



From the Office of the American Secretary

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American Rhodes Scholars-elect for 2021

(Subject to ratification by the Rhodes Trustees after acceptance by one of the colleges of Oxford University)

DISTRICT 1

Massachusetts

Shera S. Avi-Yonah, Lincoln, is a senior at Harvard College where she concentrates in History. She is Managing Editor of the Harvard Crimson, and has interned for the American Prospect, CBS News, the Sunday Times Magazine (London), as well as for the U.S. Senate Banking Committee. As a reporter, she broke national stories on sexual harassment and workplace abuse, and as an editor she oversaw important national stories on sexual harassment and racism. Her academic work in history has included work on the origins of limits on press freedom, work she hopes to continue in England while comparing U.S. and U.K. libel law. At Oxford, Shera plans to do the M.St. in History.

Massachusetts

Jeremy N. Thomas, Missouri City, Texas, is a senior at Amherst College, where he is completing double majors in English and Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought. Jeremy serves as student body president of the Association of Amherst Students and launched the campus's first student-run Office of Student Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He has also held numerous leadership roles in the Amherst College Black Student Union. His senior honors thesis analyzes limits on the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause, and he has published academic research on death row exonerations. At Oxford, Jeremy plans to pursue both an M.Sc. in Criminal Justice and Criminology and an M.Sc. in Comparative Social Policy.

DISTRICT 2

Connecticut

Asma Rahimyar, Trumbull, is a senior at Southern Connecticut State University, where she majors in Politics and International Studies while pursuing a second B.A. in Philosophy and a minor in English. A Truman Scholar, she has been a leader in student government and multicultural activities and is President of the Muslim Student Association. Asma also participated in a United Nations Conference on Cultural Diplomacy. Her parents are Afghan refugees, and she hopes to help in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. She is the first Rhodes Scholar and we believe first Rhodes applicant from Southern Connecticut State University. At Oxford, Asma plans to do master's degrees in Global Governance and Diplomacy and in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.

New Jersey

Lillian N. Usadi, Basking Ridge, is a senior at the United States Naval Academy, where she is majoring in Electrical Engineering. Lillian is an accomplished violinist and serves as concertmaster for the U.S. Naval Academy Symphony Orchestra. Her passion for music is also reflected in her academic interests in acoustic applications to energy, the environment, and war and her independent research on ways to manipulate microbots using sound. Lillian is President of the Jewish Midshipmen Club. At Oxford, Lillian will pursue an M.Sc. in Energy Systems and an M.Sc. in Nature, Society and Environmental Governance.

DISTRICT 3

New York - South

Danielle N. Grey-Stewart, Westbury, is a senior at MIT majoring in Materials Science and Engineering. A materials scientist who is passionate about social justice, Danielle has extensive independent research experience and is a student leader at MIT's Center for Public Service. She is also the current chair of the Undergraduate Association Committee on COVID-19 and serves on the Student Advisory Group for Engineering. She plans a career that will “responsibly use the elegance of engineering to address the immense inequity within our society” and integrate historically ignored perspectives into science policy. At Oxford, Danielle plans to pursue an M.Phil. in Nature, Society, and Environmental Governance.

New York - South

Brian Reyes, Bronx, is a Yale College senior pursuing a B.A. in History. He combined a perfect and deep academic record with an extraordinary commitment to bringing people together, including connections among Latino and Black communities. Brian served as President of the Yale Dominican Student Association, led an initiative to guide low-income students through the U.S. naturalization process, and was a lead organizer to ensure that undocumented students in Connecticut could receive scholarships. He has also studied at a university in the Dominican Republic and was a first-year counselor at Yale. Brian plans to do the M.Phil. in Comparative Social Policy at Oxford.

DISTRICT 4

Pennsylvania

Mackenzie C. Fierceton, Philadelphia, received her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania in 2020 and is currently completing a Master's in Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania. Mackenzie spent her youth in the foster care system and wrote her capstone thesis for the University of Pennsylvania's Civic Scholars Program on the foster-to-prison pipeline. In addition to completing various clinical and policy research experiences focused on child welfare and youth justice issues, Mackenzie is a volunteer birthing doula. She plans a career dedicated to pioneering policy that supports vulnerable youth. Mackenzie will pursue a D.Phil. in Social Policy at Oxford.

Pennsylvania

Victoria Puglia, Wassenaar, Netherlands, is a senior at Lafayette College where she majors in International Affairs. Born in Spain, she has also studied in Peru, Uganda, India and Senegal, and worked in Sri Lanka. Her senior independent study project is on malnutrition in Sub-Saharan African refugee settlements. Victoria has won numerous academic prizes at Lafayette across several disciplines, has a perfect academic record, and is President of the Lafayette International Students' Association. She is passionate about equitable development, humanitarian aid and food security. At Oxford, Victoria will do the M.Sc. in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies and the M.Sc. in Global Governance and Diplomacy.

