

**Smithsonian Institution  
National Museum of American History**

**Philanthropy Initiative  
Oral History Project**

**Interview with:  
Darren Walker  
President, Ford Foundation  
Detroit, Michigan**

**Interview conducted by:  
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Detroit, Michigan  
Segment 1 of 2**

AMANDA MONIZ: Okay. This is Amanda Moniz conducting an oral history interview with Darren Walker of the Ford Foundation for the Smithsonian's Philanthropy Initiative Oral History Project. It's April 26th, 2017, and we're at the Ford Foundation's temporary headquarters at 1440 Broadway.

Could you please state your name?

DARREN WALKER: Darren Walker.

MONIZ: And can you tell us where you were born?

WALKER: Lafayette, Louisiana.

MONIZ: Thank you. All right, can you tell me a bit about where you grew up and your hometown?

WALKER: Well, I had several hometowns. I was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, which was 30 miles away from the very small town of Rayne, Louisiana, where my mother lived. And I was born there and lived in that town until I was about four years old, at which point, my mother took my sister and me to live in Ames, Texas, where we had family in rural Liberty County. And those two small towns were followed by another small town, Goose Creek, Texas, which is the community where I lived until I graduated from high school. When I graduated from Ross Sterling High School in Baytown, Texas, which is really a larger county seat, if you will, in eastern Harris County, Texas.

MONIZ: And you mentioned you had family who lived in that area. Can you tell me a bit more about your extended family, about your mother?

WALKER: Sure, well, my mother was from this town where we had ... from the town of Rayne where most of our extended family lived. We moved to Ames, Texas because of my great-aunt living there and her willingness to take us in while my mother studied to be a nurse's assistant. And I never knew my father, so there was never any real material contact with him. So for most of my life, I have had one parent and that suited me well.

MONIZ: Is your mother still alive?

WALKER: Oh yes, she's 81 years old and she's very much alive. She has just returned from a wonderful cruise of Caribbean and Panama Canal, and she had a great time for a couple of weeks down there.

MONIZ: Oh, how terrific. And I'm curious how far back you can trace your family. I'd be curious to know about-

WALKER: Oh, that's a really interesting point, Amanda, and it's going to be very disappointing to you as a historian to say that I don't know anything about my family's history. I didn't really know my grandparents because they died either before I was born, or when I was very young. And my mother's parents. And I have really no idea about my family's history.

And it's been something that I've never really felt an emotional tug or pull to need to know that I find is often the case with people. I find that people generally have a deep need to know about their history, where they came from and who their forebears are. And I've never felt that.

MONIZ: I'm very surprised to hear you say that because history is so important to you. Do you have an idea of why you're not curious about your family history?

WALKER: I think it's because I've always felt that my work is about looking ahead and that I've never felt the necessity of understanding my past, because I'm really not looking for anything in my past. And so I know it sounds very peculiar, particularly because I love history. I love reading autobiography and I love historical narratives and because I'm just so interested in people.

But I've just ... maybe it's because I didn't have a father, and I mean, I did know my father and I wouldn't know how to begin to think about finding out about my father and his family, because my father really wasn't a part of my life and had no interest in me. And I just have never felt that I'm incomplete because of that, or that my life is in any way diminished because I don't know that history.

And I found that people I know who have that need to know their history feel unfulfilled, because they don't know or feel that there is something missing, because they don't know. I don't feel there's anything missing in my life because I don't know the history of my family. I feel like my life is incredibly rich.

MONIZ: How do you square that with saying ... you've talked about embracing your past, so how do you square what you've just said with embracing your past? You're talking about simply your own past that you can remember from childhood.

WALKER: I mean embracing your journey and your own personal narrative. And I find that sometimes successful people aren't always comfortable with the fullness of their personal family narratives. And in my family, there was a lot of poverty, there was domestic abuse, there was violence, there was incarceration. There were lots of things that are really unfortunate, but

those experiences shaped me and informed who I am. I'm not really sure knowing who my grandfather or great-grandfather was, would have any impact on actually shaping sort of who I am. So I guess I must sound quite superficial, but it's that I'm really just interested in looking ahead.

MONIZ: You mentioned that your childhood involved poverty and domestic abuse and violence. You were born in a charity hospital, can you tell me where you received medical care?

