



AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS—GUARDIANS OF PUBLIC VALUES

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—AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES JOSEPH
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THE SERVANT-LEADER: BUILDER OF THE JUST AND LOVING SOCIETY

Robert Greenleaf (1970) defined servant-leaders as affirmative builders of a better society. He saw the rock upon which a good society would be built as people caring for and serving one another. While he noted that in previous times this was largely person-to-person, he expanded this thesis and charged large institutions with the task of building a just and loving society—one that would offer greater creative opportunities to its people.

While Greenleaf envisioned a good society, his own experience and his writings did not emphasize social change and movements, such as the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation struggles that surfaced during his life. A prophetic and compassionate man, he described the times he lived in thus: "The late twentieth century will be seen as revolutionary because, in this period, large numbers of influential men and women have come seriously to grips with the issue of power and authority," thereby "making power legitimate for the public good. . . as an ethical imperative" (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 26). Greenleaf saw the underlying power shift the social movements were advocating.



Such movements, he noted, implied far-reaching changes in leadership: “The signs of the times suggest that, to future historians, the next thirty years will be marked as the period when the dark skinned and the deprived and alienated of the world effectively asserted their claims to stature. And that they were not led by a privileged elite. . .but by exceptional people of their own kind.” He declared the last quarter of the twentieth century would be a time when the “dark skinned and the deprived and the alienated” would find their own enlightenment. In a prophetic and alarming statement he proposed that today’s privileged might best serve by “waiting and listening until the less favored define their own priority needs and *how* they want to be served” (Greenleaf, 1970, pp. 26-27). Greenleaf, a White male who spent his career in corporate America, had the foresight and humility to understand that authentic leadership rises from the people and community that are to be served.

As can be seen in his writings and teachings, Greenleaf’s life is living proof that *concepts and ideas* inspire people to think and then act in new ways. The change in leadership described above will be realized when the voices, ideas, and vision of what he called the “dark skinned” and “alienated” are introduced and then incorporated into mainstream leadership thought. The hope of this interview is to bring forth the voice of an exceptional African American, a servant-leader, who is “very right for the time and place” in which he lives—a synchronicity Greenleaf identified as critical to great leadership (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 27).

James Joseph was raised by his parents, teachers, and the many people in his village to believe that through the path of education he would uplift himself and his people. He obtained a doctorate, becoming a scholar and writer. He took the helm of the Council on Foundations in the eighties, prompting the organization to chart new ground. When Nelson Mandela was president, and a new nation was being born in South Africa, he served as the U.S. Ambassador to that country. Returning to the United States, he established the Center on Leadership and Public Values at Duke University, with a special emphasis on developing South African leaders.



Dr. Joseph urges Americans to re-embrace the public values on which this country was founded—values heralding common welfare, justice, and equality. Furthermore, he asserts that these values have been kept in trust by the African American community and are the foundation of the South African liberation movement. Joseph challenges Americans to shed the cloak of individualism and the current focus on personal morality, and look instead to re-establishing public values that will hold our society accountable for the welfare of all people.

On a broad spectrum of measures concerning quality of life, the U.S. ails from lack of attention to the public values and social responsibility that are the lifeblood of a democracy and the underpinnings of the good and just society. While individuals contemplate personal moral values, 45 million American citizens lack health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), the unemployment ranks swell, the minimum wage continues to decline (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2004), and college costs continue to rise, topping 23% in the past two years (College Board, 2004). The preoccupation with personal instead of public morality was evident in the 2004 presidential election exit polls, which showed that 45% chose “moral values” as the priority issue that affected their voting. While the item most often mentioned was honesty (referring to the *personal* trait of the candidate), 17% chose protection of marriage, 15% opposition to abortion, and 13% looked to family values (Harris Polls, 2004).

Public values were not a theme highlighted by Greenleaf, yet inherent in his writing is a set of intrinsic values that are the wellspring of servant-leadership. In *Trustees as Servants* (1974), Greenleaf stated, “Perhaps the greatest threat is that we lack the *mechanism of consensus*, a way of making up our collective minds” (p. 34). It may be that the consensus Greenleaf sought can be found by taking to heart and then acting on Joseph’s call to re-establish our public values, and then forging servant-leadership that supports the common welfare. A look at the dynamics of the period that gave rise to the Civil Rights movement provides a framework for understanding



the influence and impact of Dr. Joseph's conceptual leadership and his call for social responsibility.

