

**Bridge Philanthropic Consulting Mourns the Loss of
Thomas W. Dortch Jr.**

Entrepreneur, Community Activist, Youth Advocate, Servant Leader



(L-R) Dwayne Ashley, unknown, Attorney Johnnie Cochran, Jr., **Thomas Dortch, Jr.** with his son (Center) Thomas W. Dortch III, Congressman John Lewis and Luther Gatling

When Robert Greenleaf coined the groundbreaking term “servant leader” 53 years ago, part of what he said was, “The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.” Thomas W. “Tommy” Dortch’s life came to symbolize the very definition of Greenleaf’s concept of leaders who serve.

Tommy exhibited leadership qualities at an early age, but it was his unwavering and unrelenting commitment to ensuring people’s needs were a priority that distinguished him as a servant leader.

I know because I had a front-row seat to his lifetime of service, beginning when I was executive director of 100 Black Men of America, Inc., in the late 1990s and continuing until his passing. When we met, Tommy was in his first tenure as chairman of the board, which required that we work closely together every day. I was a young man, but Tommy saw potential in me, and without being asked, he began to nurture my leadership skills. In him, I found a mentor who imparted many exceptional lessons that I continue to draw upon to this day. One lesson that stood out to me then and still guides my work today is the importance of equity and inclusion.

Long before diversity, equity, and inclusion became a focus of corporate HR and social justice efforts, Tommy was a trailblazer in that arena. He began his career as an activist in 1972 working on behalf of disenfranchised people and he never stopped, even when he was ill. As recently as November, he was still advising Atlanta civic leaders on 2023 programs for underrepresented youth.

Driven by a personal mission, he was a tireless advocate for Black youth and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He founded the National Black College Alumni Hall of Fame and led the foundation to award over \$1 million in grants and scholarships, which extended college opportunities to more than half a million students. He was a successful business owner that always reached back to give other minorities a leg up. When doors were often closed to entrepreneurs of color, Tommy created innovative organizations that continue to help them gain access to opportunities to create and develop their businesses.

A sought-after author, advisor, and speaker on a national and international level, his accomplishments were broad, extensive, and too numerous to list here. His works will reverberate for many generations to come. His legacy is indelible. The people, institutions, and communities he touched will forever be appreciative of his service. Many people stand on Tommy Dortch's shoulders, and I am proud and privileged to be among them.

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Media Contact:

Dr. Edna Sims, ESP Public Relations
310-770-8117 ~ esppr@icloud.com