WALKER: I never received medical care until I was an adult. I never saw a dentist. I never saw a doctor, outside of a couple of visits to the public clinic. I never had the privilege of private medical care or attention. And when you're born in a charity hospital, certainly in Louisiana in the late 1950s, there's not much that you expect.

When I was a child, I would, in the little town in Rayne where I'd visit our family with my mother, there were always people sitting on the porches of these shotgun houses with their limbs missing. And I remember seeing people sitting in wheelchairs or sitting in rocking chairs and they would have a leg missing. And I would say to my mother, "What happened to them?" And my mother would just say, "Diabetes." And I always thought that if you had diabetes, which I know that there is much of it in my family, that had meant that you automatically would have a limb. And the reality was that if you were poor and you had diabetes, there was really no care for you, and so amputating the leg or arm of a person with diabetes, who was often black, of course, and poor, was what the public health system did to poor blacks.

And I never understood that actually there was treatment that would prevent the loss of a limb, for example. And I now have diabetes and, which of course, was completely expected and predictable. But I never think about like losing a limb, as a result of that.

MONIZ: Wow. All right, so medical care was not part of your experience growing up. Did your mother or grandmother or aunt great-aunt provide ... they must have provided some sort of healing care if you were sick.

WALKER: Oh sure, oh my goodness, they were very attentive. Of course, absolutely, it's not to say that my mother, my grandmother, my grandmother who was actually my great-aunt, or my great-uncle who I was close to, they absolutely took good care and care was relative. The things that one would eat or the things that one would experience what today probably not be ... but if you're poor, it is what you ... when I was a little boy and I would be out in the country at my aunt's house or sitting on the front porch or back porch of a little shotgun house and for lunch we would have like a bologna sandwich and to drink we would have water, and they'd just pour

like spoonfuls of sugar in it. And like, you get sweet water and sweet water was you drank.

Now of course who today would give their child water and sugar as a drink for lunch or any time. But of course, it's not as if making iced tea or going to get Kool-Aid was something that was necessarily on the menu.

MONIZ: So you mentioned that your grandmother was actually your great-aunt. What is the story there?

WALKER: Well, my grandmother died and my grandmother had one child with her first husband, who was my mother. And my grandmother remarried and with her new husband, had several children. My mother was the victim of sexual abuse by the man my grandmother married and my grandmother died when my mother was 13. And my mother confessed to her aunt what was happening and what she feared what was happening.

So in fact, my mother immediately after my grandmother's death, left Rayne, Louisiana and returned home with my great-aunt. Her aunt. And was raised for the rest of her youth by her great-aunt. And so I grew up with really, my grandmother was really my great-aunt.

MONIZ: I got it. And this is the family who moved to live with-

WALKER: In Texas, yes.

MONIZ: We're talking about medical care and I'd like to talk a little about education. When you were a child, you participated in Head Start. Can you tell me about that experience with as much detail as you remember?

WALKER: Well, I remember that a woman, a young woman approached the porch of our little shotgun house one day in the spring of 1965. It was a warm day and I was five years old and she told my mother about a new program called Head Start, and that the program was going to help children like me with getting an early start on school. And she didn't go into the pedagogy and the effort to help low-income urban and rural kids, but she just promised my mother that it would be a good program. And I think my mother thought, that's great, and if it means I can be relieved of the responsibility of this boy for four hours a day, please take him.

And so I was in the first class of Head Start in 1965 and we were in a school ... sorry, a church in Ames, Texas, and that's where the Head Start program was. And I remember that I loved to read and that Head Start absolutely gave me an early start.

MONIZ: Do you remember the classroom?

WALKER: I just remember that it was in the church and there was a classroom like ... there was the Sunday school room and it was the room where Sunday school was held in the church. And for some reason, I remember that there was for some reason, I think, a Catholic nun or a woman who was in some way attached to the Catholic Church, who had something to do. Because there was a little Catholic Church in this town, but I just recall that we were in ... everyone was black, we were all black and we were in this little classroom and there was maybe a dozen of us.

MONIZ: You mentioned this church, was religion a part of your childhood? Did you attend that church?

WALKER: I did, not that church, but I did attend ... religion was not a constant. I think the real challenge in my household ... I just think it was the sort of stability to have that predictability of like we're going to go to church every Sunday was just not possible.

MONIZ: Is religion a part of your life now?

