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LDF Celebrates Five Years of Innovative Program Training the Next Generation of Civil Rights Lawyers

The [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) today celebrates the five-year anniversary of the [Marshall-Motley Scholars Program](#) (MMSP), a groundbreaking initiative created to train and support the next generation of civil rights lawyers committed to advancing racial justice in the South.

In January 2021, LDF launched MMSP as an innovative educational and training initiative that builds upon the organization's more than 85-year legacy of fighting to secure full citizenship and civil rights for Black communities. The scholarship and pipeline program reflects LDF's longstanding commitment to the South, where most Black people in the United States live and continue to face systemic barriers to accessing their rights. MMSP scholars are largely drawn from the communities they serve and are committed to returning to the South to build, sustain, and lead impactful civil rights advocacy.

“At a time when our nation’s civil rights and multiracial democracy face unprecedented challenges, I am deeply proud of all MMSP has accomplished over the past five years. These scholars are the future of civil rights law, and the program equips them to defend and advance justice where it is needed most,” **said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson**. “Thanks to this program, 50 Marshall-Motley Scholars now stand ready to reimagine the legal landscape of the South with bold advocacy, lived experience, and unwavering commitment to the communities they serve. Together, they represent not only the tenacious fight against racial injustice, but the promise of what justice can become.”

Over the past five years, the program has supported 50 Marshall-Motley Scholars, providing comprehensive legal training, financial support, mentorship, and placement within civil rights organizations across the South. Scholars emerge from the program prepared to advance a multiracial democracy where dignity is sacred, power is shared, and thriving is the standard for all.

“MMSP’s work over the last five years has been nothing short of inspiring,” said **Director of the Marshall-Motley Scholar Program, Adria Kimbrough**. “Each cohort of scholars brings incredible talent, courage, and dedication to the fight for justice. Their steadfast focus, continuous growth, and unwavering commitment to the cause of racial justice show that the next generation of civil rights lawyers is not only prepared to confront the challenges we face today, but also to reimagine and shape a more just future.”

On its five-year anniversary, LDF reaffirms its commitment to supporting MMSP. To follow progress and updates about the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program, please [visit the website](#).

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Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation's first civil rights legal organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957, though it was founded under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall while he was at the NAACP. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute (TMI) is a division of LDF that undertakes innovative research and houses LDF's archive. In all media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF (do not include NAACP) and refer to the Institute as LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute or TMI.