

SPRING 2021



## The Art of Law— Ashley Vignaud Marshall-Hawkins

AVM HAWKINS

**Ashley Vignaud Marshall-Hawkins** is a Thurgood Law alumna Class of 2012, and she is an incredible abstract artist who started creating art as a student at Thurgood Law. AVM Hawkins is the name of her art company which is also her true life calling. However, she took an interesting path to find out that art

was her passion. "As far back as childhood, I always had a desire go to law school. Recently, I have discovered that it was something I had written in my 6th grade yearbook. I saw myself being a lawyer who helped others and who stood up for justice. I knew I wanted to attend law school, but my creative and entrepreneurial desires deepened. I felt that law school would be invaluable to me becoming a creative entrepreneur," says Ashley. During her 1L year she began practicing abstract art, she says it was her creative outlet during her time at Thurgood Law. "It was not until seeing rows of painted canvases, that I realized I was an artist. It was evidence that art was something I loved. Although I achieved many of my goals, such as passing the Texas Bar and practicing in public service, I still felt the calling to pursue art professionally. Art became a prominent desire that I felt I could no longer pacify as a hobby," said Ashley. However, Ashley does share that even though the practice of law is not her main love the skills she has gained have helped her tremendously as an artist such as understanding contracts, extending offers and fulfilling orders, structuring her business, communicating, and describing her work, as well as communicating with clients and potential customers, developing goals, researching and overcoming challenges with diligence and hard work. Ashley worked in real estate law and probate law for six years and has now transitioned to a full-time artist.

Ashley describes her art as "abstract expressionistic paintings." Exuding bright vibrant colors that also embody layers of paint, texture, and designs. "I paint freely and unconsciously --meaning that I never know what the outcome will look like. I trust my intuition, my instincts, feelings, emotions, and most importantly, my ability to arrive to an outcome that I am proud of. My art is the one place where I do not think, and where I do not place conditions upon myself nor judgment," said Ashley. She says art makes her feel true and authentic. Ashley hopes to grow an innovative and creative company that merges business and intellectual property law with artists and other modalities of creative expression. She says Thurgood Law was monumental in her professional career and her development as a human being. "I have many professors who have and continue to deeply inspire me to pursue every endeavor, with excellence, purpose and service. Thurgood Law has taught me grit. Thurgood Law trained me to identify what I want, and to work with full commitment, diligence, pride and tenacity to achieve it, whether it's passing the Texas Bar, representing a client, speaking out against injustices, or pursuing my dream to become an artist-- to do so with excellence, purpose and service," said Ashley. She wants the world to know that her art is special and unique, every piece is one-of-kind just like every human being. Ashley is also a true representation that a juris doctor degree and an esquire title is only the beginning of what a Thurgood Law grad's future may hold.



## **ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS**

## The Art of Law—Ashley Vignaud Marshall-Hawkins





# THURGOOD MARSHALL SCHOOL OF LAW

TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

## **FACULTY NEWS**



**Professor SpearIt's** scholarship and speaking engagements continue to enhance Thurgood Law's academic reputation. In 2021, his presentations so far include: "Muslims in Prison: A Story of Conversion, Litigation & Rehabilitation" on 1/26 at Advancing Real Change, "The U.S, Constitution: Reimagining 'We the People' as an Inclusive Construct" on 2/4 at Texas Southern University, "Reimagining the Death Penalty, Targeting Christians, Conservatives" on 2/16 at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and "Police Reform: From Prisons to the Streets, How Far We Have Come and How Far We Still Have to Go" on 3/26 at Indiana University School of Law. SpearIt's scholarship continues to be cited widely in various fields and academic disciplines, including Officer-Created Jeopardy: Broadening the Time Frame of Assessing a Police Officer's Use of Deadly Force, 89 Geo. Wash. L. Rev. (2021), Black Redemption 448 Fordham Urban L.J. 701 (2021), Wake Up or Get Woke: The Paradox of America's Diplomatic Export of Hip Hop 43 Hastings Comm. & Ent. L.J. 59 (2021), The Possibility Report: From Prison to College Degrees in California (The Campaign for College Opportunity 2021), "Challenging Systemic Racism with Human Connection" on 3/1/21 at AmericanBar.com,

and "The Rise of the Underdog" on 2/5/21 at Fatcork.com.



