

Equity

Written explanation of the big idea and how it was executed, including its purpose, and how it worked to influence culture to be more equitable.

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) asked us to help introduce the inaugural cohort of the Marshall-Motley Scholars Program (MMSP) to the world. Launched on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January 2021 and named in honor of the legendary civil rights attorney, Supreme Court Justice and LDF founder Thurgood Marshall, and civil rights litigator and Federal Judge Constance Baker Motley, the MMSP is a groundbreaking commitment to endow the South with the next generation of civil rights lawyers trained to provide legal advocacy of unparalleled excellence. Scholars pledge to devote the first eight years of their career to civil rights law in the South.

The MMSP is an integral component in LDF's continued work to expand democracy, eliminate disparities, and achieve racial justice. The program came at a time when Black students are facing more barriers than ever to attend law school. The cost of a private law school education has grown by 175% since 1985, and 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.

Our main objectives were to generate significant media coverage from a diverse range of outlets to share the stories of LDF, the scholars themselves and inspire applicants in subsequent years to follow in their footsteps.

LDF narrowed an applicant pool of hundreds down to a final 12, with only 10 slots available. We signed an NDA to ensure that word of the final 12 would not leak. We were also not told the composition of the actual top 10 until they had each accepted the scholarship on Wednesday evening. To ensure we could still be prepared, our strategy team was given access to application and interview videos of the top 12 and watched hundreds of hours of footage to assemble personal story abstracts for use in earned and social media.

Our production team created a launch video that opens by framing the historic work of LDF over the last 80 years and being clear-eyed about how much work remains to ensure rights that have been won are protected and expanded upon particularly for Black communities in the South. We then meet the Marshall-Motley Scholars as each one is presented with the news of their acceptance by LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill and team.

There was a less than 48-hour window between the evening the scholars found out they had been selected and a national press conference introducing them to the media. During that time,

our production team mined the 10 selection videos for reaction shots and poignant moments and layered them into the cohort announcement video.

After reviewing the footage, we used the most impactful quotes from the candidates' interview footage and converted them into social content featuring their names and headshot. This furthered our goal of introducing 10 individuals rather than just a blanket cohort. LDF also used the cohort launch video created by our agency on the morning of the announcement.

The PR team was tasked with generating significant coverage across multiple media genres and channels including national and local TV, radio, national and regional print including Black media, and influencers. Our content goals were to both tell the story of the MMSP and secure mentions of the scholars themselves.

We began by examining which date to make the actual announcement. In collaboration with LDF, we landed on May 17, 2021, the anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that remains LDF's most well-known case providing us a natural hook for national coverage.

We developed a list of noteworthy influencers from politics to pop culture whose brands intersect with civil rights and social justice work to amplify the program and share assets. LDF then used the research and influencer recommendations to conduct outreach and coordinate engagement.

Next, we needed to draft pitches and build local/regional media lists based on the hometowns and current locations of the cohort, but this presented a challenge because we didn't know who the final 10 scholars would be and we did not want to wait for a last-minute scramble. We asked LDF if we could sign a non-disclosure agreement to gain access to the final 12, allowing us to build pitches and regional media lists for each prospective scholar, knowing that two would ultimately be cut.

We developed a launch strategy that included offering exclusives to both NPR, who would break the story Friday morning, and Blavity, who would publish the video introducing the scholars. We had our regional outreach strategy ready to go. We then searched for a top-tier national television outlet to share the news and received an intriguing pitch from producers at GMA3. They asked us to consider a strategy other than looking for same or next day coverage. They were planning an hour-long special on the anniversary of the murder of George Floyd to air on May 25, and believed the story of a new generation of civil rights attorneys using the law to bring justice to Black communities across the South would give viewers hope. We accepted the offer and began coordinating the segment before knowing the identities of the scholars.

The scholars learned they had been chosen on the evening of May 15. The next morning, our agency conducted three small-group media training sessions ensuring each of the scholars could attend. We covered interviewing virtually via platforms like Zoom, messaging and bridging techniques, a mock interview, and also gave them an overview of how to speak about their new

affiliation with the LDF. We also used this session to cast for the two scholars requested by GMA3.

We spent the entire day of May 16 sending embargoed pitches and media alerts to national and regional outlets, inviting them to the press conference. On Thursday, May 17, we hosted a press conference with Zoom Webinar moderated featuring the 10 scholars, in addition to LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill, Associate Director-Counsel Janai Nelson, and MMSP program managers Jino Ray and Adria Kimbrough.

The MMSP launch video has been streamed over 100,000 times across social media platforms and debuted exclusively on Blavity.

We secured a three-minute feature story on GMA3 during a one-hour special commemorating the anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, an NPR exclusive that was syndicated nationally across the NPR network, and national print stories in Blavity, Essence, Law360, The Grio and USA Today.

We secured local stories across the nation from either current or hometown outlets including **Montgomery, AL, Boca Raton, Gainesville, FL, Jackson, MS, Murfreesboro, TN, Houston, TX** along with mentions from **Harvard, Yale** and **Georgetown**.

Collectively, we garnered a print, digital and broadcast audience reaching over 156 million nationwide.

We secured engagements from influencers like **Yara Shahidi, Senator Cory Booker, John Legend** and more.

URL: <https://marshallmotleyscholars.org>