

THE NATIONAL BLACK LAWYERS

TOP 100

HALL *of*
FAME



January 17, 2024 | 6:00 PM
Loews Miami Beach Hotel

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT SANDRA H. ROBINSON

As my term as President of this esteemed organization comes to an end, I reflect on the events of the past year and how proud I am to have been a part of our journey. Through our programs, we sought to engage, educate, and enlighten our membership. Our membership has grown, increasing our connections with the wealth of outstanding Black Lawyers who are advocating for their clients and impacting their communities in meaningful ways.

It gives me great pleasure to now bring you the second annual National Black Lawyers Hall of Fame. At last year's inaugural event, initiated by NBL's immediate past President, Labarron Boone, we honored a stellar first class of inductees: Barbara R. Arnwine, Esq.; Fred D. Gray, Esq.; Elaine R. Jones, Esq.; Honorable Charles Price; Hezekiah Sistrunk, Jr., Esq.; and Benjamin F. Wilson, Esq. – all of them pillars of the civil/criminal justice system.

This year, we will continue what will become a tradition of recognizing civil and criminal justice warriors, those who have fought the battles to protect the rights of all. Those who have spoken out against injustice in any form. Those who have given a voice to many who believed they had no voice.

You will learn more about this year's inductees in the pages to follow, but I want to shout them out briefly to you now:

- Wade J. Henderson, Esq., has held several leadership positions with numerous human rights organizations: being active with direct advocacy and strategic policy development. He is a past President of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and his counsel is sought on a national and international level for the development and implementation of appropriate civil rights legislation and policies.
- Bryan Stevenson, Esq., is the Founder and Executive Director of Equal Justice Initiative. He has been a major force in fighting the biases found in our criminal justice system against the poor and minorities. His efforts to create a National Memorial for Peace and Justice is overwhelmingly moving and a necessary reminder.
- Christina Swarns, Esq., is the Executive Director of the Innocence Project, which advocates for, and has successfully achieved, the release of persons wrongfully incarcerated. She has held other advocacy positions in the civil rights arena, including a tenure at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.



Thank you to all our Hall of Fame inductees. We stand on your shoulders and continue to reap the benefits of your hard work and sacrifices.

These words of Justice Thurgood Marshall speak not only to the thrust of our program this evening but to the national issues we face today:

“Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.” (1978 University of Virginia commencement speech.)

Let's fight on and support those who are leading the charge.

Thank you for joining us this evening.



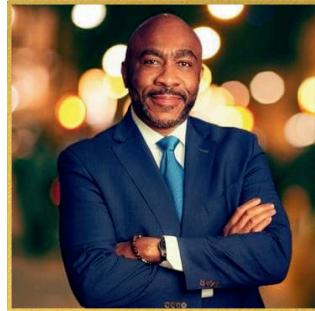
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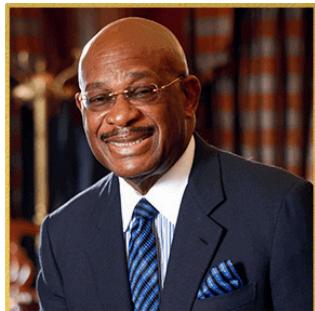
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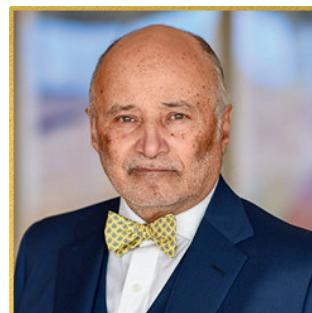
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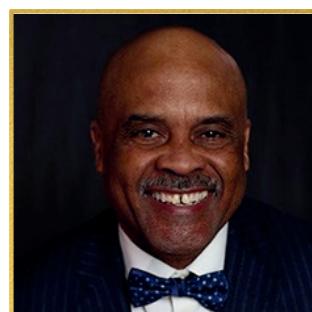
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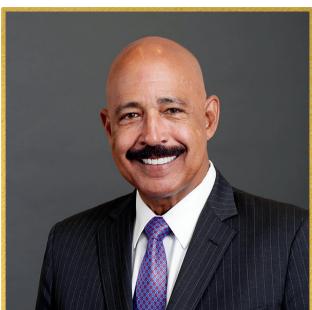
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A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ANNAMARIA STEWARD

Dear NBL Family,

Thank you for being part of our African American Legal Braintrust.™ This has been an exciting year for The NBL Top 100 and we are grateful for your membership and your contributions to our organization and the profession.

