

Transitions In Time

Leadership And Governance In African American Museums

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ABSTRACT: Leadership, succession, and governance in African American museums have often been affected by the deep relationship between these museums and their communities, their relative lack of financial resources, and relationships between the founder, CEOs/directors, and their boards. Unlike traditional museums, which were often founded by patrons of the arts, early African American museums were birthed by strong community leaders with a commitment to African American history and culture but usually without personal wealth. They needed and utilized community in every area of the museum's mission and operations to fight for their very existence, which continued to shape the leadership and growth of these museums for years. Today, African American museums combine the community-driven legacy of the past with new opportunities to create sustainable leadership and governance.

KEY WORDS: African American history, Black history, museums, leadership, succession

Introduction

For more than five decades, African American community museums have been a voice for Black people.¹ Many of these museums were founded during the civil rights era by strong, educated professionals who were activists and leaders, fiercely committed to the social and political uplift of their people.² They often did not have formal museum backgrounds, but they did have a deep, personal commitment to African American history and culture.³

Living in a time in which African Americans and their contributions to this country were seldom recognized or valued by mainstream museums, these community

1 Jeffrey C. Stewart and Fath Davis Ruffins, "A Faithful Witness: Afro-American Public History in Historical Perspective," in *Presenting the Past: Critical Perspectives on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 333-34.

2 Stewart and Davis Ruffins, "A Faithful Witness," 327.

3 Faith Davis Ruffins and Paul Ruffins, "Recovering yesterday - collection and preservation of African American history," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, June 16, 2007, <http://diverseeducation.com/article/7467/>.

leaders believed they could create institutions that could help to broaden historical narratives and inspire social change.⁴ Charles H. Wright, who founded the International Afro-American Museum (IAM) in Detroit in 1965 (now the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, or simply the Wright Museum), saw museums as a way to address the psychological tolls of white supremacy: “We are trying to erase 350 years of dehumanizing brain washing and civil rights are not enough. Something has to occur inside of the Negro to erase those self-degrading ideas he has been taught.”⁵ For Charles Wright, that was the mission of a Black history museum.

Faces of the Early Founders

The life and journey of the African American museum began with strong and determined leadership. The early group of founders and founding directors of African American museums included people like Margaret Burroughs (DuSable Museum of African American History), Charles H. Wright, John Kinard (Anacostia Museum), Joan Maynard (Society for the Preservation of Weeksville), and Barry Gaither (National Center of Afro-American Artists). products of the eras of segregation and Jim Crow were informed and inspired by the civil rights struggle and the Black Power movement.⁶ As such, these leaders created museums that not only came out of the Civil Rights Movement but helped to shape it.⁷ They elevated the recognition of Black history and culture and helped African Americans develop a strong sense of identity and self-affirmation.⁸ And always, the founders emphasized the vital need for interaction between the museums and the communities they served.⁹ Referring to the museum she founded, Margaret Burroughs told *Black Enterprise*, “we are the only one that grew out of the indigenous Black community. We weren’t started by nobody downtown, we were started by ordinary folks.”¹⁰ Barry Gaither echoed that same sentiment. “[W]e are building our institutions in the Black community, and they belong to that community.”¹¹

Margaret Burroughs and Charles H. Wright played leading roles in the African American museum movement.¹² Their brand of leadership was forged by the same issues that drove so many others in that time: the concern for the self-worth and education of the Black community, especially children.

4 Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014): 156–57.

5 Burns, *Storefront to Monument*, 29.

6 Stewart and Davis Ruffins, “A Faithful Witness,” 328–29.

7 *Ibid.*, 328.

8 *Ibid.*, 328.

9 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 15–16.

10 William Grimes, “Margaret T. Burroughs, Archivist of Black History, Dies at 95,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2010.

11 Barry Gaither, quoted in Joy Ford Austin, “Their Face to the Rising Sun,” *Museum News* 60, no. 3 (January/February 1982), 31.

12 Wilbur C. Rich and Roberta Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man: A Biography of Charles H. Wright, M.D.* (Detroit/Southfield: Charro Books, 1999), 289.