DISTRICT 5

Maryland/DC

Nicolas J.W. Fishman, Washington, D.C., is a senior at Stanford University completing majors in Computer Science and Sociology. Nic is passionate about developing technologies that will expand autonomy. He has conducted independent research at Harvard, Stanford, Northwestern, and the National Human Genome Research Institute as well as Data for Progress. Nic is active in get out to vote work around the American Elections and the Young Democratic Socialists of America. At Oxford, Nic will pursue an M.Sc. in Statistical Science and an M.Sc. in History of Science, Medicine, and Technology.

Maryland/DC

Samuel E. Patterson, Marietta, Georgia, is a senior at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he will receive a B.S. in Mathematics, a B.S. in Statistics and a B.A. in Economics. He has done summer research in economics and education at Harvard and in business at the University of Chicago. An accomplished musician, Sam is the Music Director of a community organization and plays upright and electric jazz bass, and volunteered to teach the basics of computer programming to middle school students. His deep work in economics through an equity lens has focused on the importance of transportation infrastructure to improve economic opportunity. Sam intends to do the M.Sc. In Nature, Society and Environmental Governance at Oxford.

DISTRICT 6

Georgia

Phaidra S. Buchanan, Atlanta, is a senior at the University of Georgia, where she is pursuing a B.S. in Education. Phaidra helped examine the university's role in the institution of slavery and studied the lived experiences of enslaved people connected to the university as a member of the History of Slavery at UGA research team. She also volunteers with an organization working to ensure equal access to higher education for students of immigrant families. Phaidra plans a career as a teacher "who fosters criticality, compassion, and joy," and as an advocate for policies that empower students and communities. At Oxford, Phaidra plans to pursue an M.Sc. in Comparative and International Education.

North Carolina

Savarni Sanka, Cary, is a senior at Wake Forest University where she majors in Politics and International Affairs and in Spanish, with a minor in Middle East and South Asia Studies. She has a perfect academic record and is a leader of many student organizations including the Hindu Students Association and the Student Association for the Advancement of Refugees. She has also studied or done volunteer work in Spain, Morocco, and Nicaragua. She is passionate about improving the welfare of migrants and marginalized people everywhere. At Oxford, she plans to do the M.Sc. in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies and the Master of Public Policy.

DISTRICT 7

Florida

Santiago T. Potes, Miami, graduated from Columbia University in May with a B.A. in East Asian Studies and Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Born in Cali, Colombia, he has active DACA status. Santiago has been a teaching or research assistant for leading professors in physics, philosophy, social psychology and neuroscience, and won numerous college prizes for leadership as well as academic performance. He is widely published on legal issues relating to DACA status, was one of the DACA recipients showcased in a brief filed with the Supreme Court to preserve DACA, is an accomplished violinist, and is fluent or near fluent in nine languages including Chinese. At Oxford, Santiago plans to do the M.Phil. in Traditional East Asia.

Florida

Jackson S. Willis, St. Petersburg, received a B.A. from Yale in 2020, majoring in Humanities and Economics. While completing his B.A., Jackson took a year's leave to participate in the Peace Corps Response program in Guinea, where he worked to improve youth employment. He was executive director of the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project, the college's largest service organization, served in student government, and was a student curator and gallery guide at the Yale Center for British Art. Jackson has painted St. Petersburg landmarks as a public art muralist and enjoys long-distance running. At Oxford, Jackson will pursue an M.Sc. in Economics for Development and an M.Sc. in Global Governance and Diplomacy.

DISTRICT 8

Texas

Kendall M. Jeffreys, Keller, is a senior at Duke University, where she double majors in Environmental Science and Policy and English. Kendall is an environmental conservationist whose research focuses on understanding the impact of climate change on marine environments. She is also a writer whose novel exploring themes of sacrifice related to climate change has been accepted by the Middlebury Bread Loaf Environmental Writers Conference. A Presidential Intern and Fellow at the Rachel Carson Council, Kendall also figure skates and paints with watercolor. At Oxford, Kendall will pursue an M.Sc. in Biodiversity, Conservation and Management and an M.St. in English (1900-present).

Texas

Evan C. Walker, Rowlett, is in her final year at the U.S. Military Academy where she majors in Operations Research, with focuses in statistics and linear algebra. Her thesis analyzes the demographics of promotion and attrition among U.S. Army Field Grade Officers. She is a Regimental Commander, served as the chief liaison between survivors of sexual harassment or assault and on-campus medical professionals, and is president of an initiative to mentor minority cadets. Evan is also captain of the nationally ranked and gender integrated Army Boxing Team and last year placed second nationally in her weight class. Evan plans to do the M.Sc. in Sociology and the M.Sc. in Statistical Science at Oxford.

