



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LDF Launches Groundbreaking Scholarship Fund and Pipeline Program to Create Next Generation of Civil Rights Attorneys to Dismantle Racial Injustice and Inequality in the South

Today, the [NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.](#) (LDF) launched the groundbreaking [Marshall-Motley Scholars Program](#) (MMSP), an innovative educational and training opportunity that will produce the next generation of civil rights attorneys to serve Black communities in the South. As LDF celebrates its 80th anniversary year, the new scholarship and pipeline program builds upon its legacy of fighting for racial justice in America and producing leading advocates against racial injustice. The MMSP demonstrates LDF's ongoing commitment to the South, where the majority of its clients reside, and launches as LDF prepares to open its southern regional office in Atlanta this year.

“For 80 years, LDF has been at the forefront of developing and supporting many of our nation’s legendary civil rights lawyers and leaders. The Marshall-Motley Scholars Program is the next phase of our commitment to identify and invest in a new generation of brilliant minds who have a deep personal desire to bring about racial justice in the South,” said [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), LDF’s President and Director-Counsel.

“The majority of Black people in this country still live in the South and continuously face impediments to voting, education equity, and racial and economic justice. For this reason, LDF’s docket and litigation practice has always been rooted principally in the South. During the 1960s, and early ‘70s, LDF invested in the creation of Black law firms in the South, providing fellowships and start-up costs for the law practices of some of the most celebrated civil rights lawyers in the region, including former LDF President and Director-Counsel Julius Chambers, a legend among civil rights lawyers in North Carolina. The time is ripe once again, for LDF to invest in the growth and development of civil rights lawyers in the South. With the MMSP, and the opening of our new regional office in Atlanta, LDF is deepening its longstanding presence in the South to help leverage the talent, passion, and commitment of a new cohort of civil rights attorneys dedicated to serving the majority of Black people in the country,” Ifill added.

Over the next two decades, the MMSP aims to support the education and training of **50 aspiring civil rights lawyers**. The program will afford participants:

- a full law school scholarship for tuition, room, board, and incidentals — to ease the debt burden that can prevent future lawyers from pursuing a career in racial justice;
- summer internships to begin their training as civil rights lawyers early in their law school careers;

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- a two-year postgraduate fellowship at a national or regional civil rights organization with a racial justice law practice in the South — to provide unprecedented access to professional development and skills-building, training and preparation; and
- access to special trainings sponsored by LDF and the National Academy of Sciences.

In return, Scholars commit to practicing civil rights law in pursuit of racial justice in the South for **at least eight years** following the conclusion of their fellowship. Students beginning law school in the 2021 academic year are eligible to apply.

This program comes at a time when Black students are facing more barriers than ever to attend law school. As it currently stands, [the cost](#) of a private law school education has grown by a whopping 175% since 1985. According to the [American Bar Association](#), student loans are found to take a disproportionate toll on lawyers of color, often forcing them to take unwanted career paths. The support offered by this program is an intentional effort to address the racial and economic barriers that often deter students from pursuing their dreams of becoming civil rights attorneys. Systemic racism remains a deeply ingrained part of American life, with widespread and far-reaching consequences, and there is a growing need for lawyers to help combat it. The MMSP is a response to the rampant inequality, racial injustice, and lack of resources that continues to plague the South, and its Black communities.

Named in honor of civil rights legends Thurgood Marshall — LDF's founder and the nation's first Black Supreme Court Justice — and Constance Baker Motley, former LDF attorney and the first Black woman to become a federal judge, this groundbreaking program will create pathways to leadership, self-sufficiency, and socio-economic progress, while developing individuals to become ambassadors and advocates for transformational change in Black communities. The MMSP is made possible by a generous anonymous donor who has committed to funding a program of 50 participants, which amounts to a \$40 million investment in developing a new generation of civil rights lawyers in the South.

“This announcement is especially meaningful to me because of Thurgood's powerful partnership with lawyers across the South who served with him as co-counsel on so many consequential civil rights cases,” said **Mrs. Cecilia Marshall, widow of the Hon. Thurgood Marshall**. “Thurgood had tremendous respect for the uncommon courage and skill of these attorneys and he drew inspiration from these friendships throughout his life. This program is a wonderful recognition of the need to support the development of a new generation of local lawyers in the South who play such an important role in civil rights lawyering.”

“I want to thank the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, an organization my mother held dear, for honoring her and her longtime friend and colleague, Thurgood Marshall, with the creation of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program. This is a significant event,” said **Joel Motley, son of the Hon. Constance Baker Motley**. “My mother was a fighter in a very tough struggle — one that continues today and will persist well into the future. I am grateful that the indelible mark that she left at LDF and on the broader civil rights landscape continues to inspire future generations of lawyers.

“This investment in building the next generation of civil rights attorneys is essential in our quest for justice and equality. A well-trained, committed, and passionate group of brilliant

litigators will defend the rights of Black people across the South, dismantling the structures of white supremacy that continue to suppress our communities. As deeply concerning recent events have made clear, there is much work to be done to ensure equal rights for Black Americans. This is the right time for LDF's investment in the MMSP, and I am delighted that future civil rights attorneys will carry forth my mother's legacy and continue the work she began as an LDF attorney."