Thank you for volunteering and participating in our NBL Academy, where we heard educational and inspirational messages from **Craig Owen White** (“An Introduction to Understanding Risk in Business Transactions”), **Gatluak Ramdiet** (“Five Skills Living in a Refugee Camp Taught Me About Success”), **Lucy Onyeforo** (“The Height of International Competition: Pushing Beyond All Boundaries in Sports and Law”), **Rudene Mercer Haynes** (“How to Be a Change Agent: Using Your Influence for Good”), and, most recently, **Brice Kenfack** (“From Cameroon to American Big Law: The Path to Remaining Your Authentic Self”). We have relished the opportunity to learn about your personal and professional journeys and benefit from your lessons learned.



Thank you for joining us for our inaugural Hall of Fame in Miami in January 2023, where we inducted **Barbara Arnwine**, **Fred Gray**, **Elaine Jones**, **Judge Charles Price**, **Hezekiah Sistrunk, Jr.** and **Ben Wilson**; and for joining us for our Membership Reception in Washington, DC, sponsored by The Cochran Firm.

And thank you for sharing your professional successes. You continue to represent legal excellence and inspire us to reach higher.

In the upcoming year, we hope you will join us in March when we sponsor Faulkner University Law School’s **Fred Gray Civil Rights Symposium** titled “Before Thurgood: Honoring America’s Forgotten Civil Rights Heroes”. In the vein of The NBL, we look forward to highlighting African American legal excellence and recognizing those who not only made a path for us as lawyers, but also changed the landscape of this country for the better. Furthermore, in connecting the experiences of our Hall of Famers, we also will be visiting **Bryan Stevenson’s Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice**.

We also have heard your requests for additional Membership Receptions and we look forward to bringing you together with other members across the country. Stay tuned for additional dates and locations in 2024-2025.

In sum, we wish you a productive, safe and inspiring 2024 and thank you for being exceptional. We continue to be awed by your achievements.

DINNER MENU

Amuse Bouche

Sunrise Gazpacho: *heirloom tomato, mango, yellow bell pepper, sherry vinegar*

First Course

Red and Golden Beet Salad: *baby arugula, orange segments, Humboldt Fog goat cheese, pomegranate dressing*

Main Course

Free Bird Farmed Chicken: *Chicken breast stuffed with spinach goat cheese, crispy saffron risotto, wild mushroom, baby zucchini, rosemary chicken jus*

Dessert

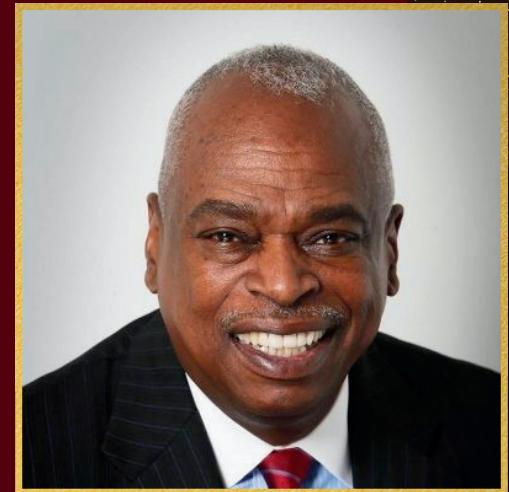
Jivara Chocolate Fudge Cake: *caramelia ganache, candied hazelnuts, Bahibe mousse quenelle*

Seattle's Best™ coffee, decaffeinated coffee, and a selection of teas

ABOUT WADE J. HENDERSON

Wade J. Henderson is a civil rights veteran and serves as a strategic advisor to major corporations, foundations, and non-profits on matters relating to civil and human rights, diversity, and inclusion.