Margaret Burroughs and Charles H. Wright were leading figures in the African American Museum Movement. (Image courtesy of Dr. Charles H. Wright Photograph Collection, Collection of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History)

Margaret Burroughs co-founded what is now known as the DuSable Museum of African American History in 1961 in Chicago.¹³ It is the oldest existing community museum in the country. Burroughs was an artist, art historian, and schoolteacher. She recalled an incident early in her career when she encountered a teacher in her school telling his students, “You’re nothing. You’re not going to be anything. I don’t see why you’re wasting your time coming to school.” Although her job was teaching art, Burroughs began to teach the students about African American history. She said, “I just couldn’t see myself standing in front of a group of eager-eyed, young Black people and not being able to tell them something very positive about themselves.”¹⁴ In an interview with the newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, Burroughs said, “African history and the true history of Black people in America are the most vital studies a Negro can undertake, yet these subjects are almost totally neglected in the education of our youth.”¹⁵

¹³ “Museum History,” the DuSable Museum of African American History, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.dusablemuseum.org/museum-history/>.

¹⁴ Robyn Autry, *Desegregating the Past: The Public Life of Memory in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 60.

¹⁵ “Black History on Display,” *Muhammad Speaks*, May 21, 1965.



Joan Maynard, a founder of the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, was a catalyst to preserve the Hunterfly Road Houses in New York. (Image courtesy of the Association of African American Museums)

Charles Wright had a similarly deep connection to the needs of Black children. He was an obstetrician-gynecologist who delivered over seven thousand babies. Early on in his professional career, he began to think seriously about the futures of the lives he was bringing into the world. Dr. Wright was bothered that many children he met displayed a lack of confidence, a lack of vision, and a lack of interest in learning.¹⁶ He said that “one of the most important tasks of our times” was “ensuring that future generations, especially young African Americans, are made aware of and take pride in the history of their forebears and their remarkable struggle for freedom.”¹⁷

In 1968, Joan Maynard, a founder of the Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History and catalyst to preserve the Hunterfly Road Houses in New York, said, “The kids have to learn they’re not trash.”¹⁸ She felt that preserving the Weeksville houses—artifacts from a strong nineteenth-century

¹⁶ Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 145.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸ Douglas Martin, “About New York; In Black History, Reconstruction Is Also a Struggle,” *New York Times*, February 9, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/09/nyregion/about-new-york-in-black-history-reconstruction-is-also-a-struggle.html>.



Under the leadership of John Kinard, the Anacostia Community Museum became one of the most innovative and community-focused institutions in the field. (Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives. Image # 92-3576)

community of freed Blacks in Brooklyn—would inspire pride in their cultural heritage.¹⁹

Burroughs and Wright were forces within their communities and quickly became forces within the museum field. They were followed by other founders and founding directors who were social activists and spent their lives working to create impactful museums. In 1967, one of the most fervent voices was that of John Kinard who, at 31, became the founding director of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, a Smithsonian-conceived and supported project.²⁰ With Kinard at the helm, Anacostia emerged as one of the most innovative and community-focused institutions in the field. Although Kinard, a pastor at John Wesley African Methodist Church, accepted the job to direct Anacostia, he was not sure how it would benefit local people. He stated, “I don’t see how a museum could have any redeeming factor in the development of this community.”²¹ Kinard’s initial skepticism, like that of other Black leaders, likely stemmed from the fact that the Smithsonian had no history of

¹⁹ Douglas Martin, “Joan Maynard Dies at 77; Preserved a Black Settlement,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2006.

²⁰ “John Kinard,” African American Contributions to the Smithsonian: Challenges and Achievements, Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed May 13, 2018, <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/African-Americans/john-kinard>

²¹ Ibid.

inclusion or developing exhibits and programs about African Americans.²² As the leader of the museum, he fought to ensure that the community did indeed benefit.

During his tenure, Kinard often clashed with the Smithsonian over what some in the institution saw as a traditional mission for Anacostia, but what he perceived to be neglect.²³ He believed the mission of Anacostia had to extend beyond merely collecting and displaying objects. The museum needed to create exhibits and programs that told stories reflecting the history and priorities of the Anacostia community.²⁴ He became one of the most fervent voices in the field, joining Burroughs and Wright as a national voice for the empowerment of African American museums and their communities.²⁵

In 1950 Elma Lewis, an activist and visionary arts educator, established the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts for children.²⁶ In 1968, she founded the National Center of Afro-American Artists, which became the umbrella organization for the school.²⁷ In 1969, she was joined by Barry Gaither, who became the founding director and curator, moving the museum from concept to a collecting institution that presented exhibitions and programs. Gaither was a graduate of Morehouse College and earned a master of fine arts degree from Brown University in 1968. Gaither joined Wright, Burroughs, and Kinard as highly respected voices for African American museums and African American art, promoting the message of community-focused museums through writing, public lectures, and teaching.²⁸ Along with Wright and Burroughs, Gaither served as co-founder of the African American Museums Association (now AAAM) and its first president.

