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Getting Into Good Trouble

**FROM THE
MEMBERSHIP**

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Fighting the good fight or getting into good trouble (as the late Senator John Lewis often said) is an inextricable part of my personality and life. Why is that? My background and family history provide the foundation for answering this question.

I was born in New Orleans, LA. My dad's side of the family is from Louisiana and my mom's side is from Alabama. Growing up in Louisiana, the British, French, Spanish, and Caribbean influences were all around me and an integral part of the fabric of the city. I really didn't notice the uniqueness of these influences until I moved away.

To describe my family lineage is not as simple as I'm African American and from New Orleans. I'm also Creole. Besides being a food seasoning, Creole is also an ethnic background. Originally, Creole referred to people born in the Louisiana colony as opposed to those born in France. By the 19th century, Creole became a means to distinguish between those who settled the Louisiana colony and those who came after the Louisiana Purchase. My ancestry is French and African. We're called "gens de couleur" or Creoles of color. New Orleans is a juxtaposition of Creole/Cajun and fun/revelry against a backdrop of Deep South mores that favored one racial identity over another. It's against this backdrop my uncle became a central figure in the civil rights movement.

My uncle, George Raymond, was a courageous civil rights leader who influenced many of Mississippi's best-known civil rights activists, including Anne Moody, C.O. Chinn, and Anne Devine, to join the movement. He also worked closely with civil rights icons Medgar Evers and the late Senator John Lewis to organize activities throughout Mississippi. My uncle started civil rights activities at the age of 18 in New Orleans when he took part in the Freedom Rides and became an established leader in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). He worked with Medgar Evers to stage the Woolworth sit-in at the whites-only counter on May 28, 1963, in Jackson, MS. My Uncle George appears in one of the photographs taken that day.

In his book, *We Shall Not Be Moved, The Jackson Woolworth's Sit-in and the Movement It Inspired*, Michael James O'Brien wrote about that fateful day. He noted the following about my uncle:

"[George] appears in only one photograph of the lunch counter scene that day... He sits stone-faced, staring straight ahead while a pint bottle of silky white cream is poured down the back of his muscular neck and onto his white T-shirt and crisp bib overalls — clothing that would become his trademark in the Mississippi movement. The fact that he entered the store when the mob was at its wildest is testimony to his courage and commitment..."

My Uncle George's civil rights work was so pervasive it struck a nerve with white Mississippians who wanted to preserve the status quo through violence. Transcripts from the Edgar Ray Killen v. State of Mississippi trial, also known as the Mississippi Burning Trial, indicate the station wagon civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner drove that night was supposed to be driven by my Uncle George and surmised he was most likely the intended target of Patrolman Earl Robert Poe who put the events of that night in motion. My uncle certainly hit a nerve with the work he was doing but continued to do it anyway.

This complex history sets the stage for who I am both personally and professionally. In my role as a senior manager for my company, I'm in a position to advocate for initiatives. I used this status over ten years ago to start developing core processes around outreach to certified businesses across the design and construction spectrum and gathered the data to support being intentional about engaging with these businesses.

In just a few years, the data supported that, when we choose to meaningfully include women-owned, minority-owned, small business enterprise, and disabled veteran business enterprise businesses (also known as XBE businesses) in contracting opportunities, we create a win-

win situation not only for ourselves, but also for the XBE businesses. When large businesses make a conscious decision to utilize XBE firms, they're contributing to mentoring, capacity building, and, in many cases, to local worker hiring opportunities. My business and the XBE businesses we work with are better organizations because of the intentional interaction created through the process and, most importantly, from access obtained through the relationship.

My familial history in the diversity and inclusion (D&I) space has absolutely shaped how I see the world and my part as a change agent. The sacrifices my uncle and countless others have made to furthering civil rights in the United States is at the core of my desire to advocate for inclusion in our A/E/C industries business practices. Not only is it good for business, it's good for our communities, XBE firms, and the A/E/C industries as a whole. I can't think of a better reason why getting into a little good trouble is a good thing.

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