

Special Black History Month Edition

February 2025

THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

The Official Newspaper of Southern University Law Center



FROM THE EDITOR- IN-CHIEF

MICHAELA D. WEEKS

Dear Readers,

The Southern University Law Center's Public Defender newspaper is back and ready to tackle our country's most pressing issues today. After a brief pause, we are excited to return with an updated perspective on the intersection of law, justice, and society. This edition will delve into Black History Month as it comes to an end. Our articles will be based on the latest developments in the United States, from the ongoing challenges to civil rights and social justice to the evolving political landscape. We aim to provide a platform for critical discussions and share the experiences and insights of our law center community, highlighting how national issues resonate within our academic and professional lives.

In this comeback, we will also focus on the unique challenges and opportunities within the Law Center itself, offering a closer look at how our students, faculty, and staff are navigating the complexities of legal education and activism in today's world. From the impact of recent legal reforms to the role of future public defenders in shaping justice, this edition will serve as a resource for reflection, action, and remembering those that have impacted the world. We hope this Black History edition sparks conversation, fosters awareness, and continues to build the vibrant, engaged community that has always been at the heart of the Public Defender newspaper.



WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT CHARLES HATFIELD?

DE'ASHANAE CHANEY



SULC

In 1946, the doors to legal education in Louisiana were slammed shut to Black students. No Black lawyers stood in court to defend their communities. No Black judges presided over cases. No Black legislators helped shape the laws governing the state. This was no accident—it was by design. And yet, Charles Hatfield refused to accept it.

A qualified Black applicant, Hatfield sought admission to Louisiana State University's law school. His rejection was not based on merit but on race. Rather than accept this exclusion, he fought back. He sued the state, challenging a system built to keep him—and countless others—out.

The cost was steep. Harassment and threats forced Hatfield to leave Louisiana for Atlanta. He never practiced law. Never stood before a judge. Never reaped the rewards of his battle. But his fight forced the state's hand, leading to the establishment of Southern University Law School in 1947. Today, the Southern University Law Center (SULC) stands as a direct result of his defiance. More than just a law school, SULC has reshaped Louisiana's legal system, producing more sitting judges in the state than any other institution. Its graduates serve as district attorneys, public defenders, legislators, and judges—ensuring that the legal system reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

Yet nearly 80 years later, the struggle for justice continues. Legal barriers may no longer explicitly exclude Black students, but the fight is far from over. From relentless voter suppression to the dismantling of affirmative action, the same forces that sought to lock Hatfield out of the legal profession still threaten to unravel the progress he fought to secure. Where would Louisiana be without Charles Hatfield? Would our judiciary still reflect the people it serves? Would the scales of justice be tipped even further against us? Hatfield never practiced law, but his defiance reshaped Louisiana's legal landscape. He forced open doors that generations have since walked through. But progress is never guaranteed—it must be defended. Hatfield sacrificed for our future. The question now is: what will we do to protect it?

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH LINE: WHO WILL BE SULC'S NEXT CHANCELLOR?

BREANNA MAGEE

EDITORS'S NOTE: This article was written prior to the announcement of Interim Chancellor Washington as the new Chancellor of SULC.

Since June 2024, Southern University Law Center has been on the hunt for a new Chancellor to lead the school into its next era of academic success. After months of anticipation, the search committee narrowed it down to three powerhouse finalists: Professor Jalila Jefferson-Bullock, J.D.; Vice Chancellor Shawn Vance, J.D.; and Interim Chancellor Alvin Washington, J.D.

Each candidate brings a wealth of experience to the table, but what sets them apart? In a series of public interview sessions, faculty, students, and community members got a front-row seat to hear the “Big 3” lay out their visions for SULC’s future.

Professor Jefferson-Bullock, an Associate Professor at Wayne State University Law School and Associate Director of the Civil Rights and Social Justice Center, emphasized student success, impactful scholarship, and fundraising as key priorities.


Professor Vance, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and an Associate Professor of Law, outlined a vision centered on participative leadership, focusing on structure, processes, and people to elevate the institution.

Finally, Professor Washington, currently serving as the Interim Chancellor at the law center and the managing professor for the mediation clinic, put the spotlight on improving bar passage rates, strengthening alumni relations, and faculty improvements, among other goals.