HEEDING THE CALLING OF THE TIMES

The social upheavals and Civil Rights struggle in the 1960s exposed the ugly face of racism, shattering the illusion that America was living up to its founding values. Images of ferocious police dogs and water hoses, police shooting Black demonstrators, people marching in the streets, and the burning and looting of cities, awakened the country from a deep 1950s slumber. The White *Father Knows Best* world laced with the values of the suburban middle class could no longer ignore the national turmoil that called for the reconfiguration of the American dream.

The nation trembled while President Lyndon Johnson assembled a distinguished commission headed by the Governor of Illinois, Otto Kerner, to find ways to heal the insidious and invasive disease of racism. The Kerner Report released in 1968 identified *institutional racism* as the mechanism that validated and perpetuated discrimination and economic disparity. It challenged Americans to go beyond addressing personal prejudice and the debilitating effects racism had on individuals to a more systemic and social view. Only by transforming the social, political, and economic institutions in which racism was embedded could America heal the schisms that existed. The Kerner Report shifted the debate from the traditional focus on individual values to one on public values, ethics, and responsibility (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). As such, it was in step with a longstanding tradition of African American ministers and leaders who advocated for building a different kind of America, one that lived up to the founding values embedded in the Constitution.

A few years after the Kerner report was published, Robert Greenleaf would echo similar sentiments, declaring that servant-leaders were "challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and . . . taking sharper issue with the wide disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and on the other hand, the



actual performance of the whole range of institutions that exist to serve society” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 3).

DEEP IN MY HEART I DO BELIEVE

The water fountains at Woolworth’s were marked Negro and White. At the lunch counter only White people could order the hot fries or the club sandwiches served on toasted white bread. When the bus pulled up, White people scurried on while Black mothers waited with their children, paid the same fare, and ambled slowly to the back. The bus jerked forward, passing trees draped with Spanish moss. Arriving at the nicely framed houses with expansive front porches, White mothers yanked the cord, gathered their children, and returned to segregated neighborhoods. The bus moved unhurriedly down the rural roads. Coming to the “other side of town,” Black folks got off and walked the lonely stretch home.

The South created a tradition that, like the heat and humidity of the Louisiana Delta, burned into people’s bones. The penalties inflicted on Black people for not conforming were severe, and sometimes deadly. Men in white sheets guarded this culture, dangling those who resisted on ropes from trees in a way that was meant to paralyze Black people from changing the *Southern* way. Whites believed Negroes were passive, simple, and apathetic. Some convinced themselves that Negroes were happy—*Why look how they sing as they wash laundry, work fields, cook food, clean houses, fix cars and shine shoes*. Many White ministers declared God had ordained segregation—this was the way things were “supposed to be.”

Many White people failed to see that behind the iron gates of segregation were intact communities sustaining the hope of freedom and equality. The stereotypes drilled into White Americans were blinders, keeping them from noticing the rising intellectual class among Black Americans, the activist ministers, and the growing unrest of the Black masses. Since the majority of White people did not understand the promise of liberation which was deeply embedded in the spiritual roots that had sustained Black people since they were slaves, many were stunned when the Civil Rights



movement “blew up” like a pressure cooker. The social and political revolution Black people marched for in the sixties was rooted in a faith and hope that had fermented for generations.

As the seeds of Civil Rights sprouted, the opportunities for Black intellectuals began to bloom. In those times a brilliant organizational leader emerged. James Joseph was born during the segregation period in Louisiana, the home of the Ku Klux Klan. His father was a minister, schooled in the tradition of spiritual activism, and a servant-leader. Understanding that education was one of the few entryways open to young Blacks, the teachers in the small rural school Joseph attended groomed and inspired him. They were so successful that of the 32 graduates of his high school, 27 went on to college—a record few privileged schools can boast even today!

Like spiritual grace that brings forth good from negativity and darkness, segregation allowed Black communities to stay intact and pass on their values. At the dinner table, in the classrooms, and from the pulpits, many Black youngsters were being instilled with hope and the belief they could achieve.

THE EARLY ROOTS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

During the course of the interview, Joseph, who was a curious and questioning child, remembered long talks with his father about what was “right” and “wrong.” Looking back, envisioning his father’s leadership, he understood these conversations were about *ethics*. The following transcript contains Joseph’s articulation of African American leadership interspersed with my own servant-leadership oriented reflections. Joseph’s words relay many of the beliefs he developed through a rich experiential understanding of the roots of African American leadership from before the Civil Rights movement to the present day.

