

BAA FOUNDER REV. DR. THOMAS KILGORE, JR.



The terms leader, pioneer, trailblazer, activist are a few of the many superlatives used to describe a man who committed his life to enriching the lives of others.

It all began in 1913 when Thomas Kilgore, Jr. was born in Woodruff, South Carolina—the sixth of Thomas and Eugenia Kilgore’s twelve children. In 1935 he graduated from Morehouse College and obtained a theology degree from Union Theological Seminary followed up with post-graduate work at Howard University.

In the tradition of African American ministers since the time of the abolitionist movement, Dr. Kilgore was also involved in civil rights. His work as an activist date to 1943 when he led the organization of voter registration in schools, and the unionization of tobacco workers. He went on to work with his fellow Morehouse alumnus and friend, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. Kilgore was a member of SCLC and one of the organizers of the legendary March on Washington. In fact, in one of the historic photos that were shot that day, Dr. Kilgore can be seen behind Dr. King. Eventually, he moved to Los Angeles and became pastor of Second Baptist Church, where he remained for 22 years.

As he has done during the Civil Rights movement, Dr. Kilgore was at the forefront in Los Angeles wherever progress was necessary. Whether it was fighting for economic re-development as a commissioner for the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA); advocating affordable housing for the elderly and indigent; creating the Los Angeles office of SCLC; or helping to form an Interfaith Coalition after the 1992 Civil Unrest.

Dr. Kilgore was always outspoken about justice and equality. Invited to speak at USC’s Baccalaureate in 1972, with then President John Hubbard sitting in the audience, Dr. Kilgore chided USC for being indifferent to its minority neighbors and described the changes necessary to improve the university’s minority relations. Dr. Hubbard not only heard him, but listened. Rev. Thomas Kilgore, Jr. became advisor to USC President John R. Hubbard and was asked to establish and direct the Office of Special Community Affairs. This office subsequently evolved into the USC Civic and Community Relations in 1984 when he became senior advisor. He served in this position at the University until his death in 1998. While working at USC Dr. Kilgore received an LL.D. honorary degree from the university in 1972; the first African-American to receive the distinction.

During his tenure at USC Dr. Kilgore founded the BAA, originally named the Ebonics Support Group. The BAA was a partnership between alumni, donors, USC staff and faculty, whose goal was to provide, needed financial support for USC’s African American students.

Over the years, with Dr. Kilgore’s encouragement, the BAA expanded its mission to provide volunteers and programs for the recruitment and retention of African American students, as well as alumni activities—which include this evening’s benefit.

The BAA is grateful that Dr. Kilgore had the foresight to create an organization that nearly 30 years later, still provides a platform to bring the University and its African American alumni together.