The MMSP application deadline is February 16. To learn more about MMSP and/or apply, visit: MarshallMotleyScholars.org.

Additional Quotes:

Rev. Dr. Bernice A. King, CEO, The King Center and daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King: "Our country continues to be plagued with racial injustice, and we need Nonviolent Warriors who are prepared and equipped on all fronts to deal with it — especially on the legal front. That is why I wholeheartedly support the launch of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. This momentous decision by LDF Leadership will help raise up future advocates committed to becoming the champions needed to continue the battles in the courtrooms. Implementation of the MMSP is tantamount to a much-needed Succession Plan. It will allow the LDF to make greater strides on behalf of the Black community for generations to come in the area of racial justice, just as they did during the movement led by my parents. As a carrier of my parents' legacy, I understand the importance of preparing new generations of leaders. As a trained and licensed lawyer and mediator, I have always been concerned about the dire need for more legal representation to battle racial injustice. I applaud LDF for its establishment of this scholarship program to prepare a new generation of leaders to help meet that need, as we all strive to create the Beloved Community."

John Legend, Artist, Activist, and LDF Board Member: "The creation of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund is one of the most important investments an organization could make to help advance racial justice and equality in our nation. The MMSP will help develop and nurture a new cohort of committed, passionate civil rights attorneys based in the South. Whether it was *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed racial segregation in our schools, or *Smith v. Allwright*, which required Texas to allow Black voters to participate in primary elections for the first time, the most transformative civil rights cases in our history were successful because of the collaboration between LDF attorneys and courageous local attorneys based in the South. Supporting and developing a new generation of southern civil rights lawyers is critical at a time when our nation is reeling from increased attempts to suppress and intimidate Black voters, when white supremacist attacks are on the rise, when our criminal justice system remains steeped in racism, and COVID is ravaging our communities. I'm thrilled that LDF has chosen to invest in law students who are committed to practicing civil rights law in the south now more than ever, and I'm proud to support the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program."

Yara Shahidi, Actress, Model, and Activist: "In every generation, civil rights lawyers have been integral in safeguarding and cementing the progress of social justice movements into the political psyche of American society. I'm so excited that the Marshall-Motley Scholars

Program supports my generation of incredible peers in carrying forward the torch lit by the Legal Defense Fund- illuminating the path of hope, equity, and justice.”

Bryan Stevenson, Founder & Executive Director, Equal Justice Initiative: “The moment we're in has made clear that much work remains to make the promise of equal justice and civil rights for all a reality in the United States. It's now certain that we will need another generation of lawyers and advocates who fight for the rights of vulnerable, disfavored and marginalized people in this country. This is critical in the American South where the long history of violence, exploitation and discrimination against people of color has created urgent problems that must be addressed. There are no better models for the kind of leadership and advocacy needed than Constance Baker Motley and Thurgood Marshall. I'm thrilled that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is initiating a major effort to identify and support future scholars, lawyers and advocates to ensure that the rule of law is upheld and that bias against the poor and people of color is eliminated. The complexity and skills required for civil rights lawyering has always been underestimated and undervalued, which is why the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program (MMSP) is an important and exciting innovation to advance the cause of justice in this nation.”

Deval Patrick, former LDF Attorney and Massachusetts Governor: "I am thrilled about the launch of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program. I began my career at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and it was one of the defining professional experiences for me and I am certain these young lawyers will be able to say the same. The year 2020 proved to us all that economic inequality, the barriers to moving up and forward, and the retreat from public and civic education are deepening challenges that we must face head on. This upcoming generation of civil rights attorneys, supported and trained by the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program and dedicated to serving the South in the goal of advancing racial justice, will be prepared for the next iteration of challenges."

Mayor Steve Benjamin, Columbia, South Carolina: “The Marshall-Motley Scholars Program will not only honor the transformative civil rights legacy of Justice Thurgood Marshall and Judge Constance Baker Motley, but also build a framework to ensure new and sustainable generations of civil rights warriors have a commitment to further racial equity and justice in the South. Offering full scholarships and covering the other associated costs of attaining a law degree, and also requiring internships, training, postgraduate work and a commitment to fulfilling eight years of legal work embedded in the South will introduce a new cohort of energized and dedicated legal minds to create real progress in the region.”

Jino Ray, Director of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program: “As a native of Cairo, GA, I am all too familiar with the complexities of racism and the stronghold of white supremacy in the South. If we are truly ready — once and for all — to call racial injustice a thing of the past, we will need extremely passionate lawyers, impeccably trained and equipped to work alongside the activists and organizers who have long been committed to the work of dismantling the oppressive systems in the South. That's why the MMSP is much more than a scholarship,” he continued. “It is a comprehensive lawyer development program that leaves no aspect of the Scholars’ growth and development as civil rights attorneys up to chance. Through the MMSP, LDF is expanding our commitment to defend, educate, and empower by removing the financial and professional barriers that often discourage law students from pursuing civil rights law as a career. We are recruiting the next generation of justice warriors – candidates who are passionate about racial equality, committed to

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becoming highly-skilled lawyers, and willing to serve Black communities in the American 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 initially founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multidisciplinary 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](#).