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**LDF Media**  
212-965-2200 /[media@naacpldf.org](mailto:media@naacpldf.org)

## LDF Announces Fourth Cohort of the Groundbreaking Marshall-Motley Scholars Program

**May 1, 2024** - Today, the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) announced its fourth 10-person cohort of the [Marshall-Motley Scholars Program](#) (MMSP). Launched in January 2021, LDF's groundbreaking pipeline program will endow the South with the next generation of civil rights lawyers trained to provide legal advocacy of unparalleled excellence in the pursuit of racial justice.

In exchange for a full law school scholarship and professional development, scholars commit to devoting the first ten years of their careers to practicing civil rights law in service of Black communities in the South. The program is named in honor of Supreme Court Justice, legendary civil rights attorney and LDF founder Thurgood Marshall, and iconic civil rights litigator, former LDF attorney, and the first Black woman to serve as a federal judge, Constance Baker Motley.

The 2024 Marshall-Motley Scholars and their respective home states are as follows:

- **Gabriella Achampong**, *Pennsylvania*
- **Miracle Bird**, *Missouri*
- **Cyan Blackwell**, *Ohio*
- **Jordan Braithwaite**, *Missouri*
- **Deksyos Damtew**, *Colorado*
- **Cam Humphrey**, *Alabama*
- **Aaliyah Pichon**, *Texas*
- **Naraya Price**, *New York*
- **Dijon Stokes**, *West Virginia*
- **Christian Worley**, *North Carolina*

“Today, I couldn’t be prouder to celebrate and welcome 10 more extraordinary Marshall-Motley Scholars to the LDF family. Their unwavering dedication to advancing civil rights, rooted in their diverse experiences and profound community engagement, truly exemplifies the legacies of Thurgood Marshall and Constance Baker Motley and the transformative impact our program seeks to cultivate,” **said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson**. “These scholars will stand as beacons of justice in the South, and I look forward to

witnessing their growth, advocacy, and contributions to reshaping racial equity through the legal profession.”

The 2024 cohort of Marshall-Motley Scholars features a host of deeply dedicated individuals, combining a wealth of diverse backgrounds with impressive professional experiences. Members of this year’s cohort have worked with the Equal Justice Initiative, the American Civil Liberties Union, The Children’s Law Center, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Research Triangle Institute International, and more. They have founded grassroots advocacy groups, led community initiatives, and held leadership positions in prominent student organizations. This year’s scholars have also had impactful internships and work experiences focused on civil rights, racial justice, and environmental advocacy, and have earned an array of distinctions including a White House HBCU Scholar, a Morrill Scholar, and a Robertson Scholar. Bios for each scholar can be found below.

“As we welcome yet another cohort of ambitious young scholars, we have been thoroughly impressed by their profound commitment to advancing racial justice and equity in the South. Each scholar’s enduring passion and dedication to confronting systemic inequities underscore their boundless potential to become civil rights attorneys that will leave lasting impacts on the communities they will serve,” **said Jino Ray, LDF’s Director of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program.** “As they embark on this journey, we stand ready to provide the resources and support necessary to empower them as they become advocates for progress and equity in communities throughout the South.”

Over the past four years, LDF’s MMSP has invested in the education and training of aspiring civil rights attorneys to advocate on behalf of Black communities in the South seeking racial justice and equity. Scholars will be afforded a full scholarship for law school tuition, and a reasonable cost of living for room, board and incidentals to alleviate the debt burden that can prevent future lawyers from pursuing a career as a civil rights attorney; summer internships with national and regional civil rights organizations with offices in the South focused on racial justice to jumpstart training in civil rights law; a two-year postgraduate fellowship focused on a racial justice practice in the South; and access to special training sponsored by LDF.

Students continue to face more barriers than ever to attend law school. Studies show that the cost of a private law school education has grown by a whopping 175% since 1985. According to the American Bar Association, student loans take a disproportionate toll on lawyers of color, often forcing them to take unwanted career paths. The support offered by the MMSP is an intentional effort to address the racial and economic barriers that often deter students

from pursuing their dreams of becoming civil rights attorneys, and a targeted effort to support the civil rights ecosystem in the South.

### *Biographies for 2024 MMSP Cohort*

#### **Scholar Name: Gabriella Achampong**

Gabriella Achampong has dedicated herself to protecting civil rights for Black communities in the educational sphere. This commitment was birthed, in part, from her upbringing and early lived experiences as a daughter of immigrants from Ghana and Trinidad. While growing up in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, a predominantly white town, Gabriella learned to navigate the complexities of identity and belonging, many times in the face of palpable racial tension. Despite the lack of Black representation and rise of divisive rhetoric in her hometown, she recognized the importance of advocacy and self-empowerment at a young age and carried this throughout her educational career. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Education and Public Policy with an English minor at The Pennsylvania State University.

