



## **THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND RECEIVES \$25 MILLION GRANT FROM LILLY ENDOWMENT FOR HBCU CAPACITY BUILDING**

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCf) has received a substantial grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to increase capacity at the organization and for the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that are its member schools.

The \$25 million grant will fund Project HBCU Capacity Building: Maximizing HBCU Performance Through Investments in Research, Operations and Innovation. Through strategic investments and partnerships, TMCf will work to address infrastructure needs and accelerate innovation across HBCUs. By enhancing efforts to improve student support and empowering campuses to pursue unfunded or underfunded initiatives, TMCf will foster operational excellence and increase institutional capacity.

"This monumental grant will enable the Thurgood Marshall College Fund to better serve its campuses and students, providing opportunities for funding to implement innovative projects that address unique challenges," Dr. Harry L. Williams, president & CEO of TMCf, said. "We're thankful for the trust placed in us by Lilly Endowment to carry out this work."

Racquel Oden, chair of the TMCf Board of Directors and HSBC Head of Wealth, Premier & Global Private Banking, US, agreed.

"This grant marks a transformative moment for our organization, empowering us to advance our mission and make a lasting impact on our campuses and students," Oden said. "We are deeply grateful for Lilly Endowment's confidence in our vision and its support as we address these critical challenges."

Project HBCU Capacity Building consists of three strategies through which TMCf will:

- Enhance administrative systems and processes. TMCf will implement a data management system to help it and its member institutions streamline data collection and information sharing and develop tailored professional development offerings (e.g., project management, process improvement) for its staff.
- Facilitate cohorts of TMCf member institutions for collaborative learning to share best practices and resources and provide programs and activities in areas such as enrollment, student support services and community engagement.

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- Provide grant opportunities and technical assistance directly to select TMCF member institutions. TMCF member institutions will be invited to apply for competitive grants to help them strengthen faculty research and development efforts; improve student retention and graduation rates; strengthen career services and workforce readiness that aligns with employer demands; and upgrade technology for enrollment management, academic advising and financial aid systems.

“Thurgood Marshall College Fund provides an impressive array of services and support to its member institutions to help their students thrive in college and achieve their education and career goals,” said Ted Maple, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for education. “We are pleased to be able to support efforts to enhance TMCF’s capacity and assist HBCUs in carrying out their important missions.”

“Over five years, we anticipate substantial improvements in institutional capacity outcomes across participating HBCUs,” Dr. Williams said. “While TMCF has chosen to focus some aspects of this initiative on a select group of HBCUs, the impact will extend far beyond those institutions, fostering collaborative learning to increase operational excellence and institutional capacity for the greater HBCU community.”

Since 2021, TMCF has concentrated efforts specifically on capacity-building strategies at its member schools by focusing on enrollment, student persistence, financial health and other initiatives.

### **About Thurgood Marshall College Fund**

Established in 1987, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) is the nation’s largest organization exclusively representing the Black college community. TMCF member schools include the publicly supported historically Black colleges and universities, historically Black community colleges and predominantly Black institutions, enrolling nearly 80% of all students attending Black colleges and universities. Through scholarships, capacity building and research initiatives, innovative programs and strategic partnerships, TMCF is a vital resource in the K-12 and higher education space. The organization is also the source of top employers seeking top talent for competitive internships and good jobs. TMCF is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, charitable organization.

### **About Lilly Endowment Inc.**

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private foundation created in 1937 by J. K. Lilly and his sons, Eli and J.K. Jr., through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, the Endowment is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with its founders’ wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion. While the Endowment funds programs throughout the United States on an invitational basis to support these causes, especially in the field of religion, it maintains a special commitment to its founders’ hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana.



## **CHAIR OF THE THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND BOARD OF DIRECTORS FEATURED IN HER AGENDA**

The chair of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCf) Board of Directors is featured on the digital media platform Her Agenda. According to its website, the platform bridges the gap between ambition and achievement for millennial women.

Racquel Oden, also serving as HSBC US Head Of Wealth, Premier And Global Private Banking, spoke with Her Agenda in a wide-ranging interview that discussed the impact and future of TMCf, success in her career, mentorship and more.

“The Thurgood Marshall College Fund is so fortunate to have a leader like Racquel serve on a board for 16 years and now lead us as its chair,” Dr. Harry L. Williams, president & CEO of TMCf, said. “The impact and growth during that time and her aspirations for the organization are amazing.”



## **THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND TEAM MEMBER PENS NEW BOOK ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE CULTURE**

A Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) team member recently published a book about the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and what an equitable approach to it could mean for underrepresented communities.

Nyjal J. Drayton, webmaster at TMCF, said he knew he wanted to write “AI For The Culture: How Emerging Tech Is Leveling The Playing Field” after recognizing the growing need for accessible education around the technology, and the number of people asking him how to get started using AI responsibly, ethically and efficiently.

Drayton started experimenting with AI in late 2022, around the same time OpenAI released ChatGPT.

“At the time, I was leading TMCF’s MetaScholars program on the I&E team, which gave me early exposure to emerging technologies,” Drayton said.

He said the clear disconnect he saw between access, education and representation inspired him to explore the relationship between AI and the culture.

“AI is advancing rapidly, but so many people in our communities aren’t being included in the conversation because of lack of exposure, lack of literacy or being over-hesitant,” Drayton said. “Our culture has always been innovative, we just haven’t always been given the tools or a seat at the table.”

By writing this book, Drayton said he wanted to start to break that barrier down and create something that could help people understand, engage and lead with AI in ways that feel natural and empowering.

“This book was meant to blow past all the hype AI brought and highlight its potential for empowerment and impact,” Drayton said. “I wrote it to help our communities understand and lead with AI and not just catch up to it or only be consumers. The goal was to make the technology feel accessible and actionable, so we can show up in this space with confidence and clarity.”

When he envisions his most hopeful future regarding AI’s impact, Drayton said he hopes it levels the playing field.

## THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND TEAM MEMBER PENS NEW BOOK ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE CULTURE (CONT.)

“I imagine students and creators from underrepresented communities using AI to innovate, build and lead, because they had access to the right tools and support,” he said. “If we approach AI with intention and equity, it can become a powerful force for opportunity and transformation.”

During the research process, Drayton said one of the most surprising insights he found was the number of new jobs and skills emerging because of AI.

Drayton cautions users to proceed thoughtfully because there are ethical considerations.

“When dealing with AI some ethical points to consider would be bias, misinformation, data privacy and human oversight,” he said. “AI models can reflect societal biases from the data they’re trained on, so it’s really important to question the outputs.”

Echoing advice from when the internet was in its infancy and growing, Drayton said AI can present incorrect information, making fact-checking essential.

“People should also be mindful of what data they’re sharing and who’s behind the tools they use,” he said. “Most importantly, AI should assist and not replace human judgment, especially in decisions that impact others.”

“AI For The Culture” is available on Amazon.