WALKER: Oh, I think I am absolutely a person of faith and a believer and it's very hard for me to imagine how to sustain oneself without a belief in God. A belief that there is some larger force at play in your life. For me, that's always been a very comforting and way of rationalizing a lot of things I don't always understand.

MONIZ: Do you belong to a church?

WALKER: No, I don't belong to a church. I generally when I attend church will attend the Abyssinian Baptist Church and occasionally, I go to church with the in-laws, which is a nice sort of Presbyterian church in Westchester County.

MONIZ: I just want to ask a few more questions about your childhood before moving on to talking about your career. You've told stories about receiving gifts of magazines and of clothes from families that your relatives worked for. Can you talk about how you felt when you received those gifts?

WALKER: Well, my grandmother in particular, because she worked for 50 years for the same wealthy family in Houston, she would bring home many of the discarded effects of the family, whether it was clothing or household goods or anything that they discarded that had any value, my grandmother would pack it up. And the family was always happy to give her things. And so I loved getting things and she knew what I really liked, and she would get it for me, and she would give it to me.

And so I loved the books and the magazines and the art and culture, sort of ephemera that she would bring. I loved ... I still remember his name, Danny Crane. I loved Danny Crane's clothes, because Danny Crane, who was a couple of years older than me, but I was a big boy for my size and he was small. So I loved his clothes because they were of such quality. And I remember the first time I put on a sweater that was made of real wool. How that felt. And I remember that my teachers would compliment me on my appearance when I wore his clothes. And so I loved ... I used to get the iron and ironing board and I would iron his khaki pants that he would give me. I would iron the shirt and all my life, all my young life, until I was in college, I had hand-me-downs. And I even bought hand-me-downs when I was in college from the thrift store.

And for example, when my grandmother sometimes would say, "Oh, I couldn't get this. I was hoping that Dr. Crane" ... because his name was Dr. Crane because he was a prominent physician in Houston, "I was hoping that Dr. Crane was going to give this to me for you, but he gave it ... Mrs. Crane wanted it to go to the Junior League." Because the Junior League Thrift Shop sold clothes of the Junior League members for charity. And so she would give things to the Junior League thrift shop and like we have housing works, it would be sold and the proceeds would go to the Junior League charitable activities.

And so I, when I became old enough, I would go to the Junior League Thrift Shop and buy my clothes. And I did that until I was literally out of law school. My first tuxedo came from the Junior League Thrift Shop. My first Brooks Brothers suit came from the Junior League Thrift Shop. In fact, the suit that I interviewed at Cleary Gottlieb, wearing, was from the Junior League Thrift Shop.

MONIZ: You talk about this in a very positive way.

WALKER: It's a very positive story.

MONIZ: Did your mother or your family share your positive feelings about receiving these gifts or shopping-

WALKER: Yes, absolutely, there was no shame. There was no sense ... because everything that we received was very high-quality, I had clothes with Neiman Marcus labels. I didn't know what Neiman Marcus was, I did, but I would never have ventured in of course, or Brooks Brothers. These were the kinds of things that were their hand-me-downs, so for a poor kid like me, there was no dishonor or shame at all.

MONIZ: So we've talked a little bit about the receiving side of things. Let's talk on the given side. Was giving or charitable activity or mutual support part of your family's experience? What did you learn from them about giving?

WALKER: Nothing. It was not a part of my family's experience and that's not to say that for example, my mother wasn't always generous with her time as she could be, but she had very little time when she wasn't working or dealing with all sorts of things. I didn't know what philanthropy was, or I didn't know what charitable giving was. I obviously knew what charity was. But I didn't learn about giving in that way, philanthropy, until I was an adult. Because I never experienced the kind of privilege that allows one to think about philanthropy. And what do I do with my spare time? Or what do I do with my disposable income? Because growing up, the people I knew had neither.

MONIZ: And what about mutual support?

WALKER: I found ... my mother relied on support from time to time from friends or relatives and because she was sort of constantly in financial stress, I certainly understood and I saw the sort of generosity of spirit that comes even when you're poor because there's no one in our orbit had a lot of disposable income, but you would see how someone would ... my mother's friend would say, "I'll loan you this amount of money but you've got to pay it back to me before this time because I've got to use it to make sure I pay my mortgage or I pay my rent," or whatever.

