



Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University Wins \$300,000 Award

By AAAM Board Member Robert Lockett, Ph.D.

Jackson, Miss.— Generously funded by a \$300,000 grant from the NoVo Foundation, *The Lighthouse* project—to be housed at the Margaret Walker Center on the campus of Jackson State University—targets southern girls with a mission “to be a revelatory, unflickering light for black girls and young women in the southern United States by providing a safe space and focused programming to address their personal, social and leadership development needs.”

Natalie A. Collier created and will direct *The Lighthouse* project. A graduate of Millsaps College, Collier has spent the past five years doing young women’s leadership development, curriculum design and grant making at the Children’s Defense Fund - Southern Regional Office and Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative for Economic and Social Justice.

The grant gives Collier the opportunity to incubate and leverage her experiences working with young women and girls in the South to focus more fully on creating a more balanced, equitable world by changing social attitudes, relationships and institutions that perpetuate injustice for girls and young women, especially black southern ones.

“I’m so fortunate to have this opportunity to expand the work I’ve been doing for the past several years—affirming girls and young women through the Children’s Defense Fund,” Collier says. “I look forward to learning more, teaching more and partnering with individuals, organizations and institutions committed to the success and uplift of girls and young women, who are the backbones of so many of our communities.”

“When Natalie approached me about the participation of the Margaret Walker Center in this project,” notes Center Director, Dr. Robert Lockett, “I jumped at the opportunity. It seemed like a perfect fit for



us and our work to promote the African American experience.”

As Collier sees it, “a falsehood has pervaded American culture as fact: Girls are fine. Because of this, girls and young women are too often neglected to focus on boys and young men, and this is especially the case when the conversation shifts to girls of color.” She says, “This negligence provides a false choice and assumes that advocates, activists, organizers, and thought leaders are not smart enough to focus on both. What is certain is girls are not and cannot be fine if no one is paying attention to them. *The Lighthouse* intends to redress this issue.”

Founded by a gift from businessman Warren Buffet, the NoVo Foundation is committed to fostering transformation from a world of domination and exploitation to one of collaboration and partnership.



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