4BL moved more than \$18

million in 501(c)(3) dollars to more than 100 Black-led organizations and \$5 million to newly formed 501(c)(4) initiatives. Organizations launched and continue to steward land projects from Georgia to upstate New York and from Minnesota to California. Community response hubs like the [Freedom Lab](#) in Miami are providing food, healthcare, and climate-disaster response, and moving to implement nonpolice responses to mental health crises. [Twenty-five cities](#) have removed police from public schools, and [\\$840 million](#) in direct cuts have been made to police departments as a result of that moment in 2020.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

But in the bigger picture of philanthropy, a much larger share of new dollars funded such efforts as DEI initiatives, investments in Black-operated banks or charter schools, and similar work that in many cases had long been favored projects of philanthropy. And many initiatives, like Chicago’s [CARE](#) program, have remained woefully underfunded despite the new dollars, are only able to address needs in some parts of the city, and, without continued investment, might vanish altogether under the present political conditions. Ultimately, and predictably, the sudden surge in funding fell far short of what millions mobilized to demand in the summer of 2020: lasting and transformative change.

### A ‘Reassessment’ of Strategy

Even before the formal transfer of power to the second Trump administration in January 2025, and in some cases earlier, it became clear that foundations were “reassessing their strategies” in response to the outcome of the 2024 elections. Black movement organizers, left activism more broadly, and those fighting for basic identity and human rights were blamed for the Democratic Party’s losses in November and the ideals they espouse were denounced as radical and polarizing. As we descend further into

authoritarian rule and communities of color continue to suffer militarized violence and bear the mounting weight of reaction and retribution, many who gave voice to that familiar backlash now call for bridge-building and push arguments for pluralism — no matter the dearth of credible partners.

On their face, those could be good strategies and align with approaches to systems change that donor organizers have advocated for years: unrestricted support, long-term funding, and priorities set by grantees instead of laid out for them in accordance with funder-developed internal initiatives. **But what is being demanded in exchange for a place at the table is acquiescence from these impacted communities to the reframing of what was once explicit support for building Black power.** This has played out most clearly in stories of requests from program officers — often contrary to their own personal politics — to replace pro-Black language in reports, proposals, and applications with more diluted language presenting a deracialized vision of democracy-building. There is an overall sense that grantee-facing staff are having to internally defend the idea that efforts to build Black power will lead to a more democratic and just society for all. When funders press for erasure of identity as

central to power-building efforts, they are failing to acknowledge what Tynesha McHarris points out in her article *Retreating on Identity Will Not Unify Us*: that **our identity-based struggles — women’s suffrage, LGBTQ rights, the civil rights movement — have actually held our fragile democracy to its promises.**

Many of these newly funded Black-led groups continue to play outsized roles in their cities, states, and regions, often leading the multiracial coalitions essential to resistance. Retrenchment on philanthropic support for racial justice work not only leaves organizations without a clear path to stabilizing the wins they have achieved, it also leaves them, and the movement they represent, increasingly vulnerable to the violence of which militarized occupation of their communities is emblematic.

## **Recommendations for Philanthropy to Advance Black Movement Building**

If the field of philanthropy is truly committed to preserving what has already been built to protect Black lives, there is still space to do so:

### → **Continue support to Black-led power building.**

The call to protect Black life in 2020 was never limited to Black folks. It also has always been an acknowledgement of this truth: a society and systems that prioritize the safety of Black people (especially femmes and Black trans women), will, inherently, be safer for everyone. And it recognizes that historically, in multiracial coalitions, Black folks’ issues are often treated as disposable. The need to center their leadership is paramount if we are serious about fundamentally shifting power in our communities. The support that went to Black-led groups has allowed them to play leadership roles that are now critical to the people-led defense against federal troops and ICE agents on city streets across the U.S. Those investments have yielded powerful results.

### → **Don’t retreat from funding specific to racial justice.**

Explicit support to building power in Black communities was, and still is, a winning strategy. Resourcing these groups to protect the gains that

have been made while building the infrastructure they need to be present in the next decade and beyond is what will transform our world. If we are serious about combating the anti-Blackness at the core of our society, we must fund the fight for the long term so that it can be at scale with the problem it is trying to solve. Black-led groups were never going to be able to defeat institutionalized racism in a three- to five-year grant cycle, and they certainly won’t be able to accomplish that if they aren’t given the support to be institutions themselves.

### → **Support Block and Build efforts.**

Funding work to resist and prevent harm is essential. And it’s just as important to support building the work that comes next. Organizations used the uptick in support from 2020 to experiment not only with approaches to keep them safe today, but also to explore those that will allow them to thrive into the future. Both efforts require attention and resources so that we can build the liberated worlds we say we want.



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