**Professor L. Darnell Weeden's** article entitled "We The People" Should Extend Constitutional Protections To Undocumented Resident Immigrants Killed Unreasonably By The Police" was recently published in The Thurgood Marshall Law Review, 44 T. Marshall L. Rev. 187 (2020).

Weeden's article asserts undocumented resident immigrants residing in the United States are entitled to basic due process rights. Weeden contends an undocumented resident immigrant living in a community in the United States should not be denied a basic right against unreasonable searches and seizures in a civil law suit. Weeden argues that the court should reject a request to a federal judge that the \$20 million civil rights lawsuit by the victim of police violence widow should be dismissed since the victim was an undocumented immigrant resident. The article challenges the State argument that the victim was not entitled to have any civil rights protection under the United States Constitution.



## FACULTY NEWS cont.



**Dean Joan R.M. Bullock's** article A Learning Experience Texas law schools respond and adjust to the coronavirus pandemic was published in the April 2021 issue of the Texas Bar Journal Vol. 84, No.4. The article discusses the affect the pandemic has on law schools and how they respond to and are adjusting to COVID-19. Dean Bullock's article explores three areas: responsive leadership, communication despite uncertainty, and empathy.



**Professor Kleven's** article Toward a More Democratic America was published by the Seattle Journal for Social Justice in Volume 19, Issue 1 (2020). The link to the article is https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol19/iss1/9. The article derives from Professor Kleven's theory of democracy in his book *Equitable Sharing* and his proposals for enhancing democracy in his platform when he ran for Congress in 2016. The article proposes and defends the following measures to move the United States in a more democratic direction: equalizing political power through mandatory voting as a civic obligation of all citizens, equalizing educational opportunity through full federal financing of elementary and secondary education and free universal higher education for all who want it, and equalizing employment opportunity through guaranteed jobs at a living wage for all who are willing and able to work.



**Distinguished Professor of Law James Douglas** gave his perspectives on the Derek Chauvin trial on the George Floyd murder to KPRC 2 News Houston and **Professor SpearIt** discussed prosecutorial strategies and how he incorporates moments from this trial into his trial simulation and criminal procedure classes in the 6pm edition of ABC news Houston on April 12, 2021.



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: NaQuia Brown

#### Law! Cameras! Action!



This month we are shining a light on a star in the making, *NaQuia Brown*. NaQuia is a 2L at TMSL who is set on pursuing a career in Hollywood in more than one way. As a law student, NaQuia is interested in working in entertainment law with a music focus and she is also pursuing a career in acting. Since the pandemic, classes have been virtual at Thurgood Law which opens up NaQuia's schedule to attend acting school online. She spends about 10 hours a week in acting classes with various casting directors in Los Angeles. When she is not rehearsing for a role, she is studying for law school classes. NaQuia says that since she was a child, she would stay up all night watching television shows and movies and would always say "I want to be on tv." She was quite the entertainer as a kid as she performed in church plays and school plays. However, she decided to put her childhood dream on hold while she pursed her undergraduate degree and now her Juris Doctor degree.

NaQuia says besides acting she always knew she wanted to be a lawyer. She also realized this passion from tv shows such as *Law and Order* and *CSI*. "I loved the fact that they were always helping people plus they looked really cool doing it," says NaQuia. Her love for

politics continued to grow from childhood to adulthood so she chose to apply to law school in hopes of combining both her interest into one with entertainment law. Since her 1L year NaQuia has held numerous internships from being a legal intern at the Oktibbeha County Circuit Clerk office in Starkville, Mississippi, working at the Harris County District Attorney's office, and most recently as a law clerk at The Ferebee Group PLLC in Houston. NaQuia juggles law school, acting school, and being a law clerk with her second job at a hotel. NaQuia carries this heavy workload with pride as she hopes to inspire her daughter that she can to achieve all her goals. NaQuia balances this workload by making great sacrifices with her time, studying overnight while working at the hotel, and creating self-tape auditions in between classes during the day. "My motivation for pursing both careers come from my daughter and the fact that you only live once, I want to show her that your mother did everything that she wanted to do," says NaQuia.

