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

**May 1, 2023** - Today, the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF) announced its third 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 eight 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 2023 Marshall-Motley Scholars and their respective home states are as follows:

- **Andrew Brennen:** Kentucky
- **Arianna Mackey:** Virginia
- **Ashley Conyers:** Florida
- **Ashonti Farrior:** North Carolina
- **Danielle Hopkins:** Massachusetts
- **Jordan Andrews:** Michigan
- **Sondos Moursy:** Texas
- **Tristan Gardner:** Alabama
- **Trenaj Mongo:** Washington, DC
- **Zachari Curtis:** Washington, DC

“We are so pleased to congratulate and welcome yet another remarkable group of 10 to the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program. Their dedication to both their undergraduate education and communities is remarkable,” **said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson.** “We are awed by their confidence and conviction in making a 13-year commitment to a program that will provide them with the education, resources and funding to be successful civil rights lawyers in the South. We are eager to see their growth over the next several years as well as their revolutionary advocacy and impact that will undoubtedly follow.”

The 2023 cohort of Marshall-Motley Scholars brings some of the most talented and inspiring leaders in the nation. Members of the cohort have worked with AmeriCorps, Harris County Public Defender's Office, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Community Farming Alliance, the Court of

Appeals of Georgia and more. They have founded their own grassroots advocacy groups, led community initiatives and served as mentors to undergraduate peers. Bios for each scholar can be found below.

“Our newest cohort of Scholars is indeed impressive but most notable is their collective commitment to fighting for racial justice alongside Black communities in the South as the next generation of civil rights lawyers,” said **Jino Ray, Director of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program**. “We are excited for them to join our growing cadre of Marshall-Motley Scholars and are humbled to support them with the resources, mentorship and support they will need as they journey together through law school and into the legal profession.”

Over the next two years, LDF’s MMSP will continue to invest 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 full law school scholarships for tuition, room and 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 at civil rights law organizations in the South fighting to achieve racial justice; and access to special training sponsored by LDF.

Black 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.

**Scholar Name: Jordan Andrews**

Jordan Andrews, who calls Michigan home, graduated summa cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, American Public Policy, French, & Africana Studies. At the University of Pennsylvania, Jordan served as the first Black female vice president of the student body, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and political chair for Umoja, the Black student coalition.

During her undergraduate experience, Jordan was a founding board member of Beyond Arrests: Rethinking Systematic Oppression (BARS), where she campaigned for Philadelphia’s “Ban the Box” protections to help returning citizens seeking employment and where she fought for the movement to end cash bail. Jordan also established BARS as an organizational plaintiff for the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) to challenge prison-based gerrymandering statewide. After college, Jordan continued her commitment to improving the lives of Black people as a Director’s Financial

Analyst at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), where she provided support for those experiencing housing insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as individuals navigating the criminal justice system in the deep South.

After graduating law school, she intends to wield the law as a civil rights attorney through direct client service and impact litigation. Jordan aspires to play a role in creating a country in which Black families get to stay in their homes while also eradicating punitive and inhumane policies that police and criminalize Blackness.

**Scholar Name: Andrew Brennen**

Andrew Brennen is a proud Kentuckian who graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and furthered his education at Harvard University with a Master of Education in Education Policy & Management. Andrew's interest in civil rights law stems from his deep-seated commitment to racial justice and civil rights, specifically promoting more just and democratic Kentucky public schools.

Throughout Andrew's time in North Carolina, and with the help of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, he served as a defendant-intervenor in the affirmative action case *Students for Fair Admission v. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill*. Andrew co-founded the Kentucky Student Voice team and currently serves as Finance & Audit Chair on the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority board of directors, appointed by Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear. He also chairs Seek Common Ground's board of directors.

With his law degree, Andrew hopes to stand before the Kentucky Supreme Court, representing a group of public school students across The Commonwealth, ensuring that the condition of Kentucky public schools affirms the right to a quality education guaranteed by the Kentucky state constitution.

**Scholar Name: Ashley Conyers**

Ashley Conyers is a Florida native who graduated from the University of South Florida with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and a Master of Business Administration. With deep ties to rural Georgia, including connections with community organizations throughout the entire state, Ashley's interest in civil rights originated from her early life experience of witnessing the injustice of housing insecurity and homelessness, which she believes to be just the beginning of her journey to public advocacy and social justice.

