

EXCLUSIVE

## UT Austin, TSU reflect generational funding inequalities



BY ASWAD WALKER  
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For generations, Black people in Houston have speculated in casual conversations that Texas Southern University has been grossly underfunded by the state of Texas, especially when compared to the funding received annually by the University of Texas at Austin.

Now, however, there is hard evidence that proves those conversations were on point. The study, “Quantifying Racism: Comparing Two Texas Universities of the First Class,” authored by Professor Marcia Johnson (Thurgood Marshall School of Law) and Dr. Johnnie Williams (TSU’s Jesse H. Jones School of Business), documents that this purposeful underfunding of Houston’s HBCU has existed for decades, to the tune of \$15 billion at the very least.



Dr. Johnnie Williams. Photo by Aswad Walker.



Marcia Johnson pictured here with Larry Brown. Photo by Aswad Walker.

Williams and two other TSU scholars, Dr. James Douglas (professor, Thurgood Marshall School of Law) and Dr. Michael O. Adams (professor, TSU’s Barbara Jordan - Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs) shared with the Defender their reflections on the importance of this report.

## ORIGINS OF RESEARCH

Williams: The topic started with the curiosity of Thurgood Marshall School of Law professor Marcia Johnson, who was heading TSU’s Urban Research and Resource Center at that time. She wanted to understand what was going on in terms of quantifying the differences between the University of Texas and Texas Southern... [Originally] the legislature had decided that they would allocate funds to have TSU be the Black equivalent of UT. It was stated that TSU would be a university of the first class. Of course, we saw a divergence in terms of the way the two universities evolved.

We thought this was important because we would like to become what we were meant to be. And that's why this is important. And in this age of COVID where we're looking at disparities that are race driven and socioeconomic driven, we feel like it's really important to say, "Look, higher education is not immune to what's going on in the rest of the country.' And we want to show the way in which it's occurred, because there's been lots of conversation over time, but not any real attempt to quantify it.

## IMPACT OF UNEQUAL FUNDING

Dr. Michael O. Adams: For university success there always has to be three important ingredients: one, financial support for both students and faculty; two, academic support and thirdly, a kind of welcoming environment that can be defined through infrastructure investments in campus beautification and student services. If you have the resources, you can do those things well... If TSU had started equal, and if we were on an equal playing field, certainly we could have done more. And I think, HBCUs are often asked to do more with less, and we're also criticized in terms of our performance and acknowledgement is never there to talk about issues like this in terms of unequal funding.



Dr. Michael O. Adams

Dr. James Douglas: If the state had fully funded us, TSU would today look like UT Austin and the University of Houston, which was originally a small, private school, would look like it was Huston-Tillotson. That's the difference in funding.



Photograph, Picture of Heman Sweatt holding a press conference for the NAACP headquarters in New York City, 1950. Photo by Fred M. Vinson. Courtesy of the [University of Texas](#).

## SWEATT VICTORY & UNEQUAL FUNDING

Douglass: Prior to 1939, if you were an African-American and you lived in one of those southern states, there was no place for you to get a law degree, a medical degree, a PhD. You had to go someplace outside of the South. [Then] the Supreme Court decided in Missouri that Missouri had to make legal education available within the state

of Missouri for an African-American who sought admission to the law school... When Heman Sweatt applied for UT, the state of Texas understood that they were going to have to make legal education available within the state for African-Americans, otherwise, they were going to have to let Sweatt in UT. So, the decision was "Let's create a university like UT, so that when this case reaches the Supreme Court, we'll be able to prove that African-Americans have a university equivalent to UT." And the state infused a lot of money into Texas State University for Negroes, because they knew they had to try to prove that it was equivalent to UT. When [the Sweatt case] got to the Supreme Court, they forced UT to integrate. That was in 1950. After 1950, when it was clear that there was no longer a legal reason to force the state of Texas to create a university for African Americans that was equivalent to UT, the state of Texas intentionally decided to reduce the funding to Texas State University for Negroes (which later became TSU). You don't reduce a university's funding by almost 40%, unless it's intentional.