She also mentioned that both acting and the law work hand in hand as she uses a lot of what she has learned these past two years at Thurgood Law in contract law when reading over talent agreements and negotiating her pay rate. NaQuia is committed to her acting career and since law school has remained online for over a year now, she's decided to make the big move to Los Angeles to give acting all she has got! NaQuia recently signed with The Polygon Group Talent Agency and she has worked with some of Hollywood's most elite acting professionals such as Gloria Gifford and Jamie Castro for acting lessons. She is excited to take her career up a notch and hopes that her journey of pursuing her dreams will inspire others.

"The sky isn't even the limit; you can do anything that you put your mind to. I hope I can inspire anyone out there that they can do anything, especially my daughter. I hope to set a positive example for her," said NaQuia.





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STUDENT NEWS cont. Bailey Clarke Bar Scholarship

## CONGRATULATIONS

Marquetta Johnson - \$3,000 Gabrielle Davis - \$3,000 William Crayton - \$2,000

## 2021 Bailey Clarke Bar Scholarship: WINNERS





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## STUDENT NEWS cont.

## Bailey Clarke Bar Scholarship Luncheon







Josetta Jones: from retirement to a new position in Diversity



*Josetta Jones* is a Thurgood Law alumna who has recently been announced as the new Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer at Chevron Corp. Jones is an engineer and patent attorney at Chevron and has worked for the company for nearly two decades. Jones spent a lot of time serving as chair of the Law Function Diversity Council to inspire underrepresented girls to pursue STEM careers with the nonprofit Techbridge Girls. Jones credits her career success to chemist Dr. William F. King who helped guide her when she arrived at the company as a young patent attorney.

Jones says in this new role she is dedicated and passionate about diversity and inclusion values. Jones acknowledges that 2020 made it clear the challenges are far from resolved with the global pandemic, the killing of George Floyd, and the economy have all highlighted issues in equality and equity that can no longer be ignored. Jones says, "we need innovation that only comes from diverse and inclusive workforces, where ideas and perspectives are valued." Jones says Chevron has a long history of drawing in talent from HBCU's just as they did with her as a Thurgood Law alum. "About 7 million dollars will be devoted to increase funding to seven HBCUs over a five-year period and will also engage in more peer-to-peer leadership with our HBCUs," says Jones. Jones hopes to focus on growth and development of the Black community and with Black employees at Chevron in her new role.





#### Nekketta M. Archie launches her own law firm



*Nekketta M. Archie* is a Thurgood Law alumna class of 2017 and she is the founding partner and managing attorney of her brand-new firm Archie Law PLLC. Her firm offers estate planning, estate administration, asset protection and preservation, and general civil litigation. Nekketta's goal for her new firm is to offer quality legal services to those in need, to be a resource to counsel, and to educate and empower the community to dispel some myths about estate planning, and to invest in other minorities in the community.

Nekketta's background before founding her own firm was in debt collection, commercial litigation, and consumer and creditor's rights. She says her previous experiences taught her to value her true worth and the unique services that she has to offer. She learned important lessons as an entrepreneur in paying off debts, protecting assets, building generational wealth, and restoring a sense of financial pride in the minority community.

Nekketta is actively involved as an attorney in Texas as she's a member of the Houston Lawyers Association, Texas Creditors Bar Association, serves as treasurer of the African American Lawyer Section of the State Bar of Texas and also a member of the Bankruptcy Section, Commercial Lawyers Section and the Women of Law Section for the State Bar of Texas. Even during her time at Thurgood Law she was VP of the Student Bar Association, a published author and scholar, served as an Associate Editor of Thurgood Marshall Law Review, and competed in several moot court competitions. Attorney Archie is all about giving back to the community that helped her. She says she is working with a colleague and another Thurgood Law grad to create an initiative to financially empower attorneys and scholars from Thurgood. Nekketta says now more than ever it is important to serve those in need and she is committed to counseling, educating, and empowering the people. She encourages all Thurgood Law alums and students to stay true to yourself!