This past year, Ashley began work as an AmeriCorps Data VISTA Volunteer, within the Law Office of the Public Defender in Augusta, Georgia, a position sponsored through the National Legal Aid & Defense Association. Ashley is leading a community initiative with the city of Augusta's Homelessness Task Force to implement Community Identification Cards for homeless and displaced individuals. Ashley also currently works as a Paralegal for the Public Defender's Office, conducting client interviews in the jail with felony pre-trial clients.

As a civil rights attorney, Ashley hopes to be a legal advocate actively working to aid in the abolishment of the human rights crises of mass incarceration, racial injustice, and poverty.

**Scholar Name: Zachari Curtis**

Zachari Curtis is an East Coast native with roots in Washington, DC and South Carolina. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Cultural Anthropology with an honors distinction from Duke University. Zachari's intellectual curiosity and on-campus activism earned her the Duke University Paul Farmer Award for Justice and Social Responsibility as well as a Fulbright Scholarship to study Black racial justice movements abroad. Upon her return to the US, Zachari set out on a career path of advocacy for racial justice.

She has founded several grassroots advocacy and social enterprise initiatives, including the Community Farming Alliance (CFA), Healthy Affordable Food for All (HAFA), and The Black Farm CSA Produce Subscription Service, all of which focus on defending the rights of Black people to have access to healthy food. She advised the Black Supply Chain Committee of the National Black Food Justice Alliance, providing business planning support for a multi-state Black Farmer cooperative enterprise in Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. She later served on the FARM Committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments where she led a Catalytic Opportunities Initiative to use policy to drive equitable procurement contracting in Maryland, Virginia and DC. Zachari also launched the Dream Black Food Fund, which delivers technical assistance and \$150k in grant funding to Black farmers to build infrastructure and boost wholesale readiness.

Zachari was nominated and now serves on the USDA's Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Federal Advisory Committee, where she makes policy recommendations to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack.

Coming from a family of Black farmers who were pushed off their land because of discrimination, Zachari is committed to eradicating racial injustice in agriculture. Having studied the civil rights history of Black farmers and agricultural workers, she feels called to law school so that she can seek justice for those who have been harmed by systemic inequality and to defend against attacks on civil rights.

**Scholar Name: Ashonti Farrior**

Ashonti Farrior is a North Carolina native who graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science in Advertising. Ashonti is passionate about racial justice, civil rights, and education opportunities specific to the Black youth in the South. Ashonti strives to amplify Black voices by initiating community-based efforts focused on educational equity, economic growth, youth development, and community unification to help bridge racial and social gaps.

With her passion for amplifying Black voices and supporting Black youth in academic spaces, Despite pandemic setbacks, Ashonti dedicated her college experience to deconstructing institutional racism. During her sophomore year, Ashonti joined the Florida Student Power Network (FLSPN) racial justice committee to help combat the disenfranchisement and voter suppression of minority voters in Florida caused by exclusionary zoning and a lack of education on the voting

process through a student-led campaign. Likewise, she helped lead communication efforts on university-wide racial justice research that strived to hold systems accountable for the black student experience at the University of Florida.

Currently, Ashonti is serves as an AmeriCorps Team Lead for the Next Steps program at Cheyney University. Within her role, she works to increase the college retention rate of black students through community service, leadership development, and mentorship. She is also an active volunteer in the Philadelphia community, oftentimes, working with the NAACP and local nonprofits to bring resources to marginalized communities.

Ashonti is dedicated to practicing law in the South and breaking generational cycles rooted in systemic racism so future generations can reach their full potential without limitations.

**Scholar Name: Tristan Gardner**

Tristan Gardner is a life-long Alabamian, earning both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Social Work from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

As a member of the Tuscaloosa chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Tristan helped helped his church assist citizens who are victimized by the cash bond bail system, and helped advocate and foster community conversations around several social issues and municipal policies that would adversely impact Black citizens in West Tuscaloosa.". He also currently serves as Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Coordinator for Community Service Programs of West Alabama's Head Start/Early Head Start Program, a program that supports low income families with comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services. Previously, Tristan also interned on Capitol Hill with the Congresswoman Terri Sewell (D-AL).

Tristan wants to use his law degree to become a civil rights attorney to help eradicate racism and prevent future immobility of communities of color in his home state. He also believes in prison reform and advocating for livable and humane jail and prison conditions, asserting that the current criminal legal system is excessively obsessed with black bodies and mass incarceration.