So what I learned during that time was less about charity and philanthropy and more about my own conviction that I would never be poor, and would do all I could to ensure that I had some level of financial security. And so ... and independence, because I found that allows you to be more independent.

MONIZ: So I'd like to shift to talking about how you have learned about philanthropy and how you have become a leader in the world of philanthropy. After you left college, you moved to New York City, you worked in a law firm and then at investment banking. Was philanthropy a part of your life at that time?

WALKER: Oh, absolutely. When I came to New York, within three years, I had joined two nonprofit boards, for example. And I understood the ... because it was the first time I actually had disposable income and I understood that there was a responsibility to give back and to be engaged. And it's why I found myself drawn to working and being involved in Harlem and that's how I came to the Children's Storefront School. Literally three years after I moved to New York in 1989 is when I first joined the board of the Children's Storefront School.

And so working in an environment like Harlem in the early '90s was an experience in everyday encounters with gross inequality and racism and classism. And it gave me a sense of my own privilege for the first time. Because I had the ability to live a very nice life downtown, to when I wanted to go uptown and volunteer and do the work of board stewardship of the school. And it allowed me to be engaged with African Americans living on the edge and the families who I got to know talked about how I could, in a long-term way, make a difference. Because I knew that I did not want to be a career Wall Streeter, it was not what I saw as my future, but I did believe that I needed to be on Wall Street for a period of time.

But I knew that ultimately, I would find my way to the social sector. I didn't have any idea about philanthropy. I thought that my trajectory would be to ... if I was fortunate, to maybe lead a nonprofit organization, ultimately, that had a mission of working on poverty or education.

MONIZ: So after a few years of being on the board and then volunteering at the Children's Storefront School, you quit your job and you went to work at the school. Can you describe what your expectations were?

WALKER: Well, my expectation was actually that I would transition to being in an education non-profit. A school, a charter school, an educational advocacy or policy organization, because I really internalized this belief that education is the great equalizer in our society. Because I felt that my own experience validated that notion, that if I found a really good educational organization, that I could just simply make the transition. And I was quickly disabused of that idea when I went to the Children's Storefront on a more full-time basis, and day-to-day saw what it actually takes to teach a class to manage an educational enterprise, for which I was in no way trained to do.

I was lucky because during that year, I met Calvin Butts at the Abyssinian Baptist Church who had recently initiated the Abyssinian Development Corporation. The Development Corporation was the nonprofit community development organization that the church created with the mission of revitalizing the Harlem community, starting with the literally thousands of units of abandoned and burned out and poor quality housing stock there. But a larger objective of really comprehensive community redevelopment, including commercial and business corridors and employment opportunities, educational opportunities for young people, etc.

So as it turned out, while I wasn't qualified or had any material skills to make a difference in a school, in a development organization, that valued my experience in law and banking. So for example, I understood project

finance. So while I at a bank may have understood project finance from the perspective of a large project to make a group of investors rich, this was about putting together the financing on low-income housing or a supermarket on 125th Street.

But the skills were transferable. So I was lucky to find myself as becoming the chief operating officer of the Abyssinian Development Corporation. And it was a great journey and it made it possible for me to work in Harlem for almost eight years. And during that time, to be engaged in a major initiative, over a thousand units of housing, a major ... the first retail complex to be developed in Harlem in over two decades, and a school, major employment and jobs training for residents, Head Start program.

There were a number of things that the Abyssinian Development Corporation initiated while I was there, so I was really lucky and I loved working in Harlem.

MONIZ: What did you love about it?

WALKER: I loved the experience of seeing the concrete and very quantifiable impact on the lives of people when you open a housing project and 30 families get to move into permanent housing from a homeless shelter. It gives you a real sense of impact on people's lives. And so policy becomes practice and implemented in that way.

And so I really loved that experience and I loved the sense of urgency that came with the necessity to deliver for the community. So you couldn't ... there were 30 families waiting for housing and if you didn't get it built, they were going to remain in the homeless shelter. So the sense of urgency and responsibility that comes with that is significant.

But it's also the rewards of delivering, are enormously valuable and gratifying and so that's what I loved.

MONIZ: So then tell me about your shift to working in foundations, which take you away from that immediacy and urgency and being able to see your impact quickly like that.