Throughout her college years, Gabriella has been actively involved in research and advocacy initiatives focused on civil rights and education. As a research intern at The Center for Education and Civil Rights, she has co-authored a book chapter on the state of voluntary integration following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and has contributed to various projects examining voluntary integration efforts in school districts across the United States. In addition, her role as President of the Unity Christian Campus Ministry has allowed her to engage in outreach activities that address food insecurity and foster community, fellowship, and personal growth among Black students through Bible study and biweekly fellowship opportunities.

Drawing inspiration from her personal experiences and academic pursuits, she envisions herself advocating for equitable access to education, fair housing practices, and voting rights protections for Black communities in the South. As an aspiring civil rights attorney, Gabriella seeks to amplify her efforts in addressing systemic inequalities and dismantling barriers to social, economic, and political mobility for marginalized groups.

#### **Scholar Name: Miracle Bird**

Miracle Bird is Missouri-born and raised and is deeply committed to the people of Southeast Missouri. Her lived experiences growing up in Southeast Missouri inform her commitment to racial justice and Black communities.

Miracle is an alum of Southeast Missouri State University, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude with Honors and received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a double minor in Spanish and Writing. This spring she is set to graduate with a Master of Public Administration, also from Southeast Missouri State University. Her determination in the classroom and beyond has earned her multiple awards, including the Dr. William F. Ansberry Pre-Law Award for outstanding academic achievement in the Pre-Law section of the Political Science Department, and the Copper Dome Award for an exemplary GPA.

Miracle's commitment to advocacy stems from the time she spent as a child at the homeless shelter her father owned. This commitment deepened through legal internship opportunities, as well as federal justice fellowships with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri and the Missouri Attorney General's Office. Miracle also served on the Southeast Missouri State University's All-University Judicial Board and College of Humanities and Social Sciences Dean's Student Advisory Council, and is currently the Vice President of the Law, Politics, & Society Club.

Miracle has further demonstrated her commitment to racial justice through her work as Southeast Missouri Coordinator for Renew Missouri, where she actively worked to bring sustainable and affordable energy options to Black communities and recruit Black citizens to serve on rural electric cooperative boards. Her ability to build relationships with the Black community in Missouri will undoubtedly empower her to challenge discriminatory practices and promote racial equity as a Marshall-Motley Scholar and future civil rights attorney.

**Scholar Name: Cyan Blackwell**

Cyan Blackwell hails from Cleveland, Ohio, but has deep family ties in Alabama where she spent two years working as a Justice Fellow at the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama. Cyan graduated Summa Cum Laude from The Ohio State University with a B.A. in Public Management, Leadership, and Policy, along with a double major in Sociology. She was also recognized as a Morrill Scholar, an honor she received for her academic excellence and commitment to social justice.

Throughout her undergraduate years, Cyan deeply engaged in advocacy work, both on and off-campus. She played an active role in statewide advocacy as part of the Ohio Student Association, which included a successful grassroots campaign focusing on decriminalizing low-level drug offenses that received over 730,000 petition signatures to qualify it for the 2018 election. Cyan currently works as a Youth Justice Policy Associate at the Children's Law Center in Cleveland, where she advocates for system transformation at the local and state

level to reduce the reliance on youth incarceration and the transfer of youth to adult court.

Inspired by personal experiences and a desire to combat racial injustice, Cyan aspires to become a civil rights attorney dedicated to transforming the criminal legal system, challenging punitive policies, and dismantling systemic racism, particularly in the South. By leveraging the power of the law as a tool for social change, she hopes to help create a future rooted in justice and equity for marginalized communities across America.

### **Scholar Name: Jordan Braithwaite**

Jordan Braithwaite grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, an upbringing that profoundly shaped her life amid firsthand experiences of injustices and systemic racism. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in History with a concentration in Law and Society at Grambling State University. Jordan, a 2021 White House HBCU Scholar, a BeyGood Foundation Renaissance Scholarship recipient, Xceleader VoteHBCU's first Fellow, and a Class of 2023 AT&T Rising Future Maker also holds a place on the Grambling State University President's List with a 4.0 cumulative GPA.