Burroughs, Wright, Kinard, Maynard, and Gaither were social activists, social entrepreneurs, and community organizers utilizing hard-earned skills to operate institutions that were painfully underresourced. They had little or no professional staff, their boards were filled with friends and colleagues, and their organizations suffered inadequate income streams.²⁹ They worked with the community to organize volunteers to work in the museum, to fundraise, and to develop and conduct programming.

Dr. Wright's IAM was typical of many other Black museums. He leaned heavily on his family, fraternity, patients, and other community educators and activists.³⁰ To this day, former patients often stop by the museum to recount how Dr. Wright

22 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 3–4, 38–39.

23 *Ibid.*, 125.

24 *Ibid.*, 15.

25 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 289.

26 “Elma Lewis,” The Museum of the NCAAA, accessed May 14, 2018, <http://ncaaa.org/about-the-museum/elma-ina-lewis-1921-2004/>.

27 *Ibid.*

28 “Edmund Barry Gaither,” The Museum of the NCAAA, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://ncaaa.org/about-the-museum/edmund-barry-gaither/>.

29 Randall A. Williams and Prof. Michael Worth, “African American Museums and Financial Sustainability” (Washington, DC: The George Washington University), 3, <https://museumstudies.columbian.gwu.edu/sites/museumstudies.columbian.gwu.edu/files/downloads/africanamericanmuseumsandfinancialsustainability.pdf>.

30 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 166–168, Appendix I.



Bairy Gaither was the founding director and curator of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists. (Image courtesy of the Association of African American Museums)

would command them to volunteer to work for the museum in one way or another. He had great respect in the community, and people rarely turned down his request. He is often described as a strong taskmaster, but he modeled his own determination. Most people were committed and enjoyed the opportunity to serve their community.

Until 1997, every board appointment was greatly influenced by Dr. Wright. The board consisted of his friends, colleagues, even relatives. Although limited in their ability to raise significant funds, they were dedicated and hard-working. To support fundraising, Dr. Wright created the museum's Friends Committee.³¹ The group remains active today and plans a biannual fundraiser around Dr. Wright's birthday to support the museum.

Despite the challenges facing their museums, these leaders established guide stars by which to chart the course. They found ways to connect to the community and create programs and exhibits that challenged the standards of mainstream

³¹ Ibid., 206.

museums.³² Margaret Burroughs developed innovative education programs for both children and adults in the museum, created an expansive outreach program serving neighborhoods and schools, and created an oral history program in the community.³³ Charles Wright developed a mobile museum to go out to the people across the community and the state.³⁴ Opened in the summer of 1967, it housed over fifty exhibits during its twenty-year run, covered fifty thousand miles, and was viewed by at least one-hundred thousand visitors.³⁵ John Kinard boldly developed museum exhibitions—such as “The Rat: Man’s Invited Affliction,” which incorporated live rats—which helped to transform the curatorial field by focusing directly on the concerns of the neighborhood in which it was located. He showed that it was possible to serve both the educational and practical needs of their audiences.³⁶

In the 1970’s and 1980’s, the early founders were joined by fresh faces of leadership. New leaders included Harry Robinson (African American Museum, Dallas, 1974), Rowena Stewart (Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, 1975), John Fleming (National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, Ohio, 1987), Aurelia Brooks (California African American Museum, opened 1984), and Mary Schmidt Campbell (Studio Museum in Harlem, 1968).