## SLAVERY'S IMPACT

Williams: As part of the legacy of slavery, those institutions that are white were rich in the beginning. When the University of Texas was formed, it was given a million acres in the Texas Constitution. And then once they agreed on where UT would be, it was given another million acres. Those funds have become the PUF funds. Because of the land that was given to UT, this report doesn't even begin to try to quantify the differences that would have occurred because of endowed funds. But I can tell you that the PUF funds, two-third go to only two university systems (UT and TAMU) and] 16 or more universities share the rest, which is just a fraction.

So, the wealth distribution, in terms of what has happened as part of the legacy of slavery, is just so pronounced that we can't even begin to quantify that.

## LEGACY OF GI BILL

Williams: One of the things we talk about in the study is the GI Bill in terms of what that did. In the late 40s, early 50s, the GI Bill funded a number of the men who had come home from the war, being able to go to college, which then led to a higher income... It was a major driver in terms of white wealth in the United States. A small fraction of those African-Americans who served in WWII were able to go to college as part of the GI bill... They were not given the opportunity to attend majority schools and they were oftentimes channeled to either HBCUs, which were very underfunded at the time, or into types of menial, training programs, where they would not be able to secure high paying jobs. If you look at where enrollment diverges between the two schools, you'll see that happened around the early 50s with one of the drivers behind that being the GI Bill was rooted in Jim Crow. It was one of the few federal bills that were allowed to be administered at the local, at the state level. The Southern racists wanted to be able to administer the GI Bill because they wanted to be able to block African-Americans from being able to benefit from it.

## PAST EFFORTS TO GET EQUAL FUNDING



Dr. James Douglas

Douglas: One was back in the early 80s. At the time Mark White was the governor and the state reached agreement with the U.S. Department of Education to equalize funding... The state legislature was supposed to appropriate money, additional funding for TSU, and it never really came through. The second consent decree was around the turn of the century, I think 2001, in which the state over a period of time gave some additional funding to TSU and to Prairie View. But nothing in the range that would be enough to make up for all the inequities that had happened and occurred in the past.

WHY JUST 1997 - 2019

Williams: We did not have access, nor do we have the resources to obtain data that went further back... So, we've gotten a snapshot, and the results of quantifying what happened during those 23 years is quite significant and quite startling. When you look at the fact that we're looking at an ecosystem impact of \$15 billion over that 23-year period, just looking at fall semesters only, we believe that the multiple of that value would be four or more [i.e.\$60 billion-plus].

## DESIRED IMPACT OF RESEARCH

Douglas: My hope is that someone in the state leadership will step up and do something meaningful to correct the inequities that have occurred over the last 67 years.

Adams: It should lay the foundation for a public policy discussion, looking at the historical inequities... Also, we don't want to move away from TSU's mission... Historically, states will give [HBCUs] money, but they change the missions... Other states gave money to HBCUs, but the built-in incentives were basically, "You'll get more money if you increase your white enrollment." What we're asking for, and the state of Texas [originally] asked us to do, to build a first-class university, and to serve those populations and expand and include other minorities... to live up to that urban mission.

## STUDY FINDINGS

- Between 1997 to 2019, UT received \$15 billion more than TSU in state funding, just looking at the fall semesters.
- In biennium 2018 2019 UT was allocated 2/3 of the \$1.8 billion in the PUF fund (roughly \$1.21B). Conversely, TSU along with its 29 other cohorts were left to share a mere \$787.5 million in the HEF fund.
- BY 2019, UT grew to an enrollment of over 50,000 students, almost 3,000 faculty, 18 colleges and schools, 156 undergraduate degree programs, over 200 graduate and doctoral programs, 17 libraries and 4 museums on more than 400 acres of land.
- For that same period, TSU grew to an enrollment less than 10,000 students, about 588 faculty, 12 colleges and schools, two libraries and 1 museum on 150 acres of land.