Joseph: Even as a young boy, I always wondered why “right” and “wrong” focused on the rules and behavior of what *individuals* should do. Growing up in the segregated South where the doors of political institutions and



social organizations were closed to Black people, I questioned why ethics concerned itself with individual behavior, but not how *institutions* acted. I witnessed how institutions mistreated Black people. So since my childhood I have been concerned about public values rather than just private virtues. America is preoccupied, even obsessed, with the private or individual virtues that build character—the micro ethics of personal behavior and morality.

Bordas: How do you see Black leaders as having a different focus?

Joseph: Unlike mainstream leaders, who primarily thought about private virtues and values, we had to be concerned with the behavior of systems and institutions, or macro ethics that focused on public morality and community values. Because those systems and institutions oppressed the freedom of our citizens, African American leaders have centered on how *public values and institutional ethics* limit our community as well as the micro ethics or private virtues of individuals. The initial group of African American leaders in the '50s and '60s were ministers who were totally independent with the freedom to act on the basis of their social conscience, without the threat of being terminated by some White-controlled structure. Their source of livelihood came from Black people and Black churches. A whole host of leaders were ministers first and then evolved into civil rights leaders: Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, and Hosefa Joseph. These leaders came with a moral conscience that went beyond the notion of individual salvation to look at the institutions that barred Black people from equal participation.

Bordas: Greenleaf, in *The Institution as Servant*, supported a similar concept, stating that the role of cutting-edge churches should be “the chief nurturing force, conceptualizer of opportunity, value shaper, and morale sustainer of leadership” (Greenleaf, 1972, p. 28).

Joseph: This first generation of African American religious leaders sought to dismantle institutional racism. In a segregated society, there was *intentional underdevelopment* that expressed itself *in* and was held in place *by*



social institutions. Black leaders strove to humanize and sensitize these institutions in order to improve people's lives, incorporate the concept of our common humanity, and open the doors to all colors, cultures and religions. These leaders sought to appeal to the conscience of the nation through moral power.

Martin Luther King, Jr. began pointing out the contradiction—the clash between *powerless conscience* and *conscienceless power*. This called for a new awareness and commitment to public values—a return to the fundamental principles this country was founded on. When he said that Black people had come to *save America*, he meant that through their liberation they would rekindle the fire of the Bill of Rights, which is the heritage of *all* Americans.

The values eminent in the African American community are basically constitutional values. This country's founders wanted to form a more perfect union, so community was a high public value. They talked about establishing justice. African Americans are very concerned about community and equal justice. The constitution was based on promoting the common good and general welfare. So too, do African Americans aspire to a better life not only for their people, but to establish a society that cares for all people.

Today the dominant society has moved away from communal responsibility and concentrates instead on individual values. This approach blinds people to institutional racism and other social ills. It negates the mutual responsibility leaders have to create institutions that support the good society based on the values this country was founded on.

Bordas: Greenleaf concurred: "Unless the quality of large institutions can be raised, not much can be done to improve the total society" (Greenleaf, 1972, p. 2).

Once some of the barricades came down and voting rights were won, political participation exploded. While churches and ministers continued to have influential positions, what was the next phase of leadership that surfaced?



Joseph: Moral leadership will only take people so far. More and more leaders began emerging in the political sphere. Congressman Bill Grey is a leader from the religious tradition who found in politics a way to address public morality.

The second generation of Black leadership exercised power in a very different way. Yet political power contributed little to the improvement of the quality of life for most African Americans. Our leaders began to recognize that moral power and political power, while important, were insufficient without economic power. The next phase of leadership that is still emerging is in the economic sector.

Concurrently, African American leadership was transitioning from a highly visible and centralized form to a decentralized, community-based one. As this shifted, people felt there were no leaders in the Black community. The prominence of the “Big Six” who used to meet with the President and had high national visibility, the resounding voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., the other major organizations in the Black community, were no longer identified as *the* African American leadership. This type of leadership just wasn’t as visible any longer.

The seeds of leadership germinated from the Mississippi River to the California hills, from the North Carolina shores to the New Jersey turnpike. They sprouted in the churches, businesses, educational institutions, and the professions. There were many Black leaders in those areas across the country, but there was not any central, highly visible national leader who *spoke* for the community. Leadership dispersed into different sectors rather than being centered in one national voice and force.