This generation of leaders was equally committed to fostering museums that elevated communities, but they also understood the need to develop more professional institutions to meet the requirements of funders and government support.³⁷ They brought new skills and a commitment to improve the standards in areas such as collections, record keeping, and exhibitions. Some, like Harry Robinson, John Fleming, and Mary Schmidt Campbell, had academic training related to the specialty of their museums. Others, like Rowena Stewart, established a close working relationship with academics, museum professionals, and the Black community from the beginning. As Jeffrey C. Stewart and Fath Davis Ruffins wrote, “by 1980 Stewart had developed an innovative collecting method that involved oral histories, public meetings and discussions, research by scholars, and exhibitions, all designed to include the local community.”³⁸ Mary Schmidt Campbell led the Studio Museum in Harlem to accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 1987, the first Black or Latino institution to achieve that honor.³⁹

Robinson, Stewart, Fleming, and Schmidt Campbell all were deeply engaged in the African American Museums Association (now AAAM) working to not only improve their own institutions, but to improve the field. None were more devoted to that task than Rowena Stewart and John Fleming, who saved AAMA from

32 Stewart and Davis Ruffins, “A Faithful Witness,” 331–32.

33 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 76.

34 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 155–57.

35 *Ibid.*, 158.

36 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 93–96.

37 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 133.

38 Stewart and Davis Ruffins, “A Faithful Witness,” 334.

39 “Mary Schmidt Campbell,” Spelman College website, accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/office-of-the-president/biography>.



Dr. Rowena Stewart became nationally known as one of the foremost African American museum directors, having led four major African American historical museum societies between 1975 and 2002. (Image courtesy of the Association of African American Museums)

financial demise. Stewart, then the Director of the African American Museum in Philadelphia, served as President of AAMA from 1981 to 1984. She would take weekly trips to the US Congress to lobby William H. Gray III, a Pennsylvania congressman who became the nation's highest-ranking African American elected official while serving in the US House of Representatives, on behalf of all African American museums. She viewed their success as a collective one, and she encouraged the museums to pull together and support one another.⁴⁰

The founders created a culture of connectedness and commitment. This standard endured in future leadership. As it was for the founders and the leaders who

⁴⁰ Alisha A. Pina, "PASSAGES: Rowena O. Stewart, 'Mother of Black Museums,' Dies at 83," *Providence Journal*, September 25, 2015, <http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150925/NEWS/150929441>.

followed, for many people, the work they perform in African American museums is more than a job—it is a commitment to a cause, it is their calling. They believe in the power of the museum to impact people and the community.

Challenges of Flawed Transitions

In the 1980's and 1990's, many new museums were opening up, and established museums were changing leadership. Some founders formally stepped out of their roles, but remained active inside of the institutions.⁴¹

For most African American museums transitions were times of great vulnerability.⁴² It was rare that transitions were used to reposition the museum for growth or to serve changing needs in its community. Often the museum was off-course—experiencing a financial crisis, programmatic challenges, discord in the leadership, or disconnect and disagreement with the community.

The Wright Museum provides a representative example of the transitions in leadership and government that African American museums around the country have experienced since their inception. Beginning in 1987, the museum had been comfortably housed in a 22,000-square foot building. In 1993, Al Taubman, a key supporter of the neighboring Detroit Institute of Arts, approached Coleman A. Young, Detroit's first African American mayor, with plans for a major renovation and expansion for the DIA. That plan included utilizing the land where the Museum of African American History (formerly the International Afro-American Museum) stood. Mayor Young, recognizing that the Black museum was slated for demolition in such a plan, asked, "Isn't that our museum that you are building over?" Taubman replied, "We thought we could include the Museum of African American History as a wing in the DIA." The mayor replied, "Don't worry about it, our museum is so small you want to build right over it. We will just build a bigger museum." That year, with Young's support, voters authorized the City of Detroit to sell construction bonds to finance a new 120,000 square foot building for the Museum of African American History. The state-of-the-art facility opened in 1997 and was hailed as the largest African American history museum in the world. Now city-owned, with a board of directors consisting in large part of mayoral appointees, the museum was moving into a new and more political phase.

Dr. Wright no longer saw the grassroots, community-focused institution that had been his dream and he disassociated from his own museum for a period of time.⁴³ There was a real split in the community: those behind the mayor and those siding with Dr. Wright.⁴⁴ Fortunately, the mayor and Dr. Wright were able to work

41 "Biographical Note," *Margaret Burroughs papers*, The Black Metropolis Research Consortium, July 6, 2012, 2, <https://docs.google.com/file/d/oBryTfZUGTvlpcnpqNEFYVVRqdmc/edit>.