With the decision looming, students have been asked to share their thoughts on who should take the helm. While the final vote rests with the board, one thing is certain – SULC’S next chapter is about to be written, and all eyes are on the finish line.

ATTENTION SULC STUDENTS! 📢

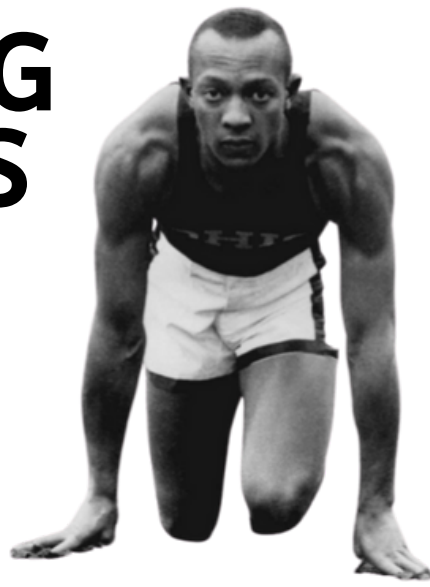
THE OFFICE OF INNOVATION AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND INITIATIVES INVITES YOU TO OUR UPCOMING EVENTS FOR MARCH 2025! BE SURE TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS SO YOU DON'T MISS OUT.

 Upcoming Events:

<input type="checkbox"/>	March 1-2, 2025 – 225Fest 2025
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 3-4, 2025 – Mardi Gras Holiday 🎉
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 5, 2025 – Cisco Legal Resume Review Clinic (Virtual) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ⌚ Time: 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM• 📍 Location: Virtual (Webex Meeting)
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 7, 2025 – Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission (JJRAIC) Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ⌚ Time: TBD• 📍 Location: TBD, Louisiana State Capitol (State Capitol Dr, Baton Rouge, LA 70802)

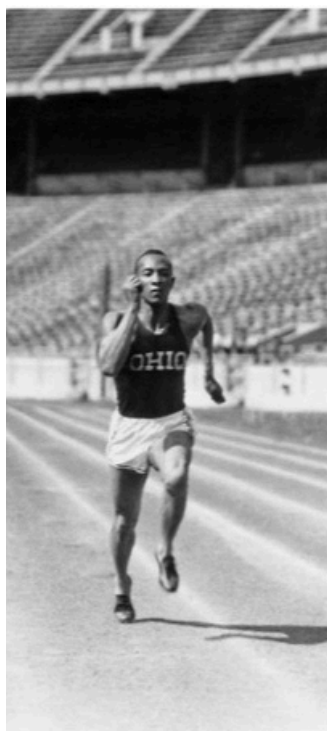
HIGHLIGHTING JESSE OWENS

MICHAELA WEEKS



Jesse Owens Official Website

Jesse Owens was an African American track and field athlete who became an ultimate hero after his legendary performance at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany. Owens' achievements on the track not only cemented his place in sports history but also carried deep significance in the fight against racial prejudice and discrimination. Jesse Owens was born on September 12, 1913, in Oakville, Alabama. Growing up in the Segregated South while also facing poverty presented numerous challenges. He was also the grandson of a slave. After he and his family moved to Cleveland, Ohio as at a young age, his talent in running became evident. He set a nation high school records in the long jump and sprints. After High school, Jesse Owens chose to attend the Ohio State University even though he could have attended any University that he wanted because of his greatness in track and field. Owens chose Ohio State University under the guidance of Coach Larry Snyder, and became a dominant force in track and field. Although Owens faced racial discrimination and financial difficulties, he became the world's best sprinter and long jumper, winning a total of 8 NCAA Championships in his college career and breaking not some, but multiple world records. At the 1936 Berlin, Germany Olympics, Owens crushed Adolf Hitler's regime of using the games to promote ideals of Aryan racial superiority by his remarkable performance. Owens won four gold medals, one in the 100 meters, 200 meters, long jump, and 4x100 meter relay. His miraculous performance made him the star of the games and earned him worldwide fame. Since Owens was an African American man, his victories were a blow to Adolf Hitler's propaganda, challenging the racist narrative of white superiority that the Nazi regime attempted to promote. I can't forget to emphasize gratitude on one of Owen's most memorable moments in the 1936 Olympics' long jump. German jumper, Luz Long, was great competition to