Bordas: Greenleaf envisioned a similar structure in which leadership consisted of a group of equals, and cautioned institutions not to concentrate power atop a pyramid (Greenleaf, 1972, p. 15). During the period of diversification Joseph speaks of, individuals began to reflect the different stages people go through as they shed the skin of racism and segregation.

Joseph: Some people tried desperately to forget the past because it was painful. Others embraced their traditions and culture, immersing in the



Black experience, dressing in dashikis and sporting Afros. Due to the inherent nature of racism, when African Americans internalize negative stereotypes and are stripped of their identity, they go through cycles of wanting to escape their history and culture. Then they recognize this is who they are and come back. Dealing with these differences, the separation, the internalized oppression, and healing these issues continues to be a major challenge that leaders shoulder today.

During turbulent times, Black leaders were held together by common values. They had a set of intrinsic values that reflected their experience regardless of what sector or profession they worked in, or whether they were at a national or local level. Values such as a concern for fellow human beings, a keen sense of justice, an emphasis on the common good [and] not just individual attainment, sharing and interdependence are intricate parts of African American leadership and are the public values that shape individual behavior.

Bordas: These values are also the foundation for authentic servant-leadership that goes beyond individuals and institutions to build the just and loving society that Greenleaf envisioned. A major contribution of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Civil Rights leaders was their focus on non-violence, love, and forgiveness.

Joseph: As leaders of people who did not have economic and political power, they became experts on the use of *soft power* instead of hard power. They only had a moral compass to guide and inspire people to take great risks. Hard power is the ability and resources to get people to do what you want, whereas soft power is convincing people to want the same thing you do. One focuses on military, economic muscle and other types of rewards and consequences, the other more on moral messages, inspiration, acts of generosity, and education. The world today is increasingly influenced by soft power rather than hard power.

Bordas: Soft power is akin to Greenleaf's reflection that servant-leaders are skilled at using the art of persuasion rather than utilizing authority to influ-



ence people's actions (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 12). As Ambassador to South Africa, Jim Joseph saw firsthand the transforming effects of soft power.

Joseph: The prototype of a leader who uses soft power is Nelson Mandela, whose stature in the world has little to do with the size of the Gross National Product or the military might in South Africa. His influence has to do with the elegance of his ideals and the merits of his ideas. Mandela was the major force behind the change in South Africa that demonstrated to the world the power of reconciliation. He did it through the power of his character from behind prison bars on a small, isolated island.

INDIVIDUAL VALUES AS A REFLECTION OF PUBLIC ETHICS

It is important to understand how public values become infused into society. Civil Rights leaders spoke in unison about the public values of justice and equal rights as an American birthright. Then laws were passed by the Johnson Administration that put some legal teeth into these values so they could become operational in society. Franklin Delano Roosevelt did the same thing with the New Deal. The power of his personality and vision for society convinced people that government had a public responsibility to the welfare of its people.

Joseph: For many Black leaders reconciliation is a public value. When Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about loving the enemy, he was talking about reconciliation. He used the word love, but it was the same notion as forgiveness. What does that mean for the African American experience in America? Black people had to come out of segregation and the pain of racism and work hand-in-hand with the communities that had oppressed them. So there had to be forgiveness. When King preached "love the enemy" he didn't say you had to like it, but this is a very different value than "get even" or "settle the score!"

A contemporary example of public values in society is the restorative justice process in South Africa. Restoring justice means that the humanity of both the perpetrator who violated humanity and the victim who has been



alienated need to be recognized. Only in this way can both be brought back into full community and society. The entire country of South Africa painfully and compassionately opened up the wound of Apartheid so that the open air of honesty and truth could heal the torn spirits of the people who had been abused, as well as those of the perpetrators.

Desmond Tutu says there can be no future without forgiveness. In South Africa, there is the philosophy of *ubuntu*. In *ubuntu* the course of progress is people to people through other people—one's humanity can only be defined through how one interacts with others. Therefore, if you damage the humanity of another person, then the whole of humanity is damaged in the process.

Bordas: How is this value reflected in the Black community in America?

Joseph: The African American community has always taught you forgive not only because it is ordained by the creator, but you live in this kind of relationship with other people because it is also in your self-interest. The value of restorative justice and *ubuntu*, where people are supposed to act with humaneness, compassion, and care, is an example of how a private value is reflected in society. The private aspect is how individuals act towards each other, and the public values are the behaviors that are condoned and sanctioned by society.