WALKER: Well, my transition to philanthropy was quite ... it was serendipity. I received a phone call from one of the foundations, the president of one of the foundations that funded the Abyssinian Development Corporation, who said that she had given my name to the president of the Rockefeller Foundation over lunch. And I indeed received a call and found myself in the office of the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, talking about community development. As it turned out, Rockefeller at that time had a major national initiative in communities like Harlem and they wanted

someone to lead that effort who had some practical knowledge of urban development and my skill set, I think, was a fit.

And so I found myself transitioning to a very different environment, one of institutional philanthropy, which certainly in 2001, felt somewhat cloistered and remote. And for me, that transition was not easy because I didn't feel the sense of urgency, and I felt that many of the things that we worked on in Harlem were handled in a more abstract way. And the sort of theoretical underpinnings of every idea felt to me, quite academic. And because most of the people I worked with, in fact, had PhDs in various disciplines in the social sciences and also public health.

The environment felt somewhat remote and so it wasn't an easy transition, but what I would continue to appreciate about philanthropy is the capacity of philanthropy to facilitate and invest in ideas and institutions and people. And in doing so, to promote and sustain social progress and human achievement. And so I saw that, obviously coming to a foundation like Rockefeller, where signature initiatives like the Green Revolution, which fed over a billion people, and the work around population health and sanitation saved the lives of untold numbers of people and improved the quality of life for millions of people.

And so you understand how this these policy ideas or these significant theoretical constructs can cascade down to meaningful impact in people's lives. And so you actually get to see the full value chain. When I was in Harlem, there was the housing tax credit program, but I didn't understand why the housing tax program existed and necessarily what its global aims sought to achieve or the kind of legislative history that created it. I just understood that we got this allocation every year from HUD, from the Housing and Urban Development Department, and we could use that to do low-income housing.

At Rockefeller, I came to understand how national housing policy is made and so you were lucky enough to see the full value chain of change.

MONIZ:

So there's so much we can talk about, about your work at Rockefeller and at Ford, the influential decisions you've made to address inequality, your recent decision about mission-related investments, but I'd really like to spend a little time talking about your views and your use about history. Because that's something that's really struck me about how you approach your work. You've said that you're trying to ensure the rights of people who've been historically excluded or underprivileged, so history is central to your understanding of your mission. Could you talk to me a bit about how you learn history?

WALKER:

Well, I think history is critical to formulating solutions for today and the future. And so I look at history, sort of two vectors of history. One, I look at ... if we're working on helping to reduce inequality in America, I look at the history of inequality in America. And I think we have to come to grips with the intersections of race and class and gender and disability. The things that have culturally and systematically marginalized and excluded some Americans, and privileged other Americans. And so understanding the systems, the structures, the practices, the culture, the policies that have reinforced and sustained intergenerational poverty.

And so understanding through the lens of what the Ford Foundation has done in these areas for me was critical, because the Ford Foundation has probably the richest, most robust and contested history in the area of social welfare of any American foundation. In part, because of our donor being a remarkable, brilliant and in many ways, incomparable industrialist. And also one of the most virulent, anti-Semite, racist men of the 20th century.

And so it's important for me to understand that history and to understand the contradictions of Henry Ford, which quite honestly, are no different than the contradictions of most great American men of the 18th, 19th, 20th century. And so I start there, and then look over Ford's history at the investments we have made in seeding new fields, in investing in very, I believe, important but controversial ideas. Like the need to support civil rights or women's rights. Human rights, generally. These are all things that the Ford Foundation advanced in the 1950s and 60s, which were very new ideas and highly contested. Because it up-ended traditional norms about what was appropriate, what was truly American culture.

And so our history is, I have mined the history of the Ford Foundation's investments over 80 years, provided me with a tremendous retrospective on really, the narrative arc of social progress in America, and the world, because of the influence of the foundation internationally. I am able to, just sitting in our archives, as I have done hours upon hours, and gaining a view of what works, what hasn't worked, what promising ideas weren't given the full opportunity, where our own behavior as a foundation was arrogant and narcissistic and where we listened better in other areas, we were thoughtful and considerate. And at other times, were caricatures of the arrogant ugly American in our behavior.