Throughout her undergraduate years, Jordan has been deeply involved in volunteer and leadership activities, both on and off-campus. Jordan founded a student mobilization initiative, "Grambling Student Power Network", that spearheaded advocacy efforts for an on-campus polling location at Grambling State University and mobilized over 2,000 Black voters during the 2022 and 2023 elections. She served as State President of the NAACP Louisiana State Conference, Youth & College Division, where she has developed and implemented several strategic action plans to enhance the organization's influence in the Louisiana legislative process and collaborated closely with other Louisiana youth and collegiate units to devise and execute consistent action plans statewide for impactful advocacy initiatives. She also served as the Advocate for Social Justice Chair for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Jordan's passion for civil rights advocacy stems from experiencing discrimination and witnessing the injustices endured by her community, especially the aftermath of the tragic Michael Brown shooting. However, instead of surrendering to the despair that often accompanies such experiences, Jordan has channeled her pain into a powerful force for change. As a civil rights attorney, Jordan wants to challenge systemic injustices and create a more equitable society, especially for marginalized communities in the South, and continue the legacy of trailblazers, such as Thurgood Marshall and Constance Baker Motley.

**Scholar Name: Deksyos Damtew**

Deksyos, a graduate of Colorado College with a Bachelor of Arts in International Political Economy, is a changemaker at his core. The son of Ethiopian immigrants, Deksyos first encountered racial injustice in the United States through the stories his mother would share. Her experiences as a Black woman in America left an indelible mark on him, and Deksyos found himself carrying out small acts of advocacy on his mother's behalf. This "advocacy at home" approach served as an important stepping stone to other opportunities: organizing the virtual Colorado Speech and Debate Camp during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as pushing for mental health supports on his campus during his time as Student Body President at Colorado College, to allow students a collective rest period. Deksyos also worked as a Community Organizer for the Davis Projects for Peace Colorado, where he facilitated civics education workshops on topics such as Critical Race Theory.

Deksyos continued to lean into the power of the collective voice while working on the campaign trail for Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, and although he was able to galvanize volunteers statewide, a certain element was still missing. This later materialized when he secured a Project Assistant position with the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), located in Montgomery, Alabama. Under the renowned leadership of Bryan Stevenson, Deksyos encountered the sobering reality of racism and racial violence that included mass incarceration, food insecurity, and a history of lynchings. It was this time at EJI that cemented his resolve to pursue racial justice for Black communities in the South.

Deksyos has learned that change is certain, and even if slow at times, must nevertheless be pursued. With plans to continue working for the advancement of Black communities in the South, Deksyos stands poised to fulfill the objective of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program and prepare for a successful career in civil rights law.

**Scholar Name: Cam Humphrey**

Cam Humphrey is a Birmingham, Alabama native and attended Auburn University, graduating Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Business and Economics. Cam's commitment to racial justice is informed by his lived experience witnessing the pollution of north Birmingham neighborhoods by nearby coal plants. He is pursuing a career as a civil rights attorney with the goal of dismantling the societal inequities that lead to environmental injustice for Black communities.

Building on his undergraduate education, Cam went on to pursue a Master of Environmental Management at Yale University's School of the Environment, specializing in Environmental Policy Analysis. As a student, he worked as a Research Associate for Professor Gerald Torres and Marianne Engelman-Lado, where he analyzed environmental justice proposals and facilitated discussions on Critical Race Theory, completing his capstone project on the application of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to environmental discrimination claims.

Following graduation, Cam became a Philanthropy Fellow at the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business, which placed him at The David and Lucile Packard Foundation as a Program Research Analyst for the Environment and Science Program. While there, he led the Learn and Build Grants Portfolio to support scalable pro-smallholder farmer approaches to tropical forest conservation in the Congo Basin and other tropical forest regions, in addition to working tirelessly to support Black grassroots organizations in the rural South fighting for environmental justice.

The heart of Cam's mission lies in his desire to serve as a catalyst for change in the rural South, where Black communities continue to bear the brunt of environmental degradation and systemic injustice. Through his work, Cam seeks to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, challenge discriminatory policies, and advocate for transformative policy changes that address the root causes of environmental inequities.

**Scholar Name:** Aaliyah Pichon

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Aaliyah and her family were among those who evacuated to Dallas, Texas after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Immediately, she noticed the economic and racial disparities between the predominantly Black community where she grew up in New Orleans and her new home in a suburban Dallas community. The duality of this experience sparked Aaliyah's commitment to racial justice and concern for Black communities.

This commitment spurred her to attend Hampton University, an historically black institution, where she encountered other dynamic Black scholars and experienced a new level of empowerment. Graduating Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a minor in Leadership Studies, Aaliyah also completed a certification in pre-law through the Hampton University Pre-Law Institute, participated in numerous equity-centered internships, and served as an LSAC PLUS Fellow at the Duke University School of Law.

Currently, Aaliyah works as an Investigative Specialist for the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia where she actively works to illuminate the humanity of her clients by

providing context for their lives and identifying mitigating factors to support their release. Aaliyah's in-depth campus and community involvement positioned her to become the Founder and CEO of The Domino Effect; Start The Reaction in Texas, a community-oriented non-profit that performs and inspires service projects for communities in need. To date, The Domino Effect has provided resources to the unhoused, while also partnering with local schools to increase student engagement for this cause. Having adopted a servant leader mindset, Aaliyah remains committed to advocating for Black communities that have suffered the devastating effects of discriminatory policies in housing, education, and the criminal justice system.

