

Sponsors Of Hate Today Must Be Held Accountable By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

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Over the next several days, across the United States, people will pause in solemn remembrance of the 49th anniversary of the tragic assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. Back then, I was a young, college student and staff member of Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in North Carolina on that tragic day in 1968

There is no question that it has been a long and difficult road for our communities, during the past half century, as we continue to fight for equal rights and to eliminate racial hatred, discrimination and bigotry.

Many in North Carolina may recall my beginnings in activism when, as a 13-year-old, I fought to integrate the public library in Oxford, N.C., and was the first African-American to successfully struggle to get a library card there. Later, I worked for the SCLC, CORE, NAACP, and the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. Today, I proudly serve the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) as President and CEO.

Over the years, our work has taken different shapes and has required many different approaches and levels of intensity to ensure we continually push our leaders and fellow citizens further down the path of freedom, justice and equality.

Under the Obama Administration, we were fortunate to have friends in the White House, the Department of Justice and all across the Administration, who recognized the historic opportunities and worked with us to maximize them. We saw many advances for our communities and the priorities were rightly on addressing criminal justice reforms, labor, income, education, poverty and access to health care. We did not arrive fully there, but we were well on our way to making more progress for all people in America.

With the rise of the so called alt-right movement and its anti-immigration agenda that many believe helped to elect President Trump, we find ourselves working to maintain the status quo in civil rights rather than advancing this fight. And we have every right to be concerned and frustrated. Yet, as Dr. King believed, we should work to get each President of the United States, including President Trump, to denounce bigotry and hatred, as well as to champion racial equality.

We must tap into that energy to push our agenda and ensure that our nation's leaders do not support bigotry of any kind and that means identifying individuals and groups that are sponsoring this hate and holding them accountable.

Unfortunately, here in my home state of North Carolina, the Foundation for the Carolinas has spent tens of millions of dollars over the years supporting groups that sponsor hate and advance this anti-immigration and population control agenda that threatens our communities. All immigrants should be treated fairly and equally without discrimination.

Behind a veil of anonymity created by the Foundation, donors who support this organization are able to indirectly fund extremist groups without any public accountability. The Foundation prides itself on—and even advertises—donor anonymity as a reason to contribute to the foundation.

Large donors are assured that Foundation for the Carolinas has “fewer reporting requirements” than private foundations that they might otherwise choose as a vehicle for their giving. This condition, afforded to some of our state’s wealthiest individuals, has enabled patrons of the organization to operate unchecked—making this lack of transparency as a significant liability for your organization.

According to the “Los Angeles Times” and others, one individual in particular, Fred Stanback, has used the foundation to direct his money to extreme causes.

Behind the cloak of the foundation, Mr. Stanback has become a leading supporter, funneling tens of millions of dollars, to fringe anti-immigrant groups including the Federation for American Immigration Reform (labeled an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center). It is my understanding that Mr. Stanback is behind several donor advised funds at the Foundation, which afford him this anonymity.

Over a period of more than 10 years, the Foundation has donated more than \$20 million dollars to the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and to NumbersUSA, a similarly minded and well-known extremist group. These vehicles have proactively disseminated hateful xenophobic sentiment throughout our region and country, ostracizing some of our most vulnerable citizens.

In addition, the Foundation For The Carolinas’s board of directors reserves “variance power,” which authorizes it “to modify any condition or restriction on the distribution of funds if in its sole judgement (without the approval of any trustee, custodian or agent), such restriction or condition becomes, in effect, unnecessary, incapable of fulfillment, or inconsistent with the charitable needs of the area served by the Foundation.” Despite the board’s discretionary power, it chose to support organizations whose agendas were clearly at odds with the best interests of a diverse nation.

As a civil rights and social justice leader, my view is that we should not tolerate this kind of unjust targeting of our most vulnerable citizens by Foundation for the Carolinas’s anonymous patrons. Public accountability for all nonprofits is necessary. It is our duty to fight for justice for all. It’s time for the Foundation for the Carolinas to come clean and stop sponsoring such hate groups. Let’s move our nation forward and not backward.