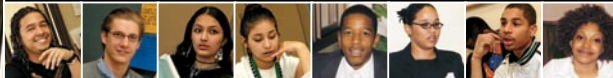


EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW



# Marshall-Brennan CONSTITUTIONAL LITERACY PROJECT



GREETINGS FROM DEAN GROSSMAN, Dean

American University Washington College of Law (WCL) has a longstanding tradition of encouraging legal education for those members of society whose rights have been ignored. WCL was founded more than a century ago by two women who believed that knowledge of the law was essential to achieving equality before the law. This belief continues to drive the mission of WCL to this day and is demonstrated through our community's numerous initiatives, including the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project.

The Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project, named after the late United States Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan, sends law students into the Washington, D.C. area to teach constitutional rights to high school students. The program has expanded to include over 50 fellows in more than a dozen D.C. area schools. Its success is a tribute to Justices Marshall and Brennan, to our



institution's founding mothers, and to WCL's ongoing mission of encouraging legal education as a means to achieving equality before the law for all members of society.

GREETINGS FROM JAMIN RASKIN, Director

Take 50 gifted law students passionate about democracy and the Constitution. Send them in to teach hundreds of public high school students on the nervous threshold of adulthood and — we hope — democratic participation.

Mix in the hopes of the families, the problems of the schools, the guiding wisdom of Thurgood Marshall and William Brennan, the exuberance of Mary Beth Tinker, the gracious support of Mrs. Thurgood Marshall, the generosity of foundations and law firms and alumni, and lots of good old-fashioned American competition, culture and community. There's power and magic in the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project. It awakens all of us involved to what America is really about and to what it still can become.

We hope that you will join us on this journey of constitutional discovery and moral inquiry.



The Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project is generously supported by gifts from many alumni and friends, by the Washington College of Law, and by the following:

- Freddie Mac Foundation
- Hatchett Foundation
- Herb Block Foundation
- Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
- William H. Karchmer Fund

Additional donations may be made payable to the Washington College of Law to benefit the Marshall-Brennan Project and should be sent to:

Office of Development  
American University  
Washington College of Law  
4801 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20016

THURGOOD MARSHALL



WILLIAM BRENNAN



“THROUGH EDUCATION OF OUR FUTURE LEADERS, ESPECIALLY IN THE FIELD OF LAW, WE CAN DO SO MUCH TO PROMOTE RACIAL JUSTICE AND ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF CIVIL RIGHTS, LIBERTY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY. I’D LIKE TO COMMEND THE STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE AND THANK YOU FOR CARRYING ON WITH THE LEGACY OF THURGOOD MARSHALL AND BILL BRENNAN.”

CECILIA MARSHALL



*Cecilia Marshall (at right), widow of Justice Thurgood Marshall, at a recent Marshall-Brennan Project celebration with Mary Beth Tinker, plaintiff in *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* (1969).*

The Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project was founded in 1999 by Professor Jamin Raskin who has served as director of the program since its inception. The vision for the program is to empower high school students to be responsible citizens and lifelong participants in the democratic process by teaching them about their constitutional rights and responsibilities through the Supreme Court cases that affect students directly.

The Project was named for the late U.S. Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and William J. Brennan, Jr. and was founded with the enthusiastic support of their widows, Mrs. Cissy Marshall and Mrs. Mary Brennan (1916-2000). Justices Marshall and Brennan were chosen because of their commitment to education as the touchstone of both effective democratic citizenship and personal success in our society.

The Project keeps alive in the 21st Century the passionate vision of two of the 20th Century’s great Supreme Court justices. From his leadership of the fight for school desegregation through his tenure on the Supreme Court, Justice Marshall never stopped believing that access to education was the great hope for social progress. Justice Brennan spoke often of the need to bring the Bill of Rights to life for generations of students, noting that constitutional guarantees are “tissue-paper bastions if they fail to transcend the printed page.”

Since its creation, the Project has sent talented and dedicated second-year and third-year law students to teach courses in constitutional law in public and public charter high schools in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery County, Maryland.

The Marshall-Brennan Fellows make a year-long commitment to teach from three to five days a week. They function as full-fledged teachers: inspiring and counseling students, planning lessons, grading papers and meeting with parents.

The program began with about twenty Fellows teaching in eight schools. It has grown to sixty Fellows teaching nineteen classes in fourteen schools. For several years, six or eight students from Howard University Law School have been invited to join the more than fifty students from American University Washington College of Law.

*“[Students do not] shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”*

JUSTICE ABE FORTAS, *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* (1969)



"WHEN ANYONE ASKS ME ABOUT MY LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, I EXPLAIN THAT THE BEST LAW SCHOOL FEELING, BY FAR, IS WALKING INTO A CLASSROOM FILLED WITH TEENAGERS AND BEING ABLE TO TEACH THEM ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS."