#### Congratulations !!



#### Sorrels Law Hires Lawyer/Nurse/ Former Hospital CEO, Tom Omondi

Sorrels Law has just hired Tom Omondi, J.D., R.N. to anchor its medical malpractice department. Tom's experience as a health care executive, front line worker and nurse is second to none. Tom obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in 2007 (Prairie View A&M University), his Masters of Science in Nursing Administration degree (University of Houston - Victoria), his Masters of Business Administration degree (University of Houston – Victoria), and his Juris Doctor degree (Thurgood Marshall School of Law – Texas Southern University) after that. He has worked at almost every level of health care from a

certified nurse aide to the Chief Executive Officer. He has been a chief nursing officer, house supervisor, charge nurse and ICU nurse. Tom has supervised a staff of 75 people in a hospital setting and overseen all aspects of hospital operations. Tom also currently serves as the Inaugural President of the Nursing Alumni Association at the University of Houston.

"We are excited to add a lawyer/nurse to our medical malpractice team who I believe has more education and experience in the health care field than any other lawyer/nurse in the state," noted Randy Sorrels of Sorrels Law. "Our clients who are victims of medical malpractice will get the highest quality of medical/legal service in the industry."

Tom joins a law firm led by the former State Bar of Texas president, who has also been named the top medical malpractice lawyer in Houston, and one of the top 100 lawyers in the state of Texas. Noted Tom, "I am excited to take my legal career to the very top level. I plan to employ my years of health care training and experience to provide first-class legal representation to all of our clients. I believe I bring a unique insight into this position that few people can bring. I am as passionate about representing victims of malpractice as I have been about providing excellent patient care to my patients."

Tom is married to Harriet Omondi, who is a practicing Family Nurse Practitioner, and they have two sons, one of whom attends Strake Jesuit and the other attends Ann Sullivan. They are both interested in the healthcare and law professions. "Of all of my accomplishments in medicine and law, I am most proud of my family. They have supported me throughout my efforts to obtain more education and experience, and it brings me great joy to watch their successes," said Tom.

#### About Sorrels Law:

Sorrels Law is a boutique law firm specializing in personal injury, medical malpractice, commercial vehicle crashes, petrochemical mishaps and business litigation. For questions regarding any medical malpractice claims you may have, please contact Randy Sorrels at Randy@SorrelsLaw.com or Tom Omondi at Tom@SorrelsLaw.com, or call firm partner, Alexandra Farias-Sorrels at 713-226-5156.



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#### Thurgood Law Alum, Glen Austin, Jr. named TSU Executive Director



Thurgood Law is proud of alum Glen Austin, Jr. who has recently stepped into the new role of Executive Director of Government and Community Relations for TSU. Glen is thrilled to return to his alma mater to serve in a new way with hopes to advance the university. In Glen's new role he manages TSU's legislative agenda at the local, state, and federal levels, as well as directing TSU's community outreach initiatives. Glen is well prepared for this position as he previously worked as a Legislative Aide, Associate Attorney, Campaign Manager/Field Director, and Legislative Director. Glen's career background has made him ideal for this role.

Glen recalls his first experience interning at the state capital as a Thurgood Law student was his "foot in the door" to legislative politics. Since then his career in politics took off. He got

involved in numerous campaigns and community organizations that were involved in the legislative processes. But, to diversify himself, he worked in property, tax, and school finance litigation on behalf of government entities at a law firm. Glen says these experiences helped to make him well rounded and knowledgeable in the area of politics. He later worked for a senior senator which allowed him to sharpen his skills. "I am thankful that I had all of those experiences because I understand the full life cycle of legislation and politics. I understand how campaigns lead to elected officials which leads to crafting of legislation, which requires shepherding through the legislative process which results in law which will be litigated in court. I have experience at all of these levels." said Glen.

