



LAUREN MAILLIAN BIAS OF GEN Y CAPITAL PARTNERS, BRINGS TOGETHER TECHNOLOGY, MARKETING, AND INVESTING



Lauren Maillian Bias started a vineyard and winery when she was 19 years old, launching her into a world of start-ups, [investing](#), and technology. After starting her second company, Luxury Market Branding, and becoming active in the [Young Entrepreneurs Council](#) (YEC), she was a founding partner at [Gen Y Capital Partners](#), an early-stage venture firm supporting tech start-ups from Gen Y entrepreneurs, where she now serves as managing director.

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In addition to her work in the venture and start-up world, **Maillian Bias** is also active in philanthropic endeavors, particularly in New York City, where she sits on the Multicultural Audience Development Initiative at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** and the board of the **New York Urban League**. She is also a lifetime member of the **Children's Aid Society**, works on education initiatives with the **Reginald F. Lewis Foundation**, and serves as a judge to **Start-up Chile**.


Maillian Bias spoke to Madame Noire about how her past shaped her investing future, diversity among investors and entrepreneurs, and how to improve that ratio.

Madame Noire: Tell me about your background and how it led you to co-found Gen Y Capital Partners.

Lauren Maillian Bias: I have been a life-long entrepreneur. My first company was successful, but creating a vineyard and winery from the ground up was an extremely labor-intensive undertaking. Through my membership with YEC, I was exposed to this whole other perspective on entrepreneurship, which is primarily [technology](#)  driven.

Most of the young entrepreneurs around the country are starting [tech](#)  companies. They are easy to start and easy to scale and you can start with minimal resources, which was the opposite of everything I found my entrepreneurial journey to be up until that point. I got excited to watch people who I met through YEC launch their companies and grow their companies, so I learned a lot about technology companies, specifically around operations, strategy, marketing, and branding.


I have a bachelor's of science in international trade and marketing and I found myself in this niche of advising a lot of start-ups around marketing, branding, how to run your company, and media buying for your company. I then started to [invest](#)  in them as well, became an angel investor, and really liked it.

As for Gen Y Capital Partners, a friend from the YEC came to me and my partner Jeremy Johnson and asked if we would be willing to start this [fund](#)  with him. We looked at what makes early-stage investing really successful and it was having an additional value add. Things such as networking and advising helped companies excel and see success in some form or fashion. We knew there was something we could do with the network that we could collectively create, and out of that Gen Y Capital was formed.


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MN: What do you do at the company? What is its strategy?

LMB: My role at Gen Y Capital Partners is managing director, so I manage the fund. When we came together to create Gen Y Capital, the sole purpose was to identify and successfully invest in early-stage tech companies, hence our tag line “By Gen Y, For Gen Y.” My partners and I are all Gen Y and we invest in companies that have at least one Gen Y founder. We also use YEC to virtually [accelerate](#)  the companies we invest in. They have access to peer-to-peer advising and they have all the benefits of being a member of YEC, which is an invite-only organization. All the companies we invest in through the fund are automatically invited, and we’re able to pull together an incredible, dynamic group of limited partners to invest in the fund. Our limited partners are people who are just like us: they had a successful company and are really passionate about technology companies and supporting the future of what they believe innovation should look like. All of this enables us to provide targeted assistance and support and expertise to companies that we fund.

MN: What other companies have you started?


LMB: I am personally very motivated by the opportunity to be one of the early movers or early adopters within the various industries I have a passion for. My first [business](#)  was a vineyard and winery and out of that, I started a marketing company called Luxury Market Branding, where we do strategic marketing, branding and media buying and planning for luxury goods. We started out doing wine and spirits, and we have since moved into hair care and skin care.

Out of that, we started working with a lot of brands that, while they were not all tech start-ups, they used technology in some light, whether it was for marketing, branding or ecommerce. Out of that, I became more passionate about marrying tech with marketing and branding. I’m most motivated by being able to see what could be potentially major opportunities leveraging technology.


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MN: How has your experience as an African-American woman shaped who you have become?


LMB: In two of my three companies, I have been the first or the youngest woman or African-American woman, so it's been an amazing and humbling experience, especially in the venture world. With the winery, starting it at 19 made me the youngest self-made winery owner in the country. In the venture world, I'm the only black woman who has started a [fund](#) . It's been an incredible experience because I get to work with people who are willing to take the risks that I've been willing to take, and start a new venture. It's been an amazing experience to be able to meet new people and hopefully change the landscape of what black involvement in the venture, technology, and the start-up world will look like 10 years from now. I do a lot of public speaking around venture, women's leadership, technology, and angel investing. I've met some incredible people and I hope there will be more like me a few years from now.

MN: What can be done to increase the number of black women in the venture world? Or African Americans in general?

LMB: What can be done overall is showing more successful black women doing it. It's not something that's really taught; you are just now seeing these new programs that are sprouting up around venture, investing, [technology](#) , innovating around entrepreneurship, and innovating around technology. It's not something that's taught today in colleges. And it's not something that people have seen a lot of success with African-American women as a whole.


What I can do, and what others can do, is give opportunities to women of color, like internship opportunities or mentorship opportunities. When you combine that with showing more successful stories, highlighting more successful people and women of color that are in the industry, whether they are on my side as an [investor](#)  or **Rachel Brooks'** side as a founder of a company, seeing more of it will inspire more people to want to do it.

MN: Within the companies that you invest in, are you able to work with a diverse group of leaders, or is it still not as diverse when it comes to the entrepreneurs who are looking to get funding now?

LMB: I think our portfolio is really diverse in terms of gender diversity and racial diversity. We have invested in young women and young men that are from the US, [Europe](#) , Brazil, and India. We've got a really diverse portfolio, not just gender diversity or racial diversity, but also the diversity of the portfolio itself with the various sectors of technology that we touch.

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Personally, I really do stray away from and discourage people from promoting this thought process of [investing](#)  for the sole purpose of promoting just one specific race or gender. I know that there are other funds that focus on that. But I think it comes down to giving women these experiences like I've had, where we can learn from and think a little bit more like most of the men who have been successful in the industry. It will undoubtedly shape and change the sorts of startups women are starting.

If you take a step back, I see more women in fashion companies than I do anything else. But I want to see women starting all sorts of companies that are technology companies, not just fashion. Men don't go out and just start sports companies; they start all sorts of companies. My personal [experience](#)  has been that I have worked with some of the best and brightest in every industry I've worked in, and I want to see women of all races also have that experience.

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