



Advancing Justice, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., Lawyers' Committee, and National Immigration Law Center Announce 2017 FirstGEN Fellows Summer Class

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 15, 2017-- Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice | AAJC), the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), and the Washington, D.C., office of the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) are excited to announce the 2017 FirstGEN Fellows summer class: Leslie Diaz, Veronica Fernandez- Diaz, Deborah Johnson, Nahlee Lin, America Morales, Rhajaa Wright. We congratulate the 2017 FirstGEN Fellows cohort.



FirstGEN Fellows is a 10-week summer program for undergraduate students interested in social justice careers who are the first in their immediate families to attend an institution of higher education. Fellows gain hands-on experience working on civil rights matters as full-time policy and advocacy interns in Washington, D.C., while also participating in a parallel training program. FirstGEN Fellows creates a greater community of advocates by linking emerging leaders with existing ones and creating a FirstGEN Fellows alumni network. Each fellow receives a \$1,000 stipend.



Leslie Diaz is majoring in History and minoring in Labor and Workplace Studies at UCLA. Her experience as a working class and first generation Mexican-American influenced her passion for social justice and public interest with a concentration on immigration, labor, and human rights. Currently, Leslie is a Project Director for Proyecto where she provides support to Los Angeles' day laborers worker centers. In addition, she was a site leader for Alternative Breaks where she created and led a community engagement trip to McAllen, Texas to focus on immigration. After graduation, she will be applying to law school to specialize in public interest. Leslie will be placed with the Lawyers' Committee's Public Policy Project.



Veronica Fernandez-Diaz is originally from Mexico, but arrived in Colorado when she was six years old. She is currently a student at Colorado College in Colorado Springs majoring in Sociology. Throughout high school and college, Veronica has worked with several nonprofits doing grant making, inclusion, and diversity work. She is currently working on campus in the Office of Admissions as an Outreach and Access Intern, in the Bridge Scholars Program as a mentor, and in the Sociology Department as a research assistant. After working with the CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project through a course called Globalization and Immigration on the US/Mexico Border, Veronica wanted to make a shift and focus on immigration. Veronica will be placed with CLINIC and is excited to contribute to their mission while learning more and more about the work being done around immigration.



Deborah Johnson is a junior at the Oberlin College, majoring in Politics with a concentration in Peace and Conflict Studies and International Studies and a minor in Africana Studies. She was born in Madras, India and grew up in Chicago, IL. She is currently the co-creator of Oberlin Bystanders Initiative, a program that pays students to be active bystanders at parties to prevent sexual misconduct and is a PRSM (Peer Responses to Sexual Misconduct) educator where she creates and facilitates programs regarding sexual assault and healthy relationships. She is the co-president of OSLAM (Oberlin Slam Poetry) and has competed nationally and internationally. She is a student senator and has worked with Oberlin administration for 2.5

years now to implement programs to benefit students. Deborah works in the Oberlin Public School System as a Ninde (a mentoring program honored by Michelle Obama) tutor for high schoolers. She was matched with Oberlin through the Posse Scholarship. Previously she has created and facilitated Colorism workshops in India for middle school girls to work against toxic beauty norms. Posse awards scholarships to students based on academic and leadership potential. Deborah plans to pursue a career in Education Policy with a specific focus on Urban Education. Deborah will be placed with the Lawyers' Committee's Educational Opportunities Project.



Nahlee Lin is a fourth-year, graduating senior at Pomona College, majoring in Sociology with interests in gender and immigration, and studying on the pre-health track. She identifies as a first-generation college student and a queer, second-generation Taiwanese-American woman. With the Asian American Resource Center at Pomona, she is actively involved in efforts to address issues impacting underserved Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, in solidarity with other communities of color and Indigenous peoples. She helps to coordinate the Saturday Tongan Education Program (STEP), which aims to address barriers to higher education for Pacific Islanders and provide academic support to local Tongan-American youth. Through a student-run organization called Health Bridges, she assists low-income immigrant patients in

accessing health insurance and linguistically and culturally competent care. Nahlee is committed to working toward gender and racial justice, health equity, and a more just future for marginalized communities. After her summer with the FirstGEN Fellows program, she will be working with the Schuler Scholar Program, a college access organization based in the Chicago area. Nahlee will be placed with Asian Americans Advancing Justice|AAJC.