Thurgood Law believes Glen will be successful in his new role for the university and we're sure that the skills he gained at Thurgood Law will make him an asset to the university. Glen said "The legal writing and research education I received at Thurgood Law has been critical in every stage of my career. Additionally, Thurgood Law provided me the opportunity to intern in the state legislature via the Texas Legislative Internship Program which led to gaining valuable legislative experience and making important relationships."

Glen says he has many goals for the new role a few being to increase funding for TSU, bring valuable corporate and individual partnerships on campus, elevate TSU's prestige within the higher education community, and improving TSU's engagement within the local community. We are excited to see all of Glen's goals come true and support his endeavors.

Glen signifies the importance of building strong relationships, and he says "it is surprising how many of your classmates go on to be judges, elected officials, and opposing counsel that can affect your career." Glen wants Thurgood Law students who are interested in a career path such as his to know it's also important to have a "plan-b," because politics can be fickle and inconsistent. He encourages students to keep a backup just in case the political climate changes. "Attorneys are uniquely positioned to do that," says Glen. Glen also wants students to know that he is a resource to those interested in a similar career path and encourages those students to reach out via email at glen.austin@tsu.edu.

Congratulations Glen, TMSL is proud!





#### ALUMNI HIGHLIGHTS THURGOOD THURSDAY—BLACK HISTORY MONTH EDITION SPONSORED BY: LEO & OGINNI TRIAL LAWYERS PLLC



















March 26, 2021

Joan R.M. Bullock Dean



## **IN MEMORIAM**

## <u>A Memorial Tribute to Thurgood Law Alum, Christopher J. Marshall '17</u>

















## **IN MEMORIAM**



#### Dr. Marie-Therese Simms gains her wings

Dr. Marie-Therese Simms, the beloved wife of Leroy Simms, Thurgood Law '1995 and mother of Thurgood Law Alumnae, Dannielle-Mahree Simms and Lesli-Cree Simms, passed away on March 7, 2021. The Thurgood Law Family lifts Leroy, their daughters, and the family in prayer during this difficult time.



#### John Albert Willis, Jr. passed away March 8, 2021

John Albert Willis, Jr., the father of Thurgood Law alum, the Honorable Kirk Willis will forever be remembered for his wisdom and dedicated stewardship to his church. The Thurgood Law family extends its heartfelt condolences to the Willis family during this time of loss.





## OFFICE OF CAREER, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & DIVERSITY INITIATIVES (OCPD)



#### A Message from OCPD:

#### **Study Space**

TMSL students have been working hard and studying remotely as the Law School continues to operate virtually. Students are requesting a quiet escape from home and a change of scenery as they prepare to study for the bar exam and final exams. Many are not local to access the TMSL library and some cities have not reopened local libraries due to the pandemic.

If any alumni in the Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, and Valley areas can offer a few hours of quiet office space in the evenings or on the weekends where students can study, they would greatly appreciate it! Email nikki.smith@tmslaw.tsu.edu

#### Need Help this Summer?

There are still several first-year law students looking to build legal skills this summer. If you could use the support of an intern this summer, please contact the OCPD. You are free to structure a summer experience in any way that works best for you, as long as the student will gain experience and an opportunity to build legal skills.

#### Here are some tips and suggestions:

<u>Dates:</u> Most positions will begin May 17, 2021 and classes resume in mid-August. Select an intern for a few weeks, half summer, full summer, or as needed!

Time Commitment: Interns work full-time, part-time, or a few hours per week.

<u>Compensation:</u> Students are encouraged to gain experience regardless of compensation. Here are some ways in which alumni have compensated interns in the past: Paid (going rate is \$10-\$15/hr.); Stipend (one lump sum payment at end of summer; or half at the beginning, half at end of position); Unpaid

Duties: Client intake, draft legal documents, conduct legal research, observe trials and hearings, general clerical support.

Employers are hosting both in-person and virtual summer positions. If you'd like to hire an intern, please email nikki.smith@tmslaw.tsu.edu

Thank you!



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To view recordings, go to: www.tmslcle.com



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## OUR STORY The History of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law







## COFFEE TABLE BOOK

#### RESEARCHED AND PRODUCED BY Urban Research and Resource Center Texas Southern University



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# TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Thurgood Marshall School of Law

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