



Women's History Month Salute: Dorothy Bridges

by [Angela Rose Myers](#) — March 28, 2023



Photo by Steve Floyd

Dorothy Bridges

The Legacy

Dorothy Bridges is president and CEO of the Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA), which provides development resources for BIPOC entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Twin Cities. Yet her understanding of the impact of the lack of

economic resources in Black communities began as a child growing up in New Orleans during the 1960s and '70s—a world away from MEDA's North Minneapolis offices.

“In the housing projects of New Orleans, there was not one bank around—not one,” said Bridges. The financing and money management—that was done at the grocery stores. They were done at furniture stores,” she remembers. “The economy in our low-income communities were serviced by other entities. My parents never even had a checking account.”

By the time she graduated from the University of Montana in Missoula with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and philosophy, she quickly learned that her credentials wouldn't go far. ‘That and a quarter will buy you a cup of coffee,’ she was told. So, she decided to go into banking.

“It was one of those serendipitous things, because I had no desire to go into banking, to get into finance. It just happened. I got there and I really loved what I did,” she added.

“One of the biggest challenges that I faced was being taken seriously—both as a woman and as a Black person—and also being taken seriously in terms of my skill set and knowledge and holding leadership positions.” She also questioned what she didn't see growing up, and why.

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“Don't do it like I do it. Do it in your own way.”

— Dorothy Bridges

“I'd learned what could happen in low-income communities if banks were not present,” she said. “That started my journey into really wanting to be in banking, and at a level where I had the authority to set strategic direction.”

Taking the lead in uplifting her community is part of her family's legacy. The Bridges' family name has deep connections to the Civil Rights Movement. "I think the defining moment for me started early in life. It was really recognizing the significance of our family name," she said. The family, which included a large extended family, moved from a small rural town in Mississippi to New Orleans.

In 1960 her cousin, Ruby Bridges, was the first Black child to integrate the public school system in New Orleans, which was depicted in the iconic Norman Rockwell painting, "The Problem We All Live With."

"All of these emotions go through you as a little kid not recognizing the significance of what's going on, but also not understanding just how traumatic it was for Ruby," said Bridges, who attended an all-Black school while her cousin attended an all-White school.

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She brings that same determination and commitment to her role with MEDA.

"I don't know when it started here in Minneapolis, but the disinvestment in predominantly Black communities is such a disturbing thing to me," she said. "It's always been about what can I do with this talent and this asset to improve our community. That's what I lean into.

"MEDA as an organization that is about helping our Black businesses and our BIPOC businesses build generational wealth and build opportunity. Because we've learned that when a business is owned by a BIPOC individual—someone Black, Indigenous, or person of color—they tend to hire people who look like them," she continues. "Not only do they tend to hire people who look like them, but the wages tend to be higher than if that person was working for a White-owned establishment.

"I'm a widow and I have four children. They're all adults now, and I have two grandsons," she added. "Everything that I have done for myself in my career has been done by keeping family in mind. I think success for me cannot be measured in terms of monetary value or material things. It's the joy of being with my family."

Her advice to young women looking to follow in her footsteps: "Don't do it like I do it. Do it in your own way."

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Angela Rose Myers

Angela Rose Myers is a contributing writer at the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.

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