America Morales is a rising senior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut studying Psychology, History and International Relations. Her passion for social justice is centered around immigrant rights and education equity. She first became interested in law and public policy through her work with CONECT (Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut) in passing the in-state tuition bill for undocumented students in Connecticut. She also contributed to the driver's licenses bill for undocumented immigrants and participated in its public testimony. At Wesleyan, she tutors local Middletown students and is involved with WesInterpreters—an organization providing translations to organizations such as CT Legal Services and New Horizons. Currently, she is studying Human Rights with the International

Honors Program in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile. Her comparative research focuses on the different types of government assistance programs available to low income families. After Wesleyan, she hopes to attend law school and continue her advocacy for immigrant rights. America will be placed with NILC.



At the age of three, **Rhajaa Wright** and her three cousins were walking around her grandma's daycare chanting, "say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud". Of course, she didn't know the significance of these words, let alone, the purpose of daycare at the time, but, she likes to think that her grandma knew what she was doing. After her mother joined the Navy, Rhajaa and her family relocated to sunny San Diego, California. Rhajaa's supportive family pushed her to excel in school, and she would soon become one the first people in her family to attend a four-year institution. From her K-12 classroom experiences to her studies of public policy, education, and African-American studies at Duke University, Rhajaa continuously saw the disheartening way that school systems shut the doors of

academic opportunities on the students that needed the support the most. She vouched to incorporate her testimony as a low-income student of color to aid the fight for equal access and opportunities in education for all students. From her work as a tutor, to helping first-year student's transition into college life, all the way to her dedication within the ACLU National Prison Project as an intern, Rhajaa endlessly seeks ways to ensure equal opportunities to education and resources

for all, with a specific focus on young males of color. However, when she is not doing this intensive, yet gratifying advocacy, she can be found dancing, reading, or giving relationship advice. She is excited to be surrounded in a network of other first-generation students and professionals that understand the trials and tribulations of being a first-generation student, in addition to the hope and excitement that accompanies the identity. Rhajaa will be placed with the Lawyers' Committee's Educational Opportunities Project.

AAJC, CLINIC, the Lawyers' Committee, and NILC welcome the 2017 class of FirstGEN Fellows.

You may learn more about FirstGEN Fellows by going to facebook.com/FirstGENFellows and following @FirstGENFellows on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC: *Founded in 1991, Advancing Justice | AAJC works to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans, and build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. Advancing Justice | AAJC is one of the nation's leading experts on issues of importance to the Asian American community including: affirmative action, anti-Asian violence prevention/race relations, census, immigrant rights, immigration, language access, television diversity and voting rights. Advancing Justice | AAJC advances its goals through the core strategies of public policy advocacy, litigation, community education and outreach, and public communications. For more information about Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, visit www.advancingjustice-aaajc.org, follow us on Twitter @AAAJ_AAJC and like us on facebook.com/advancingjusticeaaajc.*

About the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.: *Embracing the Gospel value of welcoming the stranger, CLINIC promotes the dignity and protects the rights of immigrants in partnership with a dedicated network of Catholic and community legal immigration programs. For more information about the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., visit www.cliniclegal.org, and follow on Twitter [@ClinicLegal](#).*

About the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law: *The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. The principal mission of the Lawyers' Committee is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice under law, particularly in the areas of fair housing and community development; employment; voting; education and environmental justice. For more information about the Lawyers' Committee, visit www.lawyerscommittee.org, follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @LawyersComm and like us on facebook.com/lawyerscommittee.*

About the National Immigration Law Center: *Founded in 1979, the National Immigration Law Center envisions a society in which all people -- regardless of race, gender, income level, or immigration status -- have the opportunity to live freely, work safely, and thrive in society. The organization's advocates and attorneys use a variety of tools, including policy analysis, litigation, education and advocacy, to achieve this vision. For more information about the National Immigration Law Center, visit www.nilc.org, and follow on Twitter [@NILC.org](#).*

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CLINIC Media Inquiries Contact: To coordinate interview opportunities with CLINIC, please contact Maura Moser, 301-565-4830 or mmoser@cliniclegal.org.

Lawyers' Committee Media inquiries Contact: To coordinate interview opportunities with the Lawyers' Committee, please contact Jessica Brady, 202-662-8317 or jbrady@lawyerscommittee.org

NILC Media Inquiries Contact: To coordinate interview opportunities with NILC, please contact Adela de la Torre, 213-674-2832 or 213-400-7822 or delatorre@nilc.org.

Non-media inquiries: If you have questions regarding the FirstGEN Fellowship program or are interested in serving as a partnering organization, guest speaker, or would like to financially support this program please contact Natasha Quiroga at 202-662-8350 or nquiroga@lawyerscommittee.org.

