

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Hennessy celebrates grads of fellowship program in virtual commencement event

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Hennessy gives a toast to the year's graduates whose in-person events have been cancelled. Image credit: Hennessy

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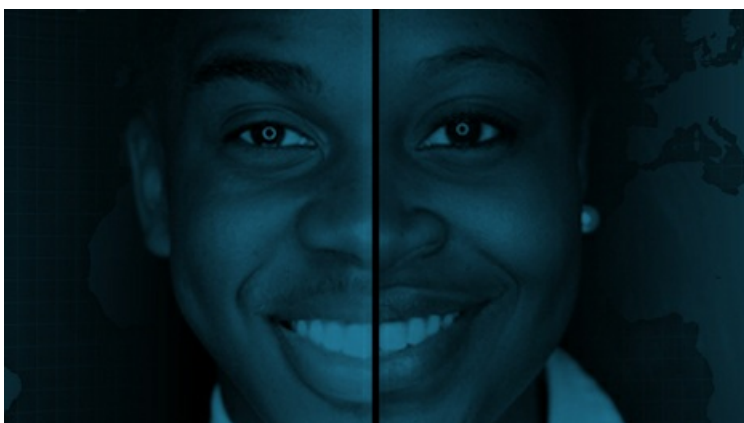
LVMH-owned cognac label Hennessy and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCf) are celebrating graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to connect with and build loyalty among future leaders at a time when graduations have been cancelled across the United States due to coronavirus-related shutdowns.

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The brand and nonprofit teamed up to host a virtual graduation after-party to a #ShowMeYourWalk HBCU Edition commencement event livestreamed by Essense Studios featuring commencement speaker, former U.S. president Barack Obama.

"The National HBCU Grad Party marks just one way Hennessy and Thurgood Marshall College Fund are expanding our partnership to address critical needs among TMCf's member HBCUs and their students," said Giles Woodyer, senior vice president of [Hennessy U.S.](#), New York.

"Launched last year, the Hennessy Fellows program was introduced for HBCU grad students, an unprecedented initiative designed to equip the next generation of diverse C-Suite leaders through financial assistance, access and experiences," he said.



Hennessy is partnering with the TMCF. Image credit: Thurgood Marshall College Fund

Hennessy fellowship

Last year, Hennessy launched a \$10 million fellowship program in a move to cultivate a more diversified pool of candidates for corporate leadership.

By partnering with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Hennessy's investment was aimed at increasing multicultural corporate leadership in the United States.

Hennessy Fellows gives graduate students financial and other support to complete their education, with the brand dedicating \$10 million over the next 10 years to the program.

According to research conducted by Deloitte, less than 10 percent of board seats in Fortune 500 companies are held by African-Americans, a statistic that Hennessy is looking to change.

"Hennessy's strategy behind the graduation sponsorship is a natural extension from the \$10 million commitment they set into motion last year," said Rebecca Miller, founder/principal at **Miller&company**, New York. "They are committed to higher learning, mentoring, providing training forums and networking – all critical elements required to graduate from college and prepare young adults to begin their careers with additional advantages as they enter the workforce."

Hennessy is also looking to increase multicultural corporate leadership in the U.S. and increase board seats in Fortune 500 companies held by African-Americans. The brand continues to invest in its commitments through a diverse group of ambassadors both past and current, often featuring "influential, but under-the-radar figures in its efforts" and generous events that address today's challenges.

TMCF is focused on education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This program is open to students enrolled at HBCUs and Predominantly Black Institutions.

Each year, the Hennessy Fellows program selects 10 applicants to receive a scholarship and career development opportunities such as networking and training forums.

This is the first graduating group and due to the unfortunate circumstances of the COVID-19 shutdowns, these fellows will not get to have in-person events to celebrate their work.

"The program offers a time for graduates and their families to share in the joy of this significant accomplishment and look forward to the next steps in their journey," Mr. Woodyer said.



Hennessy is sponsoring a virtual afterparty of the HBCU virtual commencement. Image credit: Hennessy

A toast to the graduates

Hennessy and TCMF are hosting celebrated graduating students from HBCUs who will miss their milestone in-person graduation by sponsoring the official #HBCUGradParty hosted by emcee D-Nice.

The virtual event was hosted on Saturday on D-Nice's Instagram Live channel for viewers aged 21-plus.

"Unfortunately, due to the global health crisis, many will miss the milestone of a physical graduation this year," Mr. Woodyer said. "Hennessy wants to celebrate these inspiring graduates and HBCUs with an opportunity to commemorate this milestone with family, friends and community."

Hennessy's spokesmen Nas and A\$AP Ferg were special guests at the virtual party.

Hennessy follows other alcohol brands including Natural Light beer are also hosting virtual commencements to connect with loyal customers during this difficult time.

The company also used the event as a way to raise money for participating HBCUs and their students.

Hennessy will enter the next stage in its partnership with TCMF through the launch of its first online academy in June. The learning resource will be available to Hennessy Fellows and students aged 21+ attending publicly-supported HBCUs.

"Our objective for our partnership with TCMF and the Hennessy Fellows program remains the same – to diversify the talent landscape." Mr. Woodyer said. "In this next phase, and in the wake of COVID-19, we will introduce an online academy as an incremental resource for all public HBCU students aged 21-plus."

The platform is designed to give students behind-the-scenes insights into C-Suite leaders to help these diverse students navigate corporate America.

[TCMF.org](#) also helps connect companies with interns and employees and college students and graduates find jobs by highlighting stand out students.

"Hennessy is using their never stop, never settle' mantra which communicates a value at the core of their brand: pursuing one's potential fueled by an inner drive to continuously grow, continuously improve and seek greater levels of mastery," Ms. Miller said.

"Brands who can get in front of the world's new norm by creating new experiences to the broadest audience will be able to earn and profit from increased loyalty," she said.

"They must go to the client using focused, customizable, collaborative and meaningful exchanges. Then they will earn and be rewarded with loyalty today and in the future."