All of that is a part of our history, and so that has helped me to understand that today where we are situated in the world, and what we are called to focus on and what we have some comparative advantage to working on is in part, an assessment based upon a historical analysis. That gives me greater conviction that a rights-based approach, an understanding of development, but understanding the limitations of development theory

without the empowerment of the people you hope to help, you seek to assist and support and empower, that we need paradigms that bring these different disciplines and approaches in philanthropy together. And that's what we are seeking to do at Ford today.

MONIZ: What about beyond Ford's history, how have you learned about American history, more generally?

WALKER: I love American history because the history of America is the most interesting reflection of a nation and a people ever. Because there has never been anything like America. And because it is this experiment that is quite unprecedented in global history, I've been fascinated with the contours of 300 years. The experiment of this idea that people from other parts of the world, very different people from very different parts of the world, can actually live with a foundational belief in equality, in justice, in peaceful harmonized existence, through the mechanism of democratic governance is incredibly fascinating to me. Because it has never happened anywhere in the world and because the articulation of our narrative as a people, both as codified in the Constitution and as promulgated in the Bill of Rights.

The contradictions of that, the ways in which the noble idealized notions articulated in those documents is so removed from the reality of the lived experience of many Americans and the contradictions. And the contested, countervailing notions that are a part of our sort of historical underpinnings. And the actual men who constructed those documents and created the foundational elements of a nation.

Themselves, because they were human, were flawed and themselves, did not represent the fullest aspiration of what they actually articulated. So their own lives did not manifest what they wrote. Because you can't say in a document that all men are equal, and then say but some men are 3/5 of a man, and not mention women at all. There are just things that are both at the same time, that soar and that lift you up, and then at the same time, you are deflated by the reality of what it really meant.

And so the history of America is one of these contradictions, over many generations, being negotiated and navigated. And because I see things from the perspective of being African American, my understanding is from that perspective. But as I say, the history of France isn't as interesting as the history of the United States. I think British history is very interesting. I don't think it's as interesting as American history. It's much older and so the arc is really interesting in its years of being sustained, but I don't think there's anything like American history.

MONIZ: So, it's the contradiction you find compelling.

WALKER: Oh, it's the contradiction, it's the inconsistencies, it's the flaws of the founders when measured against what they wrote.

MONIZ: And how does that relate to your faith and storytelling?  
Because you personally and under your leadership at Ford use storytelling as an important tool to achieving your mission or to pursuing your mission. I'd like to hear about your faith-

WALKER: Well, because we Americans love stories. We are motivated and inspired by stories. It's why we all love Hamilton. Because Lin-Manuel Miranda captures through powerful storytelling, the makings of a great nation. And we like narratives because they give us meaning and they affirm and reaffirm who we are, but narratives can also be mythologized narratives.

And there certainly is some of that, just as there is in any family. My mother said to me, "Oh, your uncle before he died he was" ... and I thought, "That wasn't who he was." You're making up a little part of things here, now that he's gone and you're reflecting back. Because she needs to have a story that is comforting and that is affirming. And I think stories in our history can help do that.

I think at Ford because we recognize the power of storytelling, because we know today more than we knew when Ford first started investing in storytelling 30 years ago, we know that stories have a great impact on how people understand issues and people's disposition of a particular issue. Whether it be public school reform or our criminal justice system, stories inform and often are dispositive in how we see a problem and our ability to see a solution.

MONIZ: What kind of stories did you hear as a child growing up?

WALKER: Oh, the stories I heard were often ... they were stories of racism and stories of exclusion. And when my grandfather told me the story of how in the little town in East Texas where he grew up, when you finished primary school, the colored school ended in primary school. There was no poor African American boys and girls, they went to work in the fields. And so, his view about schools and about the stories that he would tell were really about in many ways, anger, frustration. That he had not been allowed to go to school and go to high school, to really learn to read and write. And so I heard lots of stories like that.

MONIZ: Were there any good storytellers in your family?

WALKER: Yes, my grandfather who was again, my great-uncle, he was a really master storyteller, but his stories were generally tinged with anger.

Because he was very bitter about the ways in which he'd been limited because of his race.

MONIZ: Why do you tell your story in the way you do? You're a very compelling storyteller.

WALKER: I don't know how else to tell my own story and I feel that stories are most powerful when they are authentic and candid and honest and you're willing to be vulnerable and share earnestly, your own perspective and your lived experience.

MONIZ: Right, well, we're close to wrapping up now, so I want to ask for a couple final reflections. What have you been proudest of in your philanthropic career to date?