Instilling the general society with public ethics or values facilitates the *individual acceptance* of these. Values such as the need to forgive, to do one's best, to use one's talents for the common good, and to channel negative energy into constructive channels are all public values held in trust by the African-American community.

African Americans have been schooled on tolerating unacceptable behavior and continuing to work with the people who have inflicted wounds. One of the key contributions African Americans make to the world is reconciliation. The world today is integrated and fragmented at the same time. Yet the more interdependent people become, the more they are turning inward to smaller concerns, enclosing themselves in their homes, turning to the television or the internet. *The challenge of resolving conflict*



through reconciliation and bringing people together may be as important in the twenty-first century as freedom was at the dawn of the nation states. In an interdependent world, one of the primary public values must be reconciliation based on tolerance and respect for others.

Bordas: Like tightly woven yarn, these values were intertwined into the fiber of Joseph's character and into others around him. Jim Joseph had a personal experience with forgiveness when working with the Civil Rights movement in Alabama.

Joseph: Every time George Wallace, the racist governor of Alabama who blocked the University doors to Black students, appeared on television, I felt enraged. One day, as I sat there steeping in my private rage I realized this was only damaging my own personality and I needed to find a way to transmute this into constructive channels. What African Americans have generally been good at is channeling individual and collective rage into a *constructive means* of opposition, protest or civic engagement. I decided to use the energy of my rage at Wallace to fuel an even greater determination to push open the doors he had tried to block.

Bordas: These seeds of strength and understanding were planted and nourished during Joseph's childhood. Although he grew up in during the worst era of segregation, he said, "You can't let this bring you down." He could have been defeated, but instead he grew bold.

Joseph: I didn't grow up with uncontrollable rage, but was driven by the desire to demonstrate that I could be as good as anybody. In fact, this became a passion—a drive that came out of defiance. The Black teachers in the segregated schools I attended weren't only concerned with teaching mathematics, English or science; they cared about developing the whole person and instilling values. My mathematics teacher would stay after class and coach me as I began engaging in public speaking contests. Later in life I used this skill to teach and generate ideas that inspired people. My philosophy teacher recommended books, so I began to love to read and developed my conceptual skills. My teachers channeled my drive and anger into con-



structive opportunities. The leadership from the churches and schools instilled a belief that I would succeed!

Bordas: As a young child, when Joseph listened to his father preach, he thought his father talked about the afterlife in his sermons. As an adult, when Joseph came home to witness his father's leadership in protest circles, he realized his father was focused on *this* life.

Joseph: I realized my father was speaking not just of spiritual freedom, but freedom in the here and now. He encouraged people to get an education, and urged them to "Do what you need to do in this life and that is the way you overcome your troubles." Eventually he recognized the need to acquire economic and political power because without this an education doesn't mean very much.

The prominence of public values and not just individual ones was integral to the tradition, introducing the congregation to the conditions of the larger society, rather than just individual salvation. The impact is different in terms of leadership and engagement with life. The ministers were very conceptual, painting pictures with beautiful words and phrases about life as it could be, not life as it was. The slave masters and masters of segregation thought they were preaching about an afterlife, because there was a lot of rhetoric about the hereafter. But they were shaping people to be competitive and deal with the realities of *this* life. From the very beginning the slaves used to come together to worship and would use the language of religion, whereas allegorically they were sometimes plotting an escape. The Promised Land for the slave master was *by and by* when he got to heaven. The Promised Land for the slaves was the possibility to change their life circumstances. It has always been *both* this life and the hereafter.

Bordas: These ministers lived what Greenleaf called the central ethic of leadership: foresight (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 16). They were historians, contemporary analysts, and prophets. They were weaving a vision of the future based on intuitive insight and having the faith that this would be forthcoming. Institutional and social responsibility is one of the public values coming from the African American experience.



Joseph: African American progress has always been based on the concept that it is not just individuals who have a responsibility to get involved, help change things and make a difference, but it is also Black churches, institutions, and organizations.

Bordas: Greenleaf surmised that an immoral society stems from people's willingness to qualify as moral by caring *only for people*. To have a more moral *society*, he urged, moral humanity must also care for institutions (Greenleaf, 1972, p. 1). This institutional responsibility is also supported by the tradition of activism, of "voting with your feet" that drives the Black community.