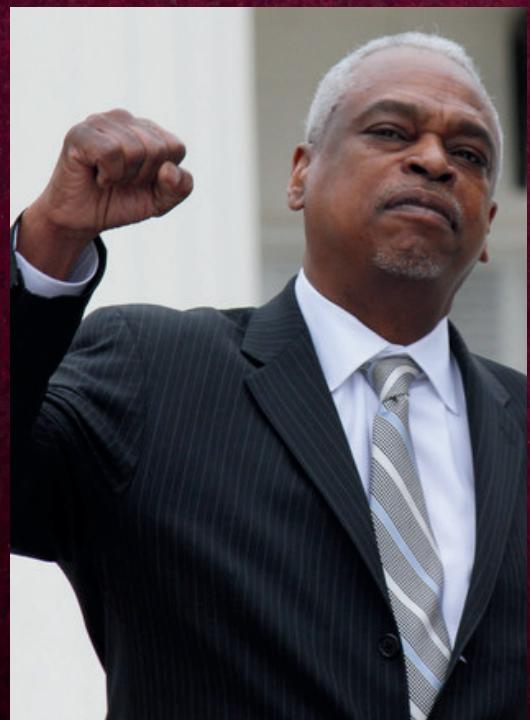
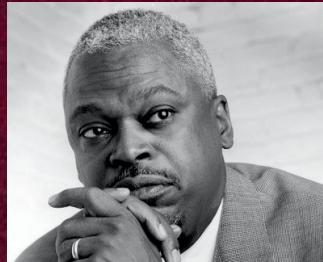
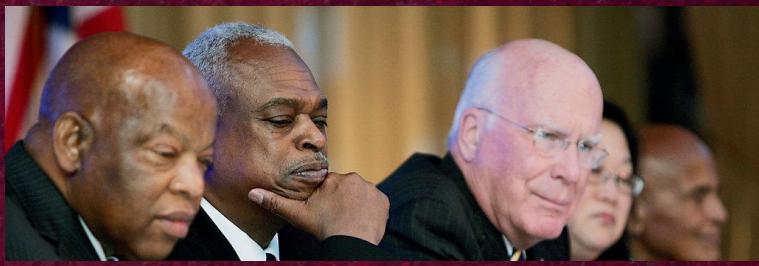
Henderson is the former president of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund. The Leadership Conference is the nation's premier civil and human rights coalition with over 230 national organizations "working to build an America as good as its ideals." The Leadership Conference has been involved in the passage and implementation of every major civil rights act from 1957 to the present. Henderson is well known for his expertise on a wide range of civil rights, civil liberties, and human rights issues, and is the author of numerous articles on civil rights and public policy. After taking the helm of The Leadership Conference in 1996, he worked diligently to address emerging policy issues of concern to the civil and human rights community and to strengthen the effectiveness of the coalition. Under his stewardship, The Leadership Conference became one of the nation's most effective organizations in advocating for progressive civil and human rights policies. Henderson was the president of The Leadership Conference from 1996 – 2017.



Henderson currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Center for Responsible Lending and the National Community Advisory Council (NCAC) of Bank of America. He also serves on the Advisory Committee on Poverty and the Environment for the JPB Foundation. He is a Senior Advisor to The Leadership Conference and to Tusk Philanthropies.

Henderson is a graduate of Howard University and the Rutgers University School of Law and holds honorary doctorates from CUNY Queens College School of Law and Gettysburg College.

Henderson served as the Joseph L. Rauh, Jr. Professor of Public Interest Law at the David A. Clarke School of Law, University of the District of Columbia from 2000 to 2020. He is a member of the Bars of the District of Columbia and the US Supreme Court. He is also a member of the National Bar Association. Henderson is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.



ABOUT BRYAN STEVENSON

Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. Under his leadership, EJI has won major legal challenges eliminating excessive and unfair sentencing, exonerating innocent death row prisoners, confronting abuse of the incarcerated and the mentally ill, and aiding children prosecuted as adults.