*Jesse Owens
Official Website*

owners, however he offered Owens advice on his techniques, helping him adjust his approach to the jump. The two athletes shared a historical, gracious moment, despite the racial tensions of the time. Owens won the gold medal, and Long won the silver. Owens later credited Long & sportsmanship as a meaningful and profound experience, and they remained friends after the games. Owens' victories in Berlin were symbolic not only because they defied Nazi propaganda but also because they challenged the racial barriers in the United States. Unfortunately, despite his success, Owens returned home to the United States to face the same racial prejudice and discrimination that had existed before the Olympics. He was not offered the endorsement deals or financial opportunities that other white athletes were offered and enjoyed. Although his fame remained, he struggled financially after his Olympic success, taking on various jobs, including as a public speaker and in the business world. However, Owens legacy extended beyond the hardships he faced. He became what we would describe as an ultimate trailblazer for African American athletes in the face of segregation and racism. He inspired future generations of athletes, including those in the civil rights movement. Today, we recognize him as a heroic champion in black history.

HBCU LAW SCHOOLS: THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF BLACK LEGAL EXCELLENCE

KEYRA JOHNSON

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been instrumental in shaping the legal landscape of the United States, providing pivotal platforms for African American students to pursue legal education and careers. Despite representing only 3% of the nation's law schools, HBCU law schools are responsible for approximately 25% of law degrees earned by Black students, underscoring their significant impact on diversifying the legal profession. The legacy of HBCU law schools is rich with notable alumni who have profoundly influenced American jurisprudence. Howard University School of Law, established in 1869, counts among its graduates Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and Charlotte E. Ray, the first Black American female lawyer in the United States. These trailblazers not only broke racial barriers but also laid the groundwork for future generations of African American legal professionals.

In addition to Howard, the United States is home to five other ABA-accredited HBCU law schools:

- Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- North Carolina Central University School of Law in Durham, North Carolina
- Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Houston, Texas
- Florida A&M University College of Law in Orlando, Florida
- University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law in Washington, D.C.

These institutions continue to produce exceptional legal minds dedicated to justice and civil rights. The presence of Black lawyers in America is not just a matter of representation—it is a necessity for justice, equity, and progress. HBCU law schools have long been the backbone of this mission, shaping legal minds who challenge systemic inequities, advocate for marginalized communities, and inspire future generations. As the legal profession continues to evolve, the importance of fostering Black excellence in law remains paramount. A more diverse legal field ensures a justice system that truly serves all Americans, embodying the principles of fairness and equality that our nation strives to uphold.



National Geographic



Medium

LOST YOUTH: THE ADULTIFICATION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS IN LOUISIANA

KEYRA JOHNSON

Louisiana's juvenile justice system has long struggled with balancing rehabilitation and punishment, but recent laws enacted under Governor Jeff Landry threaten to push more youth into the adult system. The controversial policies include lowering the age at which juveniles can be charged as adults and increasing sentencing guidelines for certain offenses.

Critics argue that these policies disproportionately impact Black and low-income youth, reinforcing the school-to-prison pipeline. Research consistently shows that prosecuting juveniles as adults leads to higher recidivism rates and worse outcomes compared to rehabilitation-focused approaches.

Advocates are calling for immediate reforms, emphasizing community-based interventions and education programs instead of harsh penalties. The question remains: Will Louisiana embrace change, or will it continue down a punitive path that has failed in the past?

MILLENNIAL BLACK LAWYER: REDEFINING THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

KEYRA JOHNSON

Millennial Black lawyers are entering the legal profession with unique experiences that set them apart from previous generations. Raised in an era of social activism, digital transformation, and economic uncertainty, they bring fresh perspectives to the legal field.

Key ways millennial Black lawyers are shaping the future:

1. **Advocating for Diversity:** They push for inclusivity in firms and challenge systemic biases.
2. **Embracing Technology:** Leveraging AI, social media, and online branding to redefine legal practice.
3. **Community Engagement:** Many use their platforms to uplift Black communities through pro bono work and mentorship.

Despite challenges like racial disparities in hiring and promotion, millennial Black lawyers are forging their own paths, ensuring the next generation benefits from their resilience and innovation.

THE LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

NICHOLAS GARON



NEW ORLEANS TRIBUNE

In honor of Black History Month—a time dedicated to celebrating the long and enduring achievements of African Americans—I want to highlight an important group I had the privilege of engaging with during my time as a staffer at the Louisiana State Capitol: the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus.

The Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus is one of the bicameral caucus groups within the Louisiana Legislature, comprising numerous representatives and senators from across the state. One of its former members, Cleo Fields—a fellow Southern University Law Center alumnus—was recently elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Louisiana’s 6th District. U.S. Representative Cleo Fields For more information, you can find a list of Louisiana legislative caucuses here: [Louisiana Legislative Caucuses](#), and a list of Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus members here: [LLBC Members](#). The caucus is a key group in legislative and cultural affairs in Louisiana.

They host an externship program with the Southern University Law Center, where 6–7 law students per year gain hands-on experience at the Capitol. Additionally, they organize a Bayou Classic Jazz Brunch during the Southern vs. Grambling game to raise scholarship funds. They also host an economic development conference focused on tax planning and business skills, along with many other valuable programs.



LA State Legislature

AMERICA: ASYLUM SEEKERS NEED TO EAT. LET'S FEED THEM.

NICHOLAS GARON

Through friends and clients at my internship, I have spent a combined five years witnessing firsthand how the U.S. immigration system operates—its strengths and its flaws. I won't claim that the system, or the people who run it, are entirely bad. Many dedicated and wonderful individuals work within it, but they are burdened by archaic, overburdened policies that prioritize caution over fairness. The overarching principle is clear, at-least for visa issuance: avoid excessive taxpayer burden, err on the side of denying applicants, and prevent anyone from taking advantage of the system. What does this mean in practice? When someone applies for a visa, they are immediately scrutinized under the Immigration and Nationality Act's (INA) long list of ineligibilities. Do U.S. officials think you might become a public charge (i.e., take welfare)? Denied. Do they suspect you pose a threat? Denied. Do they think you won't return home? Denied. Past drug usage? Denied. Many burdensome traits can also hurt your entry chances at ports of entry, even for those with valid visas. There's no burden of proof on the government—just unchecked discretion, often based on assumptions, with no review process. A friend of mine followed all the rules. They arrived in the U.S. on a visa with no intent to stay, but circumstances changed. They developed a well-founded fear of returning home and applied for asylum. This was an affirmative asylum claim, meaning they had to remain in the U.S. while awaiting adjudication, with the government prohibited from deporting them in the meantime. The same process applies to defensive asylum claims made in response to deportation proceedings. So, what happens next? For affirmative asylum seekers—many of whom were inspected upon entry and never out of status—the system does nothing to help them. They are forced to remain in the U.S. but cannot apply for work authorization until 150 days after filing their claim, and they must wait at least 30 more days for approval. That's at least 180 days—six months—where they are prohibited from legally earning a living. In that time, they cannot get a Social Security number, build credit, open bank accounts, secure loans, or sign up for basic services that help Americans survive. The system is practically designed to force them into destitution if they are not supported. Could even the most fiscal and conservative taxpayer blame them for asking for assistance when even genuine and affirmative asylum seekers cannot work? Now, let's address the right-wing talking point about “illegal” immigrants getting free handouts. The reality? Refugees—who are resettled through entirely different processes—may receive some assistance from shelters or government programs, but asylum seekers are left with nothing. Both affirmative and defensive asylum applicants—both legal statuses—are at the government's discretion when it comes to granting work authorization. Even if approved, asylum seekers cannot receive federal aid until their asylum is granted, which can take years or even decades. A few states may allow certain benefits such as emergency Medicaid, but, in Louisiana, an asylum seeker gets: No TANF (cash assistance). No food stamps. No Social Security benefits. No Medicaid. No housing. Nothing. So, no, they aren't getting “handouts.” They aren't getting 2,200 dollars a month. In fact, they're being, though probably not duplicitously, potentially starved out by a system that refuses to let them work while simultaneously denying them basic assistance. If the federal government won't help them work, won't help them survive, and actively prevents them from being self-sufficient, can we blame them for seeking help from local governments, nonprofits, and charities? America prides itself on fairness and opportunity, yet we trap asylum seekers in bureaucratic purgatory, ensuring they suffer for daring to seek safety. This isn't just inhumane—it's counterproductive. If we truly believe in the values we claim, we should let them work, let them survive, and let them contribute. It's that simple.

LANDMARK SUPREME COURT CASES OF 2025

SARAI LEWIS

As the highest court in the United States, the Supreme Court has recently issued decisions and is poised to rule on cases in 2025 that could significantly influence constitutional rights, civil liberties, and government regulation.