Joseph: This active responsibility nourishes a sense of *hope*. Without this we would have remained economic slaves in the segregated south. This is a basic American value—active citizenship should be endeared in democracy.

Again, this comes out of the religious experience because every sermon always ended with something about hope. It never stopped with "things are so bad." It stopped with "things may be bad; *however*, there is always the possibility of a better life." Without the gift of hope the Black community couldn't have held on and had the courage to overcome. African American leaders have to dispense hope because without it people won't act to change things. It's not naïve optimism; it is a hopeful realism. Today far too many people trapped in central cities have lost hope. In that regard, the leadership has not remained as true to this central value. It's even more important today that Black leaders instill the belief things will get better—that they keep hope alive.

Bordas: To be moral, to be ethical, is not just about individual behavior or private virtues; it also has to incorporate *what is good for the whole*. The arena of public values should embrace such ideals as the significance of community, a commitment to work for justice, and equal opportunity.

Joseph: Today people no longer talk much about justice, and it has been banished from public conversation. Yet oppressed people have to be con-



cerned with justice because injustice holds them hostage. To change their situation, they have to re-ignite the spirit of justice in the general society so that their oppression begins to grate at the community conscience and inspire its soul.

That is what Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela did, and this is also what the founding fathers did during the formation of our nation. They rallied the people to seek “justice for all” as a public value. Desmond Tutu brought new light to this conversation and spoke about the restoration of the broken relationship in society—a relationship that was broken because of unequal treatment and violation of human rights. This type of justice requires forgiveness. It doesn’t necessarily imply the need to forget, but it does call for forgiveness.

Bordas: Today justice needs to be redefined and expanded to include not only contributive and distributive justice, but also the notion of restorative justice.

Joseph: Communities that have been oppressed are seeking distributive justice. This has not been able to be heard because distributive justice implies a *different balance of power*. The people who want to retain power, therefore, get their backs up and are not receptive. They are only interested in contributive justice.

Bordas: Greenleaf saw the need for making power legitimate for the public good (Greenleaf, 1972). This is in alignment with Joseph’s view of that which is beyond contributive justice, and enters distributive and then restorative justice, which implies a more holistic reconfiguring of relational, political and economic power.

Joseph: People do not want to talk about this, but that’s what African Americans really want—an equal playing field, not one where the values of one group define reality, the way things operate, and impose these on others. This means, for example, that an individual in a free market, capitalistic system can’t monopolize at the expense of the greater society or the exclusion of certain groups. There would be ways of tempering this, so that



there is sharing, rather than simply a monopoly or dominance where unequal distribution and poverty is built into the system. There can be no justice when the system or society favors certain types of people and there are false absolutes or pre-determined values that positively discriminate in favor of one group.

Bordas: Greenleaf concurred, stating that for the servant-leader, “Power is used to create opportunity and alternatives so that the individual may choose and build autonomy” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 32).

In the sixties, many people joined with African Americans to protest against segregation and subsequently eliminated the barriers that existed. For progress to continue, this type of collaboration is needed today, particularly among oppressed groups.

Joseph: These groups have an affinity with each other because of their common history of being treated unjustly. By coming together they can work to bring greater justice and equality to society. This type of collaboration cannot be focused on individual progress, but on achieving a common good that benefits society as a whole.

Bordas: There are obstacles, however, that prevent oppressed people from cooperating with one another. African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and other groups are first seeking a clear identity and a respect for their primary group. Until they get them, it is difficult to identify with other groups or the larger population.

Joseph: When a people’s history and heritage is respected they are more likely to identify with *both* their primary community and then society as a whole. To respect a people means honoring their history, traditions, and culture, but also acknowledging their contribution to the common culture. The incredible contributions Black people have made to the economic development of the U.S.; their cultural contributions in literature, the arts, science, and athletics; it means acknowledging all of this. Until Black Americans have an authentic sense of ourselves, to be able to network with others or build coalitions is another heavy burden to carry.



Without this respect people tend to isolate in their own groups, seeking a comfort zone where they are known and accepted. People see this separation and say, “Why is it that those folks stick together, live together, and don’t participate more in society?” Well, the larger society is not making them feel comfortable, wanted, or showing respect for their *primary identity*. People do not want to step out into the larger community when there is no respect.