42 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 8.

43 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 213.

44 Derrick C. Lewis, "Founder Questions City Control of MAAH," *Michigan Citizen*, December 23, 1990.

out their differences and he re-engaged with the museum. However, that type of disruption can be costly to the work of and support for the museum.

As institutions became larger and more complex, transitions sometimes created community controversy and dissension—not just in Detroit, but around the country.⁴⁵ Many museum supporters worried that the vision that propelled the work of the founders could get lost.⁴⁶ Despite some successes, most African American museums have not fared well in transitions. Often those with founders with close ongoing connections to the museum have suffered discord or inconsistent leadership.⁴⁷

DuSable has had nine leaders in its fifty-seven-year existence, with seven of those leaders serving a combined twenty-three years. Dr. Burroughs served twenty-two years at the helm but continued to be connected on some level until her death. The Wright Museum has had twenty-four leaders during its fifty-three-year history.⁴⁸ Dr. Wright always served as the founder, never as executive director; many of those leaders served under his direction. From 1988 to 1993, the California African American Museum had four leaders in that five-year period.

Even relatively young museums have not been immune to rocky transitions.⁴⁹ The Underground Railroad Freedom Center, which opened in 2004, has made eight leadership changes in its fourteen-year existence.⁵⁰ The National Center for Civil and Human Rights, founded in 2007 and opened in 2014, has seen four leadership changes.⁵¹

On the other hand, the Studio Museum in Harlem has seen seven leadership changes in its fifty years, and the last four directors have led the institution for forty-one years.⁵² Both Barry Gaither, National Center of Afro American Artists, Boston and Harry Robinson, African American Museum, Dallas, have been the

45 Christy S. Coleman, “African American Museums in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Hugh H. Genoways (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 153.

46 Dawn Rhodes, “DuSable Museum Names New President-CEO,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 2015.

47 Tom Adams, *The Evolution of Executive Transition and Allied Practices: A Call for Service Integration* (CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, March 2017), 16.

48 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 182.

49 Stephen Kinzer, “Arts in America: A Struggle to Be Seen,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/22/arts/arts-in-america-a-struggle-to-be-seen.html>.

50 “History of Organization,” National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.freedomcenter.org/about-us/history>; Mark Curmutte, “Cincinnati’s Freedom Center Sheds its Chains of Doubt,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 2, 2014, <https://www.google.com/search?q=cincinnati%27s+freedom+center+sheds+enquirer&oq=cincinnati%27s+freedom+center+sheds+enquirer&aqs=chrome.69j57.7169j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>.

51 “About Us,” Center for Civil and Human Rights, accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.civilandhumanrights.org/about-us/>; Bo Emerson, “Derreck Kayongo is New CEO at Center for Civil and Human Rights,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, updated June 8, 2017; Bo Emerson, “Derreck Kayongo Leaving Center for Civil and Human Rights,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, updated March 20, 2018.

52 “Timeline,” Studio Museum in Harlem, accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.studiomuseum.org/timeline>.



Byron Rushing served as president of Boston's Museum of Afro-American History from 1972 to 1985. (Image courtesy of the Association of African American Museums)

only leaders of their institutions who have served since their inception, having served fifty-seven and forty-four years respectively.

Finances

African American museums established in the early years were always struggling financially. They survived primarily on individual donations, inconsistent fundraisers and perhaps the sporadic grant. This group includes the DuSable, the International Afro-American Museum (The Wright Museum), the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists. The Anacostia Community Museum is the exception as it was founded and funded by the Smithsonian Institution.⁵³

⁵³ Amina J. Dickerson, "African American Museums and the New Century: Challenges in Leadership," in *Leadership for the Future: Changing Directorial Roles in American History Museums and Historical Societies: Collected Essays*, ed. Bryant Franklin Tolles and Edward P. Alexander (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 171.