ZAHIDA VIRANI

MARSHALL-BRENNAN FELLOW 2006-2007

"THE MOST ENCOURAGING AND SATISFYING ASPECT OF TEACHING IS HOW THE STUDENTS HAVE CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE INFORMATION THEY HAVE LEARNED, WHICH HAS REALLY EMPOWERED THEM AND INSTILLED A SENSE OF PRIDE AND AWARENESS OF THEIR RIGHTS IN THIS SOCIETY."

MATTHEW WRIGHT

MARSHALL-BRENNAN FELLOW 2006-2007



*Washington College of Law students who are Marshall-Brennan Fellows gather outside the law school. Two Fellows teach their class in a D.C. public high school (inset).*

Marshall-Brennan Fellows usually find their participation in the program to be one of the most gratifying experiences they have ever had. They reap the reward of giving back to the community in which they are attending law school and in which they may practice law. They gain the satisfaction of helping students in a challenged school system reach their potential. They see the transformation in the enhanced ability of students to reason logically and to argue persuasively and experience the thrill of encouraging high school students to apply to college and even explore careers in law.

Marshall-Brennan Fellows find that their experience helps them after law school. Some have developed a sophisticated interest in education law through the program. Others have pursued careers in education policy. Still others have drawn on the experience to apply for teaching jobs at different levels of the education system, from law school to high school. Many find that judges seeking clerks and law firms seeking associates are intensely interested in the Marshall-Brennan Project.

Marshall-Brennan Fellows at American University Washington College of Law are selected competitively each spring after a rigorous application process which is intended to find the most talented and dedicated teachers for the program.

The law students apply in February and March by submitting a resume, a cover letter explaining their interest, and an information form designed to elicit details that will help match teachers to schools. Each student must visit a Marshall-Brennan class and guest teach for 30 minutes; then evaluations of the experience are completed by both the applicant and the Marshall-Brennan teachers whose class the applicant visited. Finally, each applicant has an interview with the associate director of the program.

The selections are made by a committee of faculty and senior staff who carefully review each application and provide feedback from each of the law school's first-year sections.

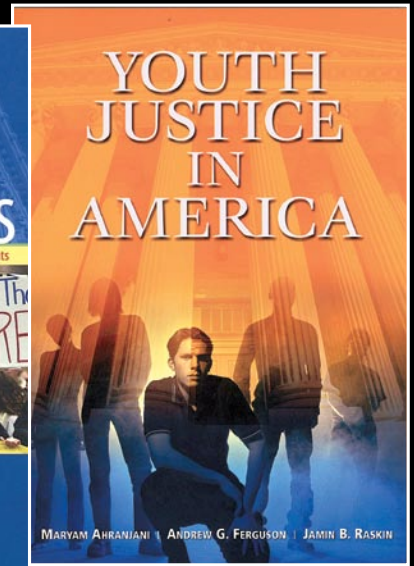
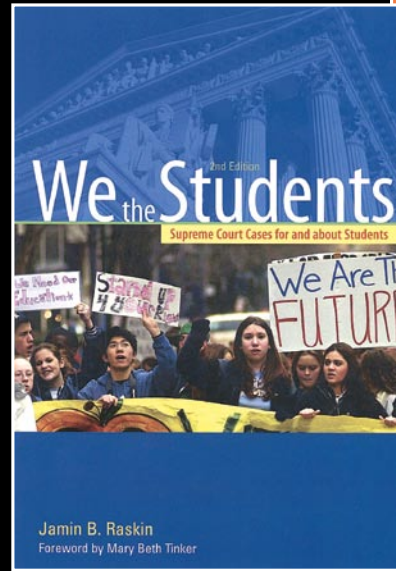
Once they are selected, the Marshall-Brennan Fellows select a partner with whom to team-teach. The Fellows are expected to understand the significant time commitment the program requires, since they must not only teach from three to five days a week but allow time for lesson planning, grading, commuting to the schools, and meeting with other teachers and with parents.

Marshall-Brennan Fellows also participate in a weekly law school seminar for credit. In the seminar they exchange ideas about teaching and explore how to make their classrooms more effective; review the curriculum that they are using with law school faculty; write journals reflecting on their experiences and research papers exploring education law topics; and learn about special education issues and other dynamics of the contemporary classroom.



“MY MARSHALL-BRENNAN TEACHING EXPERIENCE SHAPED MY CAREER PATH. AFTER MY YEAR AS A FELLOW TEACHING IN A D.C. HIGH SCHOOL, I SAW HOW MUCH OF A NEED THERE WAS FOR LAWYERS TO WORK TO IMPROVE THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN D.C. AND ELSEWHERE. THIS PROGRAM SET ME ON THE PATH TO WORK IN EDUCATION REFORM IN D.C.”

