

## Curtis Stokes Endowment for Black Radical Thought at James Madison College and Michigan State University

This endowment is named in honor of Curtis Stokes, Professor Emeritus of Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy in James Madison College, whose strong commitment to Radical Black political thought informed his teaching and scholarship and was a powerful influence on his students, on James Madison College and on Michigan State University. The Race in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America Conference Project that Curtis Stokes initiated and organized beginning in 1998, helped to shape the understanding of generations of JMC and MSU undergraduates on the centrality of race and racism to politics and identities in the United States. His guidance and support of undergraduates at James Madison College, his pivotal role as Chairperson of the Planning Committee (2002-2005) and then Founding Director of the MSU African American and African Studies Doctoral Program at MSU, and his editorship of the Black American and Diasporic Studies Book Series at Michigan State University Press, all extended the reach of his intellectual and scholarly commitment to transformative political thought. This Endowment will make that influence felt for generations to come.

Born in Savannah, Georgia and raised in Beaufort, South Carolina, Curtis Stokes came of age when white supremacy severely limited the life chances and political voice of generations of Black Americans. As a child in Beaufort, he grew up in a place that had been pivotal to the Confederacy, a place where he and his family experienced the class and racial subordination that permeated daily life for Black Americans. During the Vietnam War, the military offered one of the few ways out of poverty for many young Black men, and in the mid 1960's Curtis Stokes secured a position in the Air Force. He was stationed in Guam, as a military policeman protecting B-52 Bombers, when Martin Luther King was assassinated. Deeply affected by the unremitting racial terrorism of this period, Curtis Stokes left the military and began undergraduate studies at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas where he majored in political science and earned his B.A. There, he began his career as a political scientist and his exploration of radical political thought. Recruited by the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, under the guidance of leading Black scholars Cedric J. Robinson and Harold Cruse, along with visiting intellectual luminaries like Manning Marable and C.L.R. James, Curtis increasingly focused his studies on revolutionary and Black Radical political theory, including Marxism. In his doctoral dissertation in Political Science at the University of Michigan, Curtis Stokes examined Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. In 1983, he was hired into a tenure track position at James Madison College in the field of Justice Morality and Constitutional Democracy (later Political Theory and Constitutional Democracy).

For three and a half decades, Curtis Stokes was a powerful advocate for curricular transformation in the College, the University and academia more generally, urging greater attention to the importance of Black political thought in the U.S. and globally. His classes introduced students to critical ways of reading and understanding American history and politics. His scholarship (including six books and numerous articles) enlarged the scope of this impact. His forthcoming book (with Lynn O. Scott) is entitled, *Incarceration and Race in Michigan: Grounding the National Debate in State Practice*, and will add to his reach. So too, did his work as Assistant Director of African American Studies at Columbia University (1995-1997) and his subsequent founding and directing of the doctoral program in African American and African Studies at MSU. Professor Stokes received numerous awards for his achievements, including the Outstanding Faculty Award from MSU's Senior Class Council, a State of Michigan Teaching Excellence Award, a Distinguished Faculty Award from MSU's Office of Supportive Services, and twice the MSU All University Excellence in Diversity Award.

Through the support of an Annual Prize and programming on Race and Black Radical Thought, this Endowment will honor the transformative vision and dedication of Professor Curtis Stokes and extend his influence to future generations. We invite you to join us in establishing this Legacy Endowment for Professor Curtis Stokes. Please consider making your most generous gift in support of this Endowment. We encourage you to make a multi-year pledge to help us build for the future. For further information, please contact Rocky Beckett at the JMC Development Office.

James Madison College at MSU  
842 Chestnut Rd 329  
East Lansing, MI 48825  
(517) 432-2117