Charles Wright provided \$1,000 a month from his personal income to support IAM.⁵⁴ He also regularly paid additional bills as they were due. A staffer recalled having to keep the workman waiting while she called Dr. Wright to bring money to pay the bill to keep the utilities on.⁵⁵ Margaret Burroughs related that she, with her teacher's salary and her husband's salary as a truck driver, often had to pay the expenses of the museum.⁵⁶

Historically, African American museums have been consistently underfunded.⁵⁷ There are many reasons for this, such as the lack of strong boards, lack of donor cultivation, lack of business plans, and lack of professional fundraising staff.⁵⁸ African American museums have also at times been deliberately left out while other groups are enabled to thrive.⁵⁹ In Detroit, both the Detroit Zoo and the Detroit Institute of Arts have received a tri-county tax millage as city-owned institutions. However, the Wright Museum has not been able to get political support to get such a millage on the ballot. Many of our institutions have suffered significant financial challenges on numerous occasions, including the Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the DuSable Museum, the Wright Museum, Philadelphia Afro-American Museum, California African American Museum, and numerous other smaller institutions.

One of the strongest assets of African American cultural institutions is the African American community, but the community is limited in its ability to support larger organizations.⁶⁰ As African American museums we must refocus our missions and learn to cultivate donors to support our institutions at the level of their ability.⁶¹ We must learn the lessons from the founders to encourage grassroots ownership as well as the valuable lessons from the professional fundraising of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (which had to raise \$270 million to match federal support).⁶² Although we cannot overestimate the power of the brand of the Smithsonian nor the influence of having President Barack Obama in office, the work can be replicated with smaller donors.⁶³

The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) plays a pivotal role in helping to position African American museums as strategically important players in the overall museum milieu, bringing attention to every

54 Rich and Wright, *The Wright Man*, 153.

55 *Ibid.*, 161.

56 Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 21.

57 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 3.

58 BoardSource, *Museum Board Leadership 2017: A National Report* (Washington, DC: BoardSource, 2017), 23.

59 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 4; Stewart and Davis Ruffins, "A Faithful Witness," 322.

60 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 6; Coleman, "African American Museums in the Twenty-first Century," 157–158.

61 Rick Cohen, "The State of Black Museums—Part I," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 6, 2014, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/06/06/the-state-of-black-museums-part-i/>.

62 Autry, *Desegregating the Past*, 116.

63 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 12.

other African American museum.⁶⁴ When the Smithsonian opened NMAAHC in September 2016, millions of Americans were filled with pride and joy as they were introduced to this beautiful building with a solid collection, inspiring exhibitions, and professionally trained staff. We must use this attention and pride to connect to our donors and demonstrate the impact of our institutions in our communities.

The Board of Directors

The African American museums of today require a different set of skills and capabilities from those that were typically chosen by the museums' founders.⁶⁵ The museums' boards must now be actively and effectively involved in the life of the organization. The board must be willing to ensure that the museum has the necessary resources, both human and financial, to fulfill the mission.⁶⁶ The board must be able and willing to plan for the future of the museum by doing succession planning both for the executive and the board.

The first challenge is to know what kind of board members the museum needs. The second challenge is to identify those people and convince them to serve. Often those chosen are prominent and beloved members of the community, which is not necessarily the best idea unless those board members can bring or attract tangible resources to the museum. Board members are critical to the financial health of a museum not only because they can provide their own money, but also because they can help to leverage the funds of foundations, corporations, and other individuals.⁶⁷ They need to be people who are sitting at the table when and where decisions are made concerning distribution of philanthropic and corporate dollars. They need to know people who are consistently and individually generous, and they must be able to convince those generous people to support an African American museum to a significant degree. It is critical that they not only have the money but that they are willing to give it.

The wealth disparity between African Americans and whites in this country is well-documented. Even the most successful African American members of a community usually operate at a level of wealth that pales in comparison to that of their white counterparts. African American museums cannot look solely to African American contributors.⁶⁸

Toward this end, the museums must communicate the message that African American history is integral to American history and that only support from a wide

64 Rick Cohen, "Searching for Juneteenth: The State of Black Museums—Part II," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 23, 2014, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/06/23/the-state-of-Black-museums-part-ii-searching-for-juneteenth/>.

65 Dickerson, "African American Museums and the New Century," 180–81.

66 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 16.

67 Cheryl V. Jackson, "DuSable Plans Expansion as Others Falter; African-American History Museum Bucks National Trend of Closings and Cutbacks," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 1, 2005.