Decided Cases:

TikTok, Inc. v. Garland — TikTok's Legal Battle – National Security vs. Free Speech

- In *TikTok Inc. v. Garland*, the Supreme Court addressed the constitutionality of the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act as applied to TikTok. The Act prohibits companies from providing services to distribute, maintain, or update TikTok in the U.S. unless its operations are separated from Chinese control. TikTok and a group of U.S. users argued that this restriction violated their First Amendment rights. On January 17, 2025, the Court affirmed the decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, ruling that the Act does not violate the First Amendment rights of TikTok or its users.
- Justice Sotomayor filed an opinion concurring in part and concurring in the judgment, and Justice Gorsuch filed an opinion concurring in the judgment.
- This decision underscores the Court's recognition of national security concerns associated with foreign-controlled applications and clarifies the limitations of First Amendment protections in this context.

Pending Cases:

Barnes v. Felix – Police Use of Force

- The case centers on a 2016 incident in which Officer Roberto Felix Jr. of Harris County, Texas, fatally shot Ashtian Barnes during a traffic stop over unpaid tolls. Barnes' mother filed a lawsuit alleging that Felix used excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment. Lower courts dismissed the case, focusing solely on the immediate threat perceived by Officer Felix. The key issue before the Court is whether courts should consider only the "moment of threat" perceived by officers or evaluate the broader circumstances leading up to the use of force

Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton – Online Age Verification & Free Speech

- The case centers on a Texas law requiring age verification for accessing online content deemed "harmful to minors," which includes explicit material. The Free Speech Coalition, representing various entities in the adult entertainment industry, argues that this law violates the First Amendment by imposing undue burdens on lawful speech and raising significant privacy concerns for users.
- During oral arguments, the justices examined the balance between protecting minors and upholding constitutional free speech rights. The Court's forthcoming decision is expected to have significant implications for online content regulation and First Amendment jurisprudence.

LANDMARK SUPREME COURT CASES OF 2025

SARAI LEWIS

Garland v. VanDerStok – Regulating Ghost Guns

- The case centers on the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)'s 2022 rule that classifies "ghost gun" kits, firearms without serial numbers that can be assembled at home, as firearms under the Gun Control Act of 1968. This classification subjects these kits to federal regulations, including serialization and background checks. The plaintiffs argue that the ATF exceeded its statutory authority with this rule. During oral arguments, several justices appeared inclined to uphold the ATF's regulation, expressing skepticism toward the challengers' arguments.

U.S. v. Skrmetti – Transgender Healthcare Rights

- This case challenges Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming healthcare for minors, a law that has ignited national debates over the rights of transgender individuals and the role of states in regulating healthcare. The Court will decide whether the law violates constitutional protections under the Equal Protection Clause.

Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board v. Drummond and *St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School v. Drummond* – Funding Religious Charter Schools

- These consolidated cases examine whether states are required to fund religious public charter schools, potentially altering the separation of church and state in public education.

Stanley v. City of Sanford, Florida – Disability Rights

- The Court will consider whether certain actions by municipalities violate the rights of individuals with disabilities under federal law. A ruling could affect the enforcement of disability rights and municipal responsibilities nationwide.

The outcomes of these cases will extend far beyond the courtroom. As future legal professionals, it is imperative to closely study these rulings to understand their legal impact and consider their broader societal consequences. These cases underscore the Supreme Court's role as both a guardian of constitutional principles and a forum for resolving complex societal disputes. As the justices deliberate, they shape the legal landscape in ways that will challenge and inspire the next generation of legal professionals.

As law students, it is our responsibility to analyze these critical decisions. What are your thoughts on these rulings? Share them with us in the next edition of The Public Defender.

KENDRICK LAMAR'S GRAMMY SWEEP SHATTERS RECORDS AND IGNITED CULTURAL CONVERSATION

AARON MANZY



Monica Schipper/Getty Images for The Recording Academy

In a historic night at the Grammys, Kendrick Lamar secured five awards for his powerful diss track, *Not Like Us*, solidifying his reputation as one of the most influential voices in the current scene of hip-hop. Winning categories such as Best Rap Performance and Song of the Year, the track transcended and revitalized a genre that is already a cultural phenomenon. Its sharp lyricism and uncompromising commentary tackled issues of authenticity, appropriation, and societal divides, resonating deeply with audiences worldwide.