WALKER: Well, I think the thing that I am proudest of is the work that we have done in Detroit, which was in many ways, another moment of serendipity. When I became president of Ford in September of 2013, I received a call in October of 2013, a month in, from the bankruptcy judge in Detroit, overseeing the municipal bankruptcy of the city of Detroit. The largest in American history of any city, any municipality. And he made the case to me to come to Detroit for a meeting with him and the other attorneys and other philanthropies working in Detroit, to begin to forge a plan to bring to a conclusion that city's bankruptcy. Which ultimately required the foundation to make one of its largest grants ever, \$125 million for something we'd never done, which was to go into a pooled fund with other foundations, which raised almost \$400 million, which was matched by the state of Michigan, for a total of approximately \$800 million. And with those dollars, to have made it possible for the city's bankruptcy to come to an end, for the future of the pension funds that were imperiled and insolvent, to remain solvent. And to ensure that the extraordinary Detroit Institute of the Arts was secured and its future was secured. That was a very gratifying moment and also gratifying was our reconciliation with the Ford family, which occurred during that period.

In 1976, Henry Ford II, the grandson of Henry Ford and the son of Edsel Ford, who was the founder of the Ford Foundation, resigned from the board of the foundation in a very public way, at which time he made unflattering remarks about the foundation. The kinds of grant-making we were doing, which he felt was liberal, too liberal, too socially progressive and that he wished to have nothing to do with the foundation and he in the family, the Ford family bid us adieu. And we really never had any contact with the Ford family from 1976.

And our engagement in Detroit, our home, was very uneven in the ensuing years, such that in the 1990s, the Michigan Attorney General, who even

though we were a New York foundation, because Henry Ford II moved the foundation to New York in 1950, we remained domiciled in Michigan and governed by the laws of Michigan. And the Attorney General there threatened to sue the foundation because we, in his estimation, we were not fulfilling our mission of charitable giving in Michigan. So that was a low point.

We emerged from that I think, having come to an agreement of future work in Michigan. But more importantly, I think when I became president, I made a concerted effort to reach out to the Ford family through Sheila Hamp and her husband Steve Hamp, Sheila is the daughter of William Clay Ford and her brother Bill Ford, who is the executive chairman of Ford Motor Company. And through that engagement with them, was introduced to their mother, Mrs. William Clay Ford, Martha Firestone Ford, who at 90, is an amazing, incredibly spunky and smart woman. For the first time in 50 years, the trustees of the Ford Foundation traveled to Michigan, to Detroit for a board meeting. We had a major affair with the family. There were some 50 Ford family members who attended an event with the trustees of the foundation, and we had a major dinner for 200 community leaders there.

And so it was a really poignant and gratifying moment to be a part of this rapprochement, that I feel was necessary and healing for all of us. And I know that for the family, it was very meaningful. And I was in Detroit last week and was with Edsel Ford II, and it was just really a warm experience.

MONIZ: So, final question, I read about the grant that the Ford Foundation has given to the Henry Ford home for the restoration work. And hearing what you've just spoken about now, I'm curious about why that reconciliation with the past matters so much to you.

WALKER: It matters to me because I think history matters and we would not be the Ford Foundation were it not for two things. One, Henry and Edsel initiating this foundation in 1936 with a broad mission. And secondly, public policy that incented and encouraged the family upon the death of Edsel, to create a foundation that would expand and enlarge the vision of Edsel and Henry from that small family foundation, to a significantly larger institution.

And through that intersection of the sort of generosity of spirit and the charitable impulse of the Ford family and a tax policy that encouraged giving rather than paying taxes, we exist today. And Henry, as I said, having an honest assessment of Henry Ford, the contradictions of the man, I remain convinced that he was among the most important figures of the 20th century. And the restoration of his home and where he lived with his

wife for some 50-plus years, and having that as a center to interpret and to share and transmit his life and what he created and his contributions to advancing American democracy, advancing global development and human rights around the world and making a difference in the lives of millions of people, that deserves our support. It's worthy of a \$10 million investment, which for us was a pretty big grant, but I believe it was worth it.

MONIZ: Well, thank you so much for taking all this time to talk with me today.

WALKER: Thank you, Amanda, for this interview. I've enjoyed it a lot.