There is a distinction between hierarchical pluralism, where this happens, and egalitarian pluralism. In hierarchical pluralism, dominant cultural values are at the top, are impermeable, and everyone has to conform to them. People who are different are included, but they must understand that their traditions don’t mean anything. Their values are subservient and they must adapt.

In egalitarian pluralism, attempts are made to include the values of the different people that make up the whole, but when these two different types of pluralism clash as they continue to clash today, some people choose to stay within their own group and not have to constantly adapt to the cultural framework and values of the dominant group. Others go back and forth. They get renewed by their own culture, which is so much a part of them, and then venture out to work or study in the dominant culture. But not everyone can do this successfully. Some cannot deal with the isolation, or constant adaptation; others choose not to pay the price. Regardless, in hierarchical pluralism their rich experience and total contribution is lost. The society does not reap the benefits of true equality. In hierarchical pluralism diverse people are invited in only if they can talk, dress, and communicate like the dominant group, whose underlying psychological message is, “We don’t have to change because our way is better and we rule!”

CONTINUING THE CLIMB UPWARD: PERSEVERANCE, EXCELLENCE, AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES

The spiritual values that anchored the Black community through the long seasons of adversity are also great contributions. Joseph said, “Inher-



ent in the Black world view is that one must turn adversity into strength, and perseverance is a mainstay to overcoming.” The saying, “If it doesn’t kill you it will make you stronger” indicates that adversity fortifies the individual to overcome limitation. Jim Joseph was taught to use his talents to strive to become better and to use hardship to fuel his passion for changing those things that stood in his way.

Joseph: While there has been much progress in the past forty years, there are still many steps left to climb. Perseverance and staying on course is the only way to keep advancing. Young people today have to be reminded about the gains we have made. This will instill hope and fire up the determination needed to stay the course to work for justice.

Bordas: As president of the Council on Foundations, because Joseph represented the members in critical areas such as government relations and membership, he was able to talk about diversity and focus on values like openness and societal accountability. If he did not complete the primary assignment well, he would not have been able to do the other things that he felt were the real opportunity for leadership. He explained, “For Black leaders to be able to reinforce and re-infuse the core values they were taught and to bring these values to institutions, they must first bring excellence and competency to the table. Excellence has got to be the primary motivation. Once a person does what they do very well, they create an opportunity to act on higher values.”

Joseph related that another social dimension African American leaders must address is racial stereotypes.

Joseph: Black leaders understand that certain qualities and characteristics are attached to them regardless of who they are. No matter what position an African American attains, they are still going to be seen as Black and other people are going to overlay stereotypes on them. It is not only that Black people are bound together—people together by skin color, tradition, and culture—it is also that externally they are seen as part of a group. It really doesn’t matter how they think of themselves, whether they grew up in a city



or a suburb; they still have to deal with the external social realities of being Black in America today.

When I lived in Washington, D.C., I got on the Metro in my three-piece suit, ready for high level meetings. In front of me a woman dropped a twenty-dollar bill. I picked it up, quickened my steps, and tapped her on shoulder. As she turned around to face me I saw fear and trepidation. All her conditioning and thoughts about Black men surfaced. What she saw was not an individual, but the history of a group.

In the sixties when colleges were first integrated, African Americans were vehicles for Whites to learn about racism and understand that not everyone was just like them—like Diversity 101. This was the first and necessary step to building a new covenant between Black and White people. Changes in consciousness come in stages. The initial encounter and learning about each other can lead to what Scott Peck calls “pseudo community,” the chaos that comes when people try to pretend they are alike and ignore differences. In the next stage, they realize they are different, and then the reaction is to try to change the other person. The Human Relations movement tried to do this and perhaps a few individuals changed, but this didn’t change society. Even the next stage of discovering commonalities and respecting differences was still an individualistic approach to healing racism.

Gradually in the last forty years as a result of Civil Rights, the integration of society, and immigration from across the globe, people are having direct experiences with individuals from many cultures and races. Even though when diverse people intersect their first reaction and impulse may include stereotypes of the “other group,” once people get to know each other they begin to transcend this. That first impulse which includes negative stereotypes of the other group melts away as relationships are built. So this is why the interaction and associations between groups is key to overcoming inherited stereotypes. Again, looking at this from a public values perspective from the viewpoint of people interested in changing society—the problem is more systemic.