Critics and fans alike praised *Not Like Us* for its raw energy and cutting-edge production, which redefined the boundaries of diss tracks. Lamar's ability to merge personal narratives with broader social critiques elevated the song to its anthemic status. The track's success reignited debates about the role of protest and confrontation in music, showcasing how diss tracks can be a force for change rather than mere spectacle. After finding resonance and success of this west coast sound with fans, Lamar went on to bolster *Not Like Us*, with the release of his sixth studio album *GNX*.

The Grammys' recognition of *Not Like Us* also marked a significant cultural shift, acknowledging the genre's capacity for intellectual and artistic depth. For many, Lamar's victory was a vindication of hip-hop's growing and continued influence on mainstream culture and its ability to challenge entrenched power structures. Beyond the awards, the impact of *Not Like Us* extended to social media and public discourse, inspiring countless conversations about identity, authenticity, and artistic integrity. It also reignited discussions around the Grammys' historical neglect of Black artists, with many viewing Lamar's success as a step toward greater inclusivity. Even at a time when the removal of many initiatives of equity and inclusion across the country, has had a grave impact.

Lamar's triumph with *Not Like Us* proved that hip-hop remains a vital and transformative force in the music industry. By turning a diss track into a cultural milestone, Kendrick Lamar has once again cemented his legacy as a poet, activist, and artist who refuses to be boxed in. But the questions should be posed is this success a result of bandwagon hip-hop fans who jump from one artist to another, based on whatever is hot or is this success a direct result of organic success and artist longevity? Only time will tell.

YOUNG THUG AND THE YSL RICO: AN ATTACK ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN ENTERTAINERS AND LIMITS PLACED ON THEIR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AARON MANZY

As the high-profile trial of Atlanta rapper Young Thug unfolds, the YSL RICO case sparked nationwide debate about the intersections of art, race, and justice. Fulton County prosecutors, namely District Attorney Fauni Willis and Assistant District Attorney Adriane Love alleged that Young Thug, born Jeffery Williams, and his record label Young Stoner Life (YSL) functioned as a criminal organization involved in acts ranging from drug trafficking to violent crime. The trial drew attention not only for its legal implications but for its cultural impact on African-American artists and their freedom of expression

At the heart of the controversy is the use of rap lyrics as evidence in the courtroom. Prosecutors cite Young Thug's lyrics as proof of alleged gang activity, but critics argue this tactic criminalizes Black artistry. Rap, deeply rooted in African-American history, has long served as a vehicle for storytelling, self-expression, and protest. Activists, including prominent civil rights groups, contend that the trial sets a dangerous precedent that disproportionately impacts Black musicians.

"Rap is art, not a confession," said Professor Jamal Reed, a cultural historian. "When we allow prosecutors to weaponize lyrics, we're not only stifling creativity but perpetuating stereotypes that paint Black men as inherently dangerous."



Arvin Temkar via Atlanta Journal of Constitution

Young Thug's case isn't isolated. Across the country, hip-hop artists have faced legal scrutiny for their lyrics, fueling concerns about systemic bias and the unequal application of justice. Advocates argue that other genres, such as country or rock, rarely see their lyrics treated as evidence of criminality.

For Black History Month, the YSL RICO trial serves as a sobering reminder of the ongoing struggles African-American entertainers face in balancing artistic freedom with societal perceptions and stereotypes. The case galvanized a movement among artists, legal experts, and fans to advocate for protections against the misuse of creative expression in courtrooms.

As Young Thug was awarded his freedom ultimately dodging prison time instead for a lengthy period of probation, his trial is emblematic of a broader fight for equity—not only in the justice system but in the cultural acknowledgment of Black artistry as a legitimate and protected form of expression and free speech.

BLACK WOMEN IN LAW AND JUSTICE: BREAKING BARRIERS, LEADING CHANGE

BREANNA MAGEE

Black Women Lawyer Representation Matters!

Black women make up less than 5% of all lawyers in the U.S., yet our impact on justice and civil rights is immeasurable. From battling discrimination and bias in the legal profession to overcoming systemic barriers and breaking through glass ceilings, our journey has been one of resilience, advocacy, and groundbreaking achievements. This article explores the challenges Black women in law continue to face, the trailblazers who paved the way, and the ongoing fight for equity in the legal field.

