

# In the Joy of a New Beginning: Southern Partners Fund Celebrates 10 Years of Philanthropy



Before lunch Hollis Watkins from Southern Echo leads us in a song. He's remixed Harry Belafonte's "[Day-O \(Banana Boat Song\)](#)" changing "daylight come and me wanna go home" to:

*Freedom! Give us freedom, freedom come and it won't be long.  
Freedom, freedom, freedom come and it won't be long.*

Alta Starr from the Ford Foundation calls [Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery](#) to the stage to standing applause. He is our keynote speaker and highly revered for his enduring service to the social justice movement. Hailed as the "Dean of the Civil Rights Movement," Rev. Dr. Lowery represents a legacy of service and commitment to the nonviolent struggle for the causes of justice, human rights, economic equality, voting rights, peace and human dignity. Rev. Dr. Lowery delivered the Benediction on the occasion of President Obama's inauguration and is the recent recipient of The Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Rev. Dr. Lowery takes us back to the scene of President Barack Obama's inauguration, where he used the phrase "in the joy of a new beginning" because Obama's election created

new hope in people. He quotes Revelation 21: *I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the old heaven and the old earth passed away.*

Our land needs healing and all of you are in the healing business. I love anniversaries because they give you a new beginning. I told my wife we should celebrate our wedding anniversary three-four times a year! Southern Partners Fund's 10th Anniversary is a new beginning for you. After 10 years of work and stewardship, now you're looking to the next decade.

Rev. Dr. Lowery says that he supported Barack Obama because he thought God was trying to give us a new beginning. He went around the country asking people why they liked Barack Obama. One white woman said it was because he's sexy. Rev. Dr. Lowery asked his wife if she thought Barack was sexy. She said, "no comment!" Rev. Dr. Lowery went to Iowa with Obama to see if he would elicit support from a majority white community. He saw white people standing in the cold to hear him, suffering from runny noses and holding signs saying, "Yes, We Can!"

God has given us a new beginning and we need to grab ahold of the joy that comes with that. I know the challenges you're facing but God says you can look at things in a new way. Black folk and white folk can't get away from each other. There's no hiding place. We're tied together inextricably. We have to work together. He uses the story of the movie [The Defiant Ones](#), starring Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis as two escaped convicts chained together, white and black, who must learn to get along in order to elude capture.

Rev. Dr. Lowery reminds us that power can be generated by a small group of people. The power is in our hands, not in the hands of those who are so blind they can't see. He says that we're ushering in a new era and the whole world sees it. Rev. Dr. Lowery just turned 88 years old, and says his old eyes couldn't see the Lincoln Memorial from the Mall during Obama's inauguration. But in his mind, he went back to when he heard Martin Luther King, Jr., a 34-old preacher speaking at the Memorial. He said that he'd always thought that someday there would be a Black president, but none of his fellow civil rights leaders thought they'd live to see it. For the first time in his life, when they played the "Star-Spangled Banner," it sounded pretty good to him.

*Freedom come and it won't be long.*

Later in the evening, the freedom theme continues with Southern Partners Fund's 10th Anniversary Awards Dinner and Gala. With performances by Ballethnic Dance Company, Joyce & Jacque, and Ken Ford Strings, the atmosphere is lively and full of Southern charm and sophistication. In attendance are philanthropists, nonprofit leaders, and most of the community organizers from the day's [Social Justice Institute](#).

Several awards go out to supporters of social justice in the South. Humanitarian awards are presented to [Xernona Clayton](#), Founder of the Trumpet Awards Foundation and Creator of the Trumpet Awards highlighting African American accomplishments and contributions and Shaffer "Ne-Yo" Smith, Founder of the [Compound Foundation](#). R&B star Ne-Yo's misses his flight so his mother accepts his award on his behalf. To the audience's delight, he ends up making it to the celebration at the very end, just in time to take photos with attendees.



We are treated to a special spoken word performance by Mike Molina, telling us to “Be Encouraged” (watch the video of Mike Molina’s performance [here](#) ). We continue to celebrate the other awardees with amazing musical interludes and a lovely dinner.

**Social Justice Leadership Award for Justice**

[Marguerite Casey Foundation](#)

**Social Justice Leadership Award for Freedom**

[Southern Echo](#) (President Hollis Watkins pictured accepting award below)



**Social Justice Leadership Award for Peace**

Barbara Meyer of the [Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation](#) (BAMM) (pictured accepting award below)



Barbara had these words of wisdom for the group:

- Learn how to stop and breathe deeply when chaos surrounds you.
- Remember that unasked-for advice can be heard as criticism.
- The most important thing is life is to learn how to give love and let it come in. Love is the only rational act.

It was a great way to end an inspiring day. When the music started up for dancing afterwards, you could tell that this wasn't just any old gala with your rubber chicken and empty recognitions. For the Southern Partners Fund and their grantees, this was truly a party. A time for them to raise a glass to their 10 years of hard work and revel in the joy of a new beginning for the next 10 years.

## **Read more about what happened during Southern Partners Fund's Inaugural Social Justice Institute**

- [The Voice of Community Organizers from the South](#)
- [Structural Racism: Challenges and Opportunities in the Age of Obama](#)
- [Census 2010: Community Organizing for a Complete Count](#)
- [In the Joy of a New Beginning: Southern Partners Fund Celebrates 10 Years of Philanthropy](#)
- ["Be Encouraged"](#) – video of Mike Molina's spoken word performance at the Anniversary Gala