This may be another cultural distinction—people of color involved in social change want to change institutions, whereas White people meet African Americans and want to have their *relationships expanded*. White people want to invite African Americans over for dinner, but don't want to put any effort into changing the policies that continue to favor the majority race in this country. They are still coming from the individualistic framework. That if you are Black and I am White and we get along, then I have done something to change the world, rather than I have to do something about the systems that keep racism intact. From a public values perspective, from the viewpoint of people of color, it is the *macro ethics* governing society and its institutions that must be changed.

Bordas: This tendency was recently confirmed by a Gallop survey that found the attitudes toward race in America had changed drastically in the last forty years. Over seventy percent of White Americans would accept neighbors of any color. Even more surprising, a majority approved of interracial marriage *even* for their own children. These findings spanned all racial groups. The difference between White Americans and those of Black or Hispanic descent was that minorities reported they still *experienced discrimination* and *economic disparity*. In fact, a majority of African Americans reported a racist incident within the last month (Ludwig, 2004). This survey underscores the White tendency to personalize values. “Yes, my daughter can marry a Black person and it is fine if they move into my neighborhood.” Meanwhile, African Americans cannot afford to buy a house in these neighborhoods, and the economic and educational gaps continue to separate young people by barricading them into different social classes. Thirty years after the Kerner Report, too many White Americans have not removed the social blinders to look discrimination straight in the eye and make the commitment to change the institutions and the economic system that continue to support racism.

THE CHOICE FOR SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf believed that society suffered when people who were strong,



natural servants with the potential to lead did not do so, and when others chose to follow a non-servant (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 35). The leadership crisis in America today might well be summed up in that premonition. Coming from an African American community that survived because of its traditions of collectiveness, spirituality, and servant-leadership, Dr. James Joseph urges people to re-establish the public values that have been espoused since this nation was formed and to renew their dedication to building the good and just society that Greenleaf envisioned.

Five Anchors of African American Leadership

The following concepts are used at the Center on Public Values held in Cape Town, South Africa, where both Africans and Black Americans learn leadership together.

1. *Leadership in context of culture* — This paradigm of leadership must begin with African concepts rather than the Western concepts. For example, Greenleaf's notion of servant-leadership is very similar to what South Africans say about *ubuntu*. He conceptualized a very indigenous concept about leadership and brought it to the table for contemporary audiences. Servant-leadership can be found in the Native American tribal chief who accumulated wealth to give it away, or in African American values of service, sharing, and community responsibility. Leadership theories and concepts can add to how African Americans understand leadership, *but from their own framework and cultural context*.
2. *Ethics* — Private values form the foundation for a leader's ethical base. For African Americans there are also public values that have been enumerated. For a leader to act responsibly means to act ethically and morally. What practices do leaders need that will keep them on track? What is the ethical framework from which a person leads? Reflecting on these questions and speaking with leaders who have kept their moral compass provides younger leaders with models to emulate.
3. *Communication* – In most leadership programs communication refers to how the individual leader relates to others. While this is important, a greater rubric is the communication between a leader and his or her com-



munity. Mobilizing constituents or responding to pressure groups are things a leader must do. Like the emphasis on public values, the focal point has to be on the collective and how communication is used to engage, inspire, and inform various stakeholders.

4. *Renewal* – What do leaders do for intellectual, physical, and spiritual renewal? Studying the political prisoners on Robben Island is a textbook on how leadership can develop and thrive under the most barren conditions. It was said that they (the prisoners) made the prison their university and left educated men. Nelson Mandela would do sit-ups and run in place in his jail cell. The men would sing inspirational songs as they worked in the quarry. Hearing about personal examples of how leaders keep their balance even in the line of fire is a way to gain an understanding of how this can be done and how it prepares leaders for “the long haul.”

5. *Experience-based* – People share experiences and lessons learned. Leaders learn from leaders, not merely from scholars, through leaders’ personal stories and experiences. What yardstick did they use to make decisions? What is the fuel and inspiration that keeps them on the path? Leadership has to be spoken out loud and values have to be intertwined into a person’s life as a living thing.

The external forces, great needs, and imminent crises that occur in the Black community as a result of institutional racism make it difficult to keep African American leaders focused on conceptual and organizational leadership. The day-to-day needs consume their time and energy. To be relevant and genuinely prepare African Americans for leadership, programs have to address issues such those espoused by Dr. James Joseph, as well as incorporate the standard curriculum and skill-building which mainstream programs offer.

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