The Pioneers: Trailblazing Black Women in Law

Long before many believed women – let alone Black women – had a place in the legal field, Charlotte E. Ray shattered barriers. As the first Black woman admitted to the American Bar, she not only made history but used her legal skills to fight for justice. In the 19th century, she boldly represented Martha Gadley in securing a divorce from an abusive husband – at a time when few dared to challenge such cases. Her legacy is one of quiet rebellion, legal brilliance, and an unyielding commitment to justice.



Biography.com

Jane Bolin

Following in the footsteps of trailblazers like Charlotte E. Ray, Jane Bolin continued the fight for representation and justice in the legal field. A Yale Law School graduate and New York native, Bolin made history as the first African American female judge in the U.S., using her position on the Family Court bench to advocate for children and families. Even before donning judicial robes, she shattered barriers as the first Black woman to serve as an assistant corporate counsel for New York City. Bolin wasn't just a pioneer – she was a force, proving that Black women belonged in the highest ranks of the legal profession.



Oxygen.com

Constance Baker Motley

Among the many pioneers whose names deserve greater recognition is Constance Baker Motley. As the first African American woman to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court and the first to serve as a federal judge, Motley was a legal powerhouse. Her work was instrumental in dismantling segregation, shaping the civil rights landscape through her sharp legal mind and fearless advocacy.

BLACK WOMEN IN LAW AND JUSTICE: BREAKING BARRIERS, LEADING CHANGE

BREANNA MAGEE

The Modern Leaders: Black Women in the Legal Field Today



Vogue.com

Ketanji Brown Jackson

Ketanji Brown Jackson made history as the first Black woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, marking a significant step toward a more representative judiciary. Prior to her confirmation, the Court had been overwhelmingly composed of white male justices, with 109 preceding her appointment. Jackson's legal career spans judicial clerkships, high-profile law firms, and public service, including her tenure as a federal judge and her work with the U.S. Sentencing Commission. Her extensive background in both defense and sentencing policy brings a vital and long-overdue perspective to the nation's highest court.



Wilber & Haberkorn

Kristen Clarke

Kristen Clarke became the first Black woman to lead the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, serving as Assistant Attorney General from 2021 to 2025. A dedicated civil rights attorney, Clarke built her career advocating for racial justice and equality, beginning at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and later leading the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Her leadership in the DOJ further solidified her role as a champion for voting rights, police accountability, and anti-discrimination efforts, ensuring that civil rights enforcement remained a national priority.



Summers

Kamala Harris

Kamala Harris made history on multiple fronts, becoming the first Black woman, first South Asian American, and highest-ranking woman ever to hold the office of Vice President of the United States. During her tenure from 2021 to 2025, she played a central role in advancing policies on key social and economic issues, including voting rights, reproductive freedom, and economic equity. Her advocacy extended beyond policy, as she used her platform to amplify issues affecting underrepresented communities. In 2024, she became the Democratic nominee for President, further cementing her place in history as a trailblazer in American politics.

BLACK WOMEN IN LAW AND JUSTICE: BREAKING BARRIERS, LEADING CHANGE

BREANNA MAGEE

The Challenges: Barriers That Still Exist

Despite our growing presence in law schools, Black women continue to face systemic barriers that extend far beyond the classroom. In 2024 alone, over 2,000 Black women entered law school, yet our representation in the legal profession remains disproportionately low. We account for less than two percent of federal judges and hold only a fraction of leadership roles in law firms and corporate legal departments. The pay gap further deepens these disparities – Black women earn less than our white male counterparts across every sector of the legal field, even when education and experience are equal. Many also encounter exclusion from critical career-advancing networks, facing bias in mentorship, assignments, and promotions.

Navigating a profession where our competence is often questioned before it is acknowledged, Black women lawyers must work twice as hard to receive the same recognition as our peers – a burden often described as an “invisible tax.” From being overlooked for promotions to facing heightened scrutiny in courtrooms and boardrooms, we are forced to prove our worth in spaces never designed with us in mind. Yet, we persist – breaking barriers, reshaping legal discourse, and advocating for justice in ways that leave an undeniable mark on the profession.

Keep the Momentum Going!