ERIC LERUM, WCL '03,  
CHIEF OF STAFF TO THE D.C.  
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION



*The two textbooks used for the Marshall-Brennan classes in D.C. high schools, one focusing on constitutional rights and responsibilities of students, one on criminal justice and young people.*

The Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project has developed two engaging curricula to offer to high school students (and one charter junior high school).

The “We the Students” curriculum promotes civic literacy by treating the public school as a crucial democratic institution distributing rights and responsibilities to students, parents and teachers. Using the book *We the Students: Supreme Court Cases for and About Students*, written by Prof. Raskin, and now in its second edition with Congressional Quarterly Press, the curriculum focuses on 50 important Supreme Court cases defining the rights and responsibilities of young people and other actors in public schools. The goal is to help students become effective citizens by teaching them their rights under the Constitution while exposing them to the way courts decide cases and the process by which law evolves. Students read edited versions of Supreme Court decisions and are exposed to how judges reason and lawyers argue.

The second curriculum, “Youth Justice,” exposes students to the criminal and juvenile justice systems and challenges them to think critically about how society deals with the problems of crime and punishment involving young people. The book, *Youth Justice in America*, also published by Congressional Quarterly Press, was written by Professor Raskin, Maryam Ahranjani and Andrew G. Ferguson. The book examines the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution (including search and seizure, self-incrimination, the right to counsel, cruel and unusual punishment, and the Supreme Court’s rulings on the death penalty for juveniles). *Youth Justice in America* combines commentary with edited material from federal and state criminal law cases.

The Marshall-Brennan Fellows engage their students in numerous other ways, acting as mentors and providing guidance about careers and college applications. The Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project has developed a curriculum that focuses on the importance of attending college and that offers practical advice about when and how to apply and how to seek financial assistance. The program has also created a voting rights curriculum that can be made to fit the specifics of an election year and that also highlights the historic and continuing struggle for full voting rights for citizens of the District of Columbia.

*“Education is the dominant factor affecting political consciousness and participation in the United States of America.”*

JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL, DISSIDENTING *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* (1973)



“I THINK I KNOW MORE ABOUT MY RIGHTS THAN EVER BEFORE, AND I NOW THINK I WANT TO STUDY LAW.”

DAVID MIKEL, 11TH GRADE

“AFTER BEING A PART OF THIS PROGRAM, IT INSPIRED ME TO IMPROVE MY CIVIC INVOLVEMENT AND HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THE GOVERNMENT. NOW I CAN'T WAIT TO VOTE. TO ME, THIS PROGRAM OPENS SO MANY DOORS FOR SUCCESS IN MY FUTURE.”

ADE ADEMISOYE, 10TH GRADE



*Professor Jamin Raskin (left to right) and Federal Judges John Facciola, Emmet Sullivan and Deborah Robinson judging the Marshall-Brennan Project's Karchmer Moot Court final at the federal courthouse in D.C.*

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Beyond the classroom and individual mentoring, the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project provides numerous opportunities for high school students to gain academic enrichment.

All of the students we teach are expected to participate in a moot court competition in the fall or spring, in which individuals make a 12-minute appellate argument using a hypothetical problem. The students train for weeks to prepare for this exciting challenge which, like a real appellate argument, focuses on applying the law to a set of facts. The students learn to think on their feet to answer judges' questions, develop the ability to integrate facts and legal principles, and improve their speaking skills and demeanor. The winners from each Marshall-Brennan class compete in a day-long final round, often held at the federal courthouse in the District of Columbia. At the courthouse, the final four competitors are judged by a panel that often includes U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan, a great supporter of the Project, and other sitting federal

judges. Prizes are awarded to the forty or more students who compete at the courthouse.

Approximately 100 students each school year in Marshall-Brennan classes have the chance to see an argument in the U.S. Supreme Court. These opportunities are made available to the Marshall-Brennan program by the staff of the Court. The students are briefed about the case by their Marshall-Brennan teachers, get to sit through the hour-long argument, and then have a chance to explore the great hall and ground floor of the ornate building.

Students in Marshall-Brennan classes also compete in poetry, essay, arts and t-shirt design competitions in the spring, all focused on issues of student rights and responsibilities. As part of the competition, they are regularly introduced to Mary Beth Tinker who as a thirteen-year-old in 1965 was suspended from school in Des Moines, Iowa, for wearing a black armband to protest the Vietnam War. Her lawsuit

challenging her suspension led to the Supreme Court's landmark decision in 1969 recognizing that students retain constitutional rights in school. Mary Beth Tinker has been an avid supporter of the Marshall-Brennan project and a regular visitor to our events and to our classes. She continues to work for the rights of students throughout the country. Each year, the Marshall-Brennan Project honors one or more deserving individuals with the Mary Beth Tinker Award for "unswerving devotion to the rule of law and the rights of America's students."

**For more information, contact:**

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