68 Williams and Worth, "African American Museums and Financial Sustainability," 6–8.

range of donors will reflect that truth.⁶⁹ Skilled and well-connected board members are crucial to that effort.⁷⁰

Conclusion: Sustainability—Combining the Legacy of the Past with New Opportunities

As we look to the future of the African American museum community, we recognize that strong leadership is the foundation for sustainable, well-funded institutions.⁷¹ One of the best tools we have for developing that leadership is to remember and study the remarkable legacy of those who built and sustained African American museums with their selfless service and tireless commitment to their communities. Today, many predominantly white institutions are beginning to focus on social engagement and community outreach—the very components that always have animated Black museums.⁷² African American founders set the tone for a focus on the community, provided clear examples that worked, created a legacy of collaboration, and built a bench of supporters.⁷³ Today, we can't forget those supporters as we look to build new support. We must learn and practice the art of cultivation.

One of the legacies of African American museum founders is the vision they had to recognize the power of narrative—of storytelling and preserving history through word-of-mouth. African American museums dedicated themselves to promoting and protecting a legacy they feared could be lost.⁷⁴ We must regain the power of our storytelling and placemaking.

One of the most important legacies of the early founders is the Association of African American Museums.⁷⁵ This association was established as an opportunity to gather and share knowledge, help develop standards and best practices, and create training opportunities. This is the place where leaders of small museums, especially, can gain the tools, encouragement, and examples of success they need to meet the challenges they face. As leaders of African American museums they are overstretched, overworked, and under-resourced. AAAM must continue to take advantage of IMLS funding for African American museums and maximize technology to create these opportunities for our museums and their leadership.

We must also learn from the things that did not bear fruit. We must build strong, professional, and effective boards and we must grow our personnel bench strength

69 Ibid., 14–15.

70 BoardSource, *Museum Board Leadership 2017*, 9.

71 Coleman, “African American Museums in the Twenty-first Century,” 155.

72 Davis Ruffins and Ruffins, “Recovering Yesterday.”

73 “Profile of Black Museums: A Survey Commissioned by the African American Museums Association (Washington, DC), 3–5.

74 Davis Ruffins and Ruffins, “Recovering Yesterday.”

75 Rich and Hughes Wright, *The Wright Man*, 289–90.

as we plan for succession.⁷⁶ We must recognize that failed executive transitions have negative organizational and reputational impact.⁷⁷ Leaders flounder or are often derailed due to poor transition.⁷⁸ We can study African American museums that have done a good job with transitions, such as the Studio Museum. The African American Museum in Philadelphia now has a succession plan in place after having thirteen directors in forty years.⁷⁹ We must provide professional development for our staff as we build bench strength within our museums.

Responding to economic necessity and social change, the model for what an African American museum can and should be has evolved over time.⁸⁰ What has not changed is the need for strong leadership, at both the executive and board level, nor the need for the support of our community. We have a road map that shows some success, some missteps, some challenges, and some opportunities. We should use it.

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Juanita Moore has over forty years of experience as a museum professional, having served as a curator, educator, administrator, and museum planner. She is currently the president and CEO of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan. She previously served as executive director of the American Jazz Museum and the Gem Theater located in Kansas City, Missouri. Moore served as founding executive director of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, where she oversaw the construction and opening of the museum located at the Lorraine Motel, the site of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Prior to Memphis, Moore spent several years planning and subsequently opening the National African American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio. As a senior member of the planning team, she was pivotal in developing a strategy and concept for building a nationally donated collection. Ms. Moore began her career with the Ohio Historical Society, where she served as the first African American curator. She also served as director of the Kuumba Na Nia Dance and Theatre Company. In 2014, the Association of African American Museums presented Juanita Moore with the Dr. John E. Fleming Award for lifetime achievement. Ms. Moore has served on the boards of the Association of African American Museums, American Alliance of Museums, and American Association of State and Local History. She currently serves on the board of the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

⁷⁶ *African American History & Culture in Museums: Strategic Crossroads and New Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2004), 10, https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/africanamericanmuseums_0.pdf.

⁷⁷ Dickerson, "African American Museums and the New Century," 180–81.

⁷⁸ Adams, *The Evolution of Executive Transition and Allied Practices*, 6.

⁷⁹ Felicia McGuffie, "African American Museum in Philadelphia names new CEO; Patricia Wilson Aden, Interim President, Appointed," *The Philadelphia Sunday Sun*, July 29, 2013.

⁸⁰ Coleman, "African American Museums in the Twenty-first Century," 154–55.