**Scholar Name: Danielle Hopkins**

Danielle Hopkins was raised on Martha's Vineyard and graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts in American History.

After graduation, Danielle moved to Houston, Texas, to work as a Client Advocate at the Harris County Public Defender's Office, an experience that confirmed her desire to live in the South and solidified her disillusionment towards the criminal legal system and belief in prison abolition. She continues her advocacy and service through her time as a continual leader for the grassroots organization, Social Justice Solutions, better known as the Hoochies of Houston, which is dedicated to the empowerment and protection of Black women and femmes through advocacy. While working in the organization Danielle assisted in the planning and execution of the Women's March, March of Mahogany in Houston, Texas. She also organized fundraisers to make and distribute care packages for unhoused people in the greater Houston area.

Danielle intends to provide legal advocacy rooted in abolition to better address the systemic problems brought about by racism and socio-economic inequality in our criminal legal system. With her law degree, she plans to advocate for people on both the individual and systemic levels to make systemic changes rooted in an abolitionist lens.

**Scholar Name: Arianna Mackey**

Arianna Mackey is a Virginia native and a graduating senior from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCAT) with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. Arianna is dedicated to using legal education to be a fierce environmental justice advocate — remedying environmental harms imposed on minority communities and preventing future injustices from taking place.

Throughout Arianna's undergraduate career, she has interned with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Environmental Defense Fund. With food insecurity at top of mind, and a total of 50 hours served at Harvest City food bank, Arianna decided to co-found Black Bus Inc., a non-profit created to provide healthy and accessible food to those who are underserved in Guilford County, North Carolina. Additionally, Arianna is the Social Action chair for the Alpha Mu chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Arianna is committed to using her law degree to advocate for racial justice and civil rights in the area of environmental justice and protection based on the resulting adverse health effects on Black and lower-income people living in the South.

**Scholar Name: Trenaj Mongo**

Trenaj Mongo is a DMV native and a graduating senior who will earn his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science, with Summa Cum Laude honors, from Morehouse College with minors in Criminal Justice and Sociology in 2023.

As a student, Trenaj is the President of the Morehouse College Moot Court Team and was named the third-highest orator in the nation in 2022. In 2023, Trenaj Mongo was named champion of the American Moot Court Association (AMCA) South Texas Regional, and went on to finish as a semi-finalist in the AMCA National Competition. He also completed an internship at Gideon's Promise where he assisted public defenders in developing trial skills, and volunteered with multiple mentorship programs in Atlanta that supported black youth. In the summer of 2022, he interned at the Court of Appeals of Georgia, where he had the opportunity to work with Judge Stephen Dillard and analyze oral arguments before the Court of Appeals and the Georgia Supreme Court. Trenaj has also served as the director of the Mission Hill Summer Program, positively impacting Black youth in low income communities in Boston, MA.

Trenaj aspires to use his law degree to follow in the footsteps of others who have begun to fight for racial equality. Trenaj draws his inspiration for Southern civil rights from those who have blazed the trail before him, including Bryan Stevenson and his memoir "Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption," as well as Charles Hamilton Houston and James Nabrit Jr and their efforts to dismantle Jim Crow.

**Scholar Name: Sondos Moursy**

Sondos Moursy is a Texas native by way of Egypt and earned her degree from the University of Houston. Despite her responsibilities as a Division I NCAA athlete, Sondos never wavered in her efforts to advocate for racial justice and empower marginalized communities.

In particular, she found her passion in supporting and advocating on behalf of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people of color. As a team member in the Mayor's Office of Complete Communities in Houston, Texas, Sondos played a key role in designing an equitable training and employment program that helped fill the gap in legal employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated women of color. She also helped organize the Healing Injustice Conference, where lawyers, social workers, community health workers, and data scientists presented holistic legal defenses for underprivileged incarcerated people of color.

Sondos has received multiple awards as well for her work in public service, including the 2022 Phi Beta Kappa's Key into Public Service Award and the William Randolph Hearst Endowed Fellowship. Her desire to advocate on behalf of Black communities hinges on her belief that the prosperity and well-being of our nation will always be at stake as long as we continue to fail to protect the disadvantaged from those in political power.

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### **About LDF**

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 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.