From Charlotte E. Ray and Constance Baker Motley to Ketanji Brown Jackson and Kristen Clarke, Black women in law have continuously defined expectations, reshaping the legal landscape with unwavering determination. Our journeys prove that breaking barriers is not just about being the first – it’s about ensuring there are many to follow. Though challenges persist, every argument made, every case won, and every seat claimed at the table strengthens the foundation for those who come next. To the Black women attorneys of today and tomorrow – your work is transformative, your voice is necessary, and your resilience is history in the making. Keep advocating, keep excelling, and never let the weight of the struggle silence the power of your presence.

ASK MOSES IS BACK!



Stressed about law school? Confused about classes, cold calls, or clerkships? **ASK MOSES** is here to help! 🏛️✨

This anonymous advice column is making its **grand return**, giving 1Ls, 2Ls, 3Ls, and 4Ls a **safe space** to ask any law school-related questions—no judgment, just real advice. Whether it's about outlining, networking, professors, or surviving finals, MOSES has your back!

👁️📧 **How to Submit?** Stay tuned! Submission details will be dropping **soon** via Instagram. Keep an eye out so you don't miss your chance to get the answers you need!

👁️📧 Have a burning question? **Moses is waiting...** 🗨️💬

#AskMoses #LawSchoolSurvival #NoJudgmentJustAdvice

SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY LAW CENTER

Office of Career Services

March Events

11	Information Session: Air Force & Army JAG Corps Location: Room 129
12	Lunch & Learn: Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office Location: 130
19	Coffee Cart/Lunch & Learn: White & Case SULC Atrium/Room 129
26	Lunch & Learn: Office of the State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle Location: 129
27	LinkedIn Learning Workshop Virtual Experience

All events will be held from 12pm - 1pm
unless otherwise stated

Follow us on social media!

📷 @sulc_career_services

📘 in SULC Office of Career Services



CELEBRATING FEBRUARY *Lawyer* LEADERS

#SULCLawyerLeaders



🎉 CONGRATULATIONS TO SULC'S BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (BLSA) MOCK TRIAL TEAM! 🎉

The team has been crowned the SUPREME Southwest Region of NBSA (SWBLSA) Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition Regional Champions! 🏆👏

Pictured: Jada Haynes, William Gaspard Jr., Alexis Blanton, and Aaron Manzy.

Well done, team! Your hard work and dedication continue to make SULC proud! 💙👏

SULC LAWYER LEADERS TAKE ON THE ABA JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP PROGRAM! 🌟👏

Congratulations to Rousseau Chrisostome, Breanna Magee, Nakia Abdul, and Montaz McCray for being chosen to represent Southern University Law Center at the American Bar Association's Judicial Clerkship Program!

Your dedication and hard work continue to make SULC proud! 🍷👏



SULC'S SBA LEADERS REPRESENT AT THE ABA MIDYEAR MEETING! 🌟👏

SULC's Student Bar Association (SBA) made their mark at the American Bar Association's Midyear Meeting in Phoenix, AZ!

👏 Representing SULC with excellence:
 🌟 Daelynn Flagg – ABA Representative
 🌟 Jeremee Henry – ABA Law Student Division Chair
 🌟 Victoria Grant – SBA Vice President
 These leaders are shaping the future of law—one meeting at a time! 🍷👏



🌟 CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE! 🌟

SULC's very own Kandice Asbury has been recognized as the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP) Westin Scholar Award Honoree! 🏆👏

Her dedication to privacy law and data protection sets a shining example for future legal professionals. Congratulations, Kandice! 🍷👏

📷 Pictured: Kandice Asbury

🌟 SULC SHINES AT TULANE'S BASKETBALL NEGOTIATION COMPETITION! 🌟

SULC students Christopher Smith, Shina Hall, and Ellis-Wolv Salahuddin competed against top law schools at Tulane Law's Professional Basketball Negotiation Competition, securing the highest-valued contract in Round 2! 🏆👏

They also networked one-on-one with NBA executives, agents, and financial advisors, gaining key industry insights.

Way to go, team! 🍷👏



🎉 GOT BIG NEWS? LET'S CELEBRATE YOU! 🎉

Made an accomplishment worth sharing? Want to see your name in next month's Public Defender Newspaper? 📰👏

👏 Reach out to a staff writer for details and keep an eye out for submission info! Until then, keep striving, Lawyer Leaders—we're ready to spotlight your success! 🍷👏