Mr. Stevenson has argued and won multiple cases at the United States Supreme Court, including a 2019 ruling protecting condemned prisoners who suffer from dementia and a landmark 2012 ruling that banned mandatory life-imprisonment-without-parole sentences for all children 17 or younger. Mr. Stevenson and his staff have won reversals, relief, or release from prison for over 140 wrongly condemned prisoners on death row and won relief for hundreds of others wrongly convicted or unfairly sentenced.

Mr. Stevenson has initiated major new anti-poverty and anti-discrimination efforts that challenge inequality in America. He led the creation of two highly acclaimed cultural sites which opened in 2018: the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. These new national landmark institutions chronicle the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation, and the connection to mass incarceration and contemporary issues of racial bias.

Mr. Stevenson's work has won him numerous awards including the prestigious MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Prize; the ABA Medal, the American Bar Association's highest honor; the National Medal of Liberty from the American Civil Liberties Union after he was nominated by United States Supreme Court Justice John Stevens; the Public Interest Lawyer of the Year by the National Association of Public Interest Lawyers; and the Olaf Palme Prize in Stockholm, Sweden for international human rights. In 2002, he received the Alabama State Bar Commissioners Award. In 2003, the SALT Human Rights Award was presented to Mr. Stevenson by the Society of American Law Teachers. In 2004, he received the Award for Courageous Advocacy from the American College of Trial Lawyers and also the Lawyer for the People Award from the National Lawyers Guild. In 2006 New York University presented Mr. Stevenson with its Distinguished Teaching Award.



Mr. Stevenson won the Gruber Foundation International Justice Prize and was awarded the NAACP William Robert Ming Advocacy Award, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association Lifetime Achievement Award, the Ford Foundation Visionaries Award, and the Roosevelt Institute Franklin D. Roosevelt Freedom from Fear Award. In 2012, Mr. Stevenson received the American Psychiatric Association Human Rights Award, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Fred L. Shuttlesworth Award, and the Smithsonian Magazine American Ingenuity Award in Social Progress. Mr. Stevenson was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Science in 2014 and won the Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize. In 2015, he was named to the Time 100 recognizing the world's most influential people. In 2016, he received the American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award. He was named in Fortune's 2016 and 2017 World's Greatest Leaders list. He received the Martin Luther King Jr. Nonviolent Peace Prize, from the King Center in Atlanta in 2018. In 2020, he received the Right Livelihood Award from The Right Livelihood Foundation in Sweden. In 2023, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Biden.

Mr. Stevenson has received over 50 honorary doctoral degrees, including degrees from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, and Oxford University. He is the author of the critically acclaimed New York Times bestseller, *Just Mercy*, which was named by Time Magazine as one of the 10 Best Books of Nonfiction for 2014 and has been awarded several honors, including the American Library Association's Carnegie Medal for Best Nonfiction Book of 2015 and a 2015 NAACP Image Award. *Just Mercy* was adapted as a major motion picture and the film won the American Bar Association's 2020 Silver Gavel Award as well as four NAACP Image Awards. Mr. Stevenson is also the subject of the Emmy Award-winning HBO documentary *True Justice*. He is a graduate of the Harvard Law School and the Harvard School of Government.



ABOUT CHRISTINA SWARNS

Christina Swarns is the Executive Director of the Innocence Project, which works to free the innocent, prevent wrongful convictions, and create fair, compassionate, and equitable systems of justice for everyone. Its work is guided by science and grounded in anti-racism. The Innocence Project uses DNA and other scientific advancements to prove wrongful conviction. To date, we have helped to free or exonerate more than 240 people who, collectively, spent more than 3,600 years behind bars. Our efforts have led to the passage of more than 200 transformative state laws and federal reforms.

