

DARREN WALKER

b. August 28, 1959

FORD FOUNDATION PRESIDENT

“We have to significantly change our practices so that we can create an inclusive capitalism that works for everyone.”

As president of the Ford Foundation, he uses philanthropic investment to fight systemic injustice.

Darren Walker is the president of the Ford Foundation, the second largest American philanthropic organization, with assets of \$13 billion. Walker has dedicated most of his life to promoting social justice through eradication of economic and racial inequities.

Walker was born in a charity hospital in Lafayette, Louisiana. Raised in rural Texas by his single mother, he “felt both gratitude and rage” growing up poor, Black and gay in the South. He credits his grandmother with illuminating his world and pushing him to greater aspirations.

Walker was part of the first generation who benefited from the Head Start Program for public schools. He went on to attend the University of Texas (UT) at Austin on a Pell Grant and graduated in 1982 with a B.A. in government and a B.S. in communication. Four years later, he earned his J.D. from the UT School of Law. Throughout his education, Walker felt “his country was cheering [him] on.”

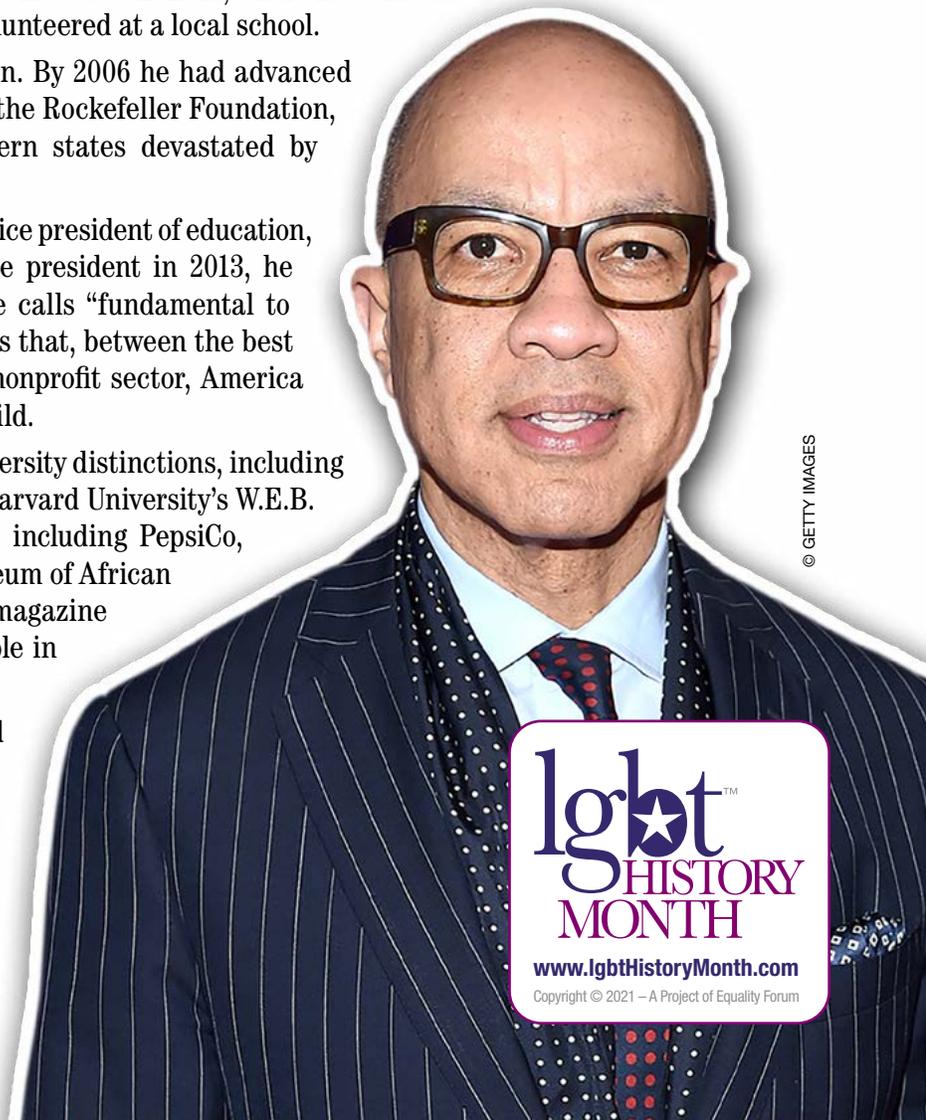
Walker spent the next seven years in Switzerland, working first as a lawyer and then in the capital markets. He left investment banking to battle systemic injustice. He moved to Harlem, where he worked at a community development organization and volunteered at a local school.

In 2002 Walker joined the Rockefeller Foundation. By 2006 he had advanced to vice president for international initiatives. At the Rockefeller Foundation, he launched recovery programs for the Southern states devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

In 2010 Walker joined the Ford Foundation as the vice president of education, creativity and free expression. When he became president in 2013, he doubled down on social justice, the principle he calls “fundamental to the DNA of a successful America.” Walker believes that, between the best private philanthropy in the world and a robust nonprofit sector, America can reduce the inequality he experienced as a child.

Walker has received 16 honorary degrees and university distinctions, including UT Austin’s Distinguished Alumnus Award and Harvard University’s W.E.B. Du Bois Medal. He serves on numerous boards, including PepsiCo, Ralph Lauren and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture. In 2016 TIME magazine named him one of the “100 Most Influential People in the World.”

Walker is openly gay. His partner of 26 years died in 2019.



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