As a Marshall-Motley Scholar, Aaliyah will build on her accomplishments and will assist in the cultivation of a legal system that promotes equitable outcomes for all, regardless of race.

**Scholar Name: Naraya Price**

Naraya Price, originally from Poughkeepsie, New York, now calls Atlanta, Georgia home. She graduated from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) with a Bachelor's degree in Public Policy and African, African American, and Diaspora Studies and a Certificate in Human Rights from Duke University. Naraya graduated as a Robertson Scholar, a Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society member, and an Honors Carolina Laurate. Her senior honors thesis, which investigated civic engagement patterns amongst formerly incarcerated Black women in North Carolina, won several departmental awards and received a grade of highest honors.

While at UNC-Chapel Hill, Naraya served as a teacher, mentor, and advocate with organizations, including the Sunflower County Freedom Project in Mississippi, the ACLU's Racial Justice Project, Bronx Defenders, Black Sash, and the Women's Legal Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. After graduating from UNC, Naraya taught English to 60 3<sup>rd</sup>-graders at Lawrence E. Boone Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

Currently, Naraya serves as a Research Analyst in the Education and Justice Practice Areas at Research Triangle Institute International. In this role, she contributes to the evaluation of various education and criminal justice reform programs. In addition, Naraya is the Equitable Democracy Fellow at the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. In this capacity, she leads efforts to expand access to high-quality civic education for K-12 students in the Southern United States.

Looking toward the future, Naraya plans to leverage her legal education to advocate for research-informed educational practices that foster opportunity for all students, especially Black youth living in poverty. Furthermore, she is interested in understanding and addressing the intersection of the school-to-prison nexus and our nation's staggering 75% recidivism rate, with a focus on its disproportionate impact on Black communities following the surge in



incarceration after 2009. Naraya's experiences to date, which reify that the pursuit of racial justice is inextricably tied to the fight for educational equity, directly inform her approach to social justice.

**Scholar Name: Dijon Stokes**

Dijon Stokes, a proud native of Charleston, West Virginia, graduated from Howard University's College of Arts and Sciences with two Bachelor's degrees, one in Economics and the other in Political Science. As a student, Dijon immersed himself in various extracurricular activities and organizations that reflected his deep-seated commitment to community service and social justice, from spearheading initiatives as Director of Operations with Howard University's Alternative Spring Break program, to serving as a 1st Vice President for Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated, Alpha Chapter.

After graduating in 2020, Dijon worked with the ACLU of West Virginia where he played a pivotal role in strengthening connections with southern ACLU affiliates, developing political strategies to address systemic issues facing Black communities, and leading successful campaigns for felony voting rights restoration. Currently, he serves as Program Associate at The Advancement Project in Washington, D.C., strategizing and leading the execution of nationwide voter education campaigns and advocating for fair access to the ballot for marginalized communities across multiple states.

With his law degree, Dijon wants to leverage his legal education to challenge oppressive structures and advocate for systemic change in education and criminal justice systems. He draws his passion for civil rights from his personal experiences navigating the complexities of economic disparity, over-policing, and incarceration prevalent in his hometown, and envisions a future where equitable opportunities are accessible to all, regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

**Scholar Name: Christian Worley**

Christian Worley was born just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, and grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Her Bachelor's in Criminology and Sociology from The University of North Carolina Wilmington and soon-to-be-acquired Master's in Public Administration from North Carolina Central University are the product of countless hours of hard work, sacrifices, and perseverance. A selfless catalyst for change, Christian has already collaborated with community leaders and policymakers to develop initiatives that promote financial literacy and the growth of Black-owned businesses and educational institutions and is showing no signs of stopping.

Working on the ground as the founder and executive director for Economic Justice for African Americans, a social media platform dedicated to advancing economic justice for African American communities, and as a senior child support agent in North Carolina, impact is at the root of Christian's mission. In her various leadership roles, Christian prioritizes efforts that contribute to dismantling the systemic barriers that hinder the economic progress of Black communities.

Christian's lived experiences, nurtured by her Southern roots and personal journeys across North Carolina and Georgia, have empowered her to pursue a career that addresses the various emotional, physical, and mental traumas that negatively impact the advancement of Black people, specifically within the southern region of the United States. Every step she has taken has equipped and prepared her with the necessary knowledge, credibility, and opportunities to fulfill her calling as a civil rights attorney to achieve social equity for Black communities in the South.

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation's first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Follow LDF on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.*