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Rashad Robinson: Building Good Ancestors Through Institutional Accountability

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How Rashad Robinson's generational vision transforms current resistance work into lasting structural change

"We have to be good ancestors," Nikole Hannah-Jones declared during the 2025 ESSENCE Festival, her words cutting through the celebration to frame a harder challenge. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist's call immediately resonated with Rashad Robinson, who expanded on the concept throughout their panel discussion. "My friend Nikole Hannah-Jones said on a panel here, 'We have to be good ancestors,'" [Robinson later told BOSSIP](#). "So part of this is doing the work so that the people coming behind us inherit something better."

Rashad Robinson's career embodies a deliberate discipline that treats every victory as raw material for institutional scaffolding. His approach evaluates success not through immediate policy changes alone, but through whether current campaigns establish playbooks, preserve strategic intelligence, and build mechanisms that amplify future organizing power. His methodology strengthens movement capacity by ensuring today's wins become tomorrow's launching points. This responsibility redefines how social justice leaders understand the relationship between present-day resistance and generational change.

From Crisis Response to Repeatable Strategy

On the surface, during the aftermath of Charlottesville, it looked like corporations severed ties with white nationalist groups overnight in response to moral outrage. Behind the scenes, however, Robinson's team had cultivated relationships with credit card executives for months to draft policy proposals and prepare internal advocates to lay the groundwork for such a seemingly quick response. When PayPal, Mastercard, and Visa finally acted, they weren't making spontaneous decisions—they were executing predetermined plans.

That foresight transformed reactive corporate responses into something far more valuable: a repeatable blueprint. The preparatory work didn't just secure temporary wins; it created operational templates that future campaigns could reference, adapt, and scale.

Years earlier, when Rashad and his team [forced major corporations to abandon the American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#) due to the organization's promotion of voter suppression legislation and Stand Your Ground laws, they had developed these same preparation tactics—relationship cultivation with executives, detailed policy alternatives, and internal coalition

building that made organizational abandonment of ALEC financially advantageous rather than morally coercive. This earlier success provided the template for the post-Charlottesville corporate pressure campaigns.

The \$7 billion #StopHateForProfit coalition that Robinson helped coordinate against Facebook demonstrated this approach at unprecedented scale. Where earlier efforts targeted individual companies, this campaign unified over 1,000 businesses under shared guidelines. “Making change inside of big institutions is hard,” Robinson told Fast Company about institutional pressure work. “But we’ve learned if you can build up enough energy, make it important to enough people, and create the right narrative, that folks will figure out how to make the change that you’re asking for.”

Multiplying Strategic Expertise Across Boundaries

After more than a decade leading transformative campaigns at Color Of Change, Rashad’s evolution to independent advising through Rashad Robinson Advisors represents an exciting expansion of his impact across the social justice ecosystem. This strategic transition creates new opportunities to preserve and multiply expertise across institutions and movements. boundaries

Rashad Robinson has developed a team of experienced strategists who bring specialized knowledge in corporate pressure tactics, foundation strategy, and coalition coordination. This advisory approach helps organizations develop measurement systems that track structural progress and invest in long-term capacity for sustained pressure across political cycles. The work emphasizes systematic capabilities required for coordinated messaging over extended periods and strengthens the entire ecosystem of social justice work.

Cross-Sector Adaptation of Core Principles

The same discipline that transformed corporate accountability extends across vastly different institutional contexts. Robinson’s work with the [Aspen Institute’s Commission on Information Disorder](#) exemplifies this adaptability. Serving as co-chair alongside Katie Couric and Chris Krebs, he focused on connecting existing social justice enforcement mechanisms to digital platform oversight, creating regulatory precedents that inform ongoing technology policy discussions without requiring a complete overhaul of regulatory thinking.

His entertainment industry work has built systematic guidelines that persist through industry personnel changes and executive transitions. Rather than negotiating individual representation agreements dependent on personal relationships, initiatives like “Normalizing Injustice” establish [evaluation tools that future advocates](#) can utilize for criminal justice portrayals across different productions and platforms. The mechanisms survive leadership turnover because they’re embedded in operational processes rather than personal networks.

Robinson’s corporate responsibility work creates measurable policy standards that transcend individual leadership transitions. The work focuses on operational embedding and his integrated approaches operate across corporate, cultural, and policy domains, creating multiple reinforcement mechanisms that maintain momentum through organizational changes.

Preparing for Coordinated Backlash

Contemporary threats demand more than individual campaign victories—they require redundant systems capable of withstanding systematic attacks. Speaking at the 2025 ESSENCE Festival,

Robinson warned that “we are heading into an authoritarian period that will look like no other most of us have ever experienced.” His discipline prepares movements for such reversals by establishing multiple pressure points that opponents cannot eliminate.

When federal social justice protections face elimination, robust corporate accountability mechanisms provide alternative advancement pathways. When electoral outcomes threaten policy progress, established precedents in media representation and corporate governance maintain institutional pressure for continued change. Robinson’s approach builds coordinated responses across multiple sectors, reducing movement dependence on any single avenue for progress while preparing for opponents who understand how to target centralized resistance.

The preparatory thinking extends to leadership development across generations. Rather than concentrating expertise in individual leaders whose departure eliminates institutional knowledge, Robinson’s model creates systematic preservation and multiplication of strategic understanding. Future organizers inherit operational playbooks rather than starting foundational work from scratch, enabling them to build upon previous victories.

The Next Evolution

Robinson’s forthcoming book on power and how to make change represents the synthesis and advancement of these institutional accountability strategies for broader implementation. The project represents the synthesis and advancement of these ancestral principles for broader implementation, combining public education with long-term capacity development. The work creates resources that serve immediate organizing needs while establishing foundations for sustained institutional accountability across generations.

Hannah-Jones framed the challenge as a responsibility to be good ancestors. Robinson’s methodology demonstrates how Hannah-Jones’ call to be good ancestors translates into concrete institutional practice—a systematic approach to ensuring contemporary victories become foundational elements for tomorrow’s progress. In an era of coordinated rollbacks and systematic threats, being good ancestors means [constructing mechanisms that outlast individual campaigns, leaders, and political moments](#).

The discipline requires patience, foresight, and the recognition that today’s resistance work succeeds when it creates scaffolding for victories we may not live to see. That’s the work of good ancestors: leaving not just better policies, but better tools for those who inherit the fight.

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