Christina previously served as the President and Attorney-in-Charge of the Office of the Appellate Defender, Inc. (OAD), one of New York City's oldest providers of indigent appellate defense representation. Prior to joining OAD, Christina was the Litigation Director and Criminal Justice Project Director for the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), where she oversaw LDF's economic justice, education, political participation, and criminal justice litigation, organizing, public education, communication, and other advocacy strategies.



Christina argued, and won, *Buck v. Davis*, a challenge to the introduction of explicitly racially biased evidence in a Texas death penalty case, in the United States Supreme Court. In a February 2017 decision, Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for a 6-2 majority, vacated Mr. Duane Buck's death sentence and denounced the "noxious strain of racial prejudice" that infected the case after an expert witness testified that Mr. Buck was more likely to commit criminal acts of violence in the future because he is Black. Christina was the only Black woman to argue in that Supreme Court term and is one of the few Black women to have argued before the nation's highest court.

Prior to joining LDF, Christina served as a Supervising Assistant Federal Defender and Assistant Federal Defender at the Capital Habeas Unit of Philadelphia's Federal Community Defender Office where she represented numerous death-sentenced prisoners whose convictions and/or death sentences were vacated, including Nicholas Yarris, the first death sentenced prisoner in Pennsylvania to be exonerated by DNA evidence. Christina began her legal career as a Staff Attorney with the Legal Aid Society's Criminal Defense Division in New York.

Christina speaks and writes about race and criminal justice. She has authored multiple op-eds, including “The Supreme Court Should Reject Arizona’s Death Penalty Gambit” and “Dylann Roof Shouldn’t Get the Death Penalty,” both of which were published in the New York Times; “Why the Dangerousness Standard is Racist,” which was published in the New York Daily News; and “Black people are wrongly convicted more than any other group. We can prevent this,” which was published in the LA Times. Christina earned a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and a B.A. from Howard University.



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The NBL Top 100 Hall of Fame
Inductees, please scan here.*



 SCAN ME

INTRODUCING THE 2024 NBL PRESIDENT BENJAMIN F. WILSON

Benjamin F. Wilson hails from Jackson, Mississippi. A graduate of Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School, Ben first worked as an attorney at King & Spalding, focusing on litigation and tax matters. In 1979, he joined the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Division, where he represented the government throughout the country and received multiple Special Achievement Awards for his trial expertise in commercial litigation. Ben then became an associate and partner at Rose, Schmidt, Chapman, Duff, and Hasley. In 1986, he joined Beveridge and Diamond (B&D).

Over the next 35 years, Ben became a national environmental law expert while significantly increasing B&D's attorney diversity and serving multiple terms as a firm Chairman. He was lead counsel in numerous complex environmental litigation and regulatory matters for major consumer product corporations, retailers, oil and gas companies, municipalities, and developers. He served as Court-Appointed Monitor for the Duke Energy coal ash spill remediation project (the largest US electric power holding company) and Deputy Monitor for Emissions & Environmental for DOJ in Volkswagen AG's emissions-cheating criminal plea agreement. He served as lead counsel at the largest chromium site in the U.S. and also represented many municipal government agencies on Clean Water Act enforcement, litigation, and project development, including the City of New Orleans, DC Water and Sewer Authority, Metropolitan Water District of Greater Chicago, San Antonio Water System, and Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority. He also counseled clients on environmental justice representations.

Ben also is a recognized leader in diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. In 2008, he founded Diverse Partners Network and, in 2021, established African American General Counsel and Managing Partner Networks. He has been lauded for his expertise and leadership by countless organizations and publications, most recently The Environmental Law Institute's (ELI) Environmental Achievement Award (October 2022), The American Lawyer's Lifetime Achievement Award (December 2021) and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (2022).

Ben serves as Chair of ELI, Secretary of the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, and on the Boards of APCO Worldwide, Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, PG&E Corporation, DC Bar Foundation, and DC Judicial Nomination Commission. Previously, he also served on the Board of Trustees of Dartmouth College and Chairman of DC Board of Elections and Ethics (1990-2004). For the past 30 years, he has chaired the National Bar Association's Environmental, Energy, and Public Utilities Law Section, and for over 17 years, he has taught at Howard University Law School.



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