DISTRICT 9

Virginia

Peter J. Andringa, Vienna, received a B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he completed a double-major in Journalism and Computer Science in 2020. Peter currently works as a data visualization engineer at the Washington Post and uses his training in journalism and computer science to understand how technology changes politics, culture, and daily life. A participant in the Robertson Scholars Leadership Program at UNC Chapel Hill and Duke University, Peter also co-directed the Robertson Community Council. In addition, he served as the student representative to the UNC Faculty Council. While at Oxford, Peter intends to pursue an M.Sc. in Social Science of the Internet.

Virginia

Tyrese D. Bender, Fairfax, is in his final year at the U.S. Military Academy where he will get a B.S. in Engineering. He is Deputy Brigade Commander, the second-highest ranking cadet in the West Point chain of command. Tyrese has a 4.0 GPA and has been instrumental in drafting the first-ever Diversity Strategy designed to establish a more inclusive environment at the Academy. He also established a character training protocol for 1300 cadets around issues including race, sexual harassment and assault, mental health, political activism and COVID-19. Tyrese is also captain of the Division I track and field team and a champion triple jumper. Tyrese plans to do an M.Sc. in Sociology and an M.Sc. in Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation at Oxford.

DISTRICT 10

Ohio

Daniel N. Lesman, Dublin, is a senior at The Ohio State University, where he majors in Biomedical Science. A first-generation American, Daniel is a Goldwater Scholar who researches rare genetic disorders. Daniel also co-founded a nonprofit that provides academic tutoring to homeless and at-risk youth in Columbus. Daniel plans a career as a physician-scientist working to combat genetic diseases through direct patient care and research. At Oxford, Daniel plans to pursue an M.Sc. in Evidence-Based Social Policy Intervention and Policy Evaluation and an M.Sc. in Physiology, Anatomy, and Genetics.

Ohio

Swathi R. Srinivasan, Beachwood, is a senior at Harvard College with double concentrations in Social Studies and History of Science, with a focus on public health inequality. She is also writing a thesis for the Chemistry Department. She was an intern at the U.N. Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS in Geneva, has done extensive research and activism on the opioid epidemic, and chaired the Policy Program at the Kennedy School Institute of Politics. Swathi is also a Ghungroo choreographer. At Oxford, Swathi intends to do the M.Sc. in International Health and Tropical Medicine and the M.Sc. in Comparative Social Policy.

DISTRICT 11

Michigan

Amytess F. M. Girgis, Grand Rapids, is a senior at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, where she majors in Political Science. Her honors thesis focuses on mutual aid groups in Detroit during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to extensive experience in progressive political campaigns and union organizing, Amytess is president of the Michigan Stamps Scholars Society. Amytess plans a career “amplifying the experiences of the marginalized to rectify past harms.” At Oxford, Amytess will pursue a B.A. in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics.

Wisconsin

Nkaziewoh N. Nchinda-Pungong, Oak Creek, is a senior at Harvard College where he concentrates in Biomedical Engineering with a minor in Sociology. He is working with a team to design a smartphone-based hemoglobin sensor for point-of-care anemia diagnosis, and is Editor-in-Chief of Harvard Brevia, the goal of which is to make scientific research more accessible to students and the general public. In addition to extensive research in microbiology, he has been active in Engineers Without Borders, is co-President of the Harvard Community of Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics, and volunteered extensively in a homeless shelter. The son of Cameroonian immigrants, Nkazi’s focus at Oxford will be to merge his interests in bioengineering and global health in order to make healthcare more scalable and affordable. At Oxford, Nkazi plans to do an M.Sc. by Research in Engineering Science.

DISTRICT 12

Kansas

Vijayasundaram Ramasamy, Overland Park, graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 2018 with a major in Public Health Studies. Since graduation, Vijay was for one year a Special Assistant in the Baltimore City Health Department and is currently Policy and Budget Advisor in the Office of Kansas Governor Laura Kelly, with responsibilities for the State's COVID-19 re-opening plan. While at Johns Hopkins he was an active volunteer in healthcare and social services in underserved neighborhoods. He was also co-President of the University Hindu Students Council, worked as a research and teaching assistant in public health, and has been very active in political campaigns. At Oxford, Vijay intends to do the M.Sc. in Comparative Social Policy and the Master of Public Policy.

Missouri

Jamal T. Burns, St. Louis, is a senior at Duke University, where he majors in History. A Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, his research engages colonial influences on interpretations of the masculinity of Black boys in school settings. Jamal is a leading promoter of a new debate paradigm known as performance debate; he organized a speech and debate tournament that brings high school debaters from across the country to Duke. Jamal also founded and ran a campus organization for first-generation college students. At Oxford, Jamal will pursue an M.Sc. in Social Anthropology and an M.Sc. in Education.

DISTRICT 13

Colorado

Aryemis C. Brown, Colorado Springs, is in his final year at the U.S. Air Force Academy where he majors in Legal Studies and Humanities, and minors in Religion Studies and Philosophy. Arye's research interests are in space and cyberspace law, technology, policy, policy and philosophy. Arye commanded the Air Force Cadet Wing as commander of troops, serving as the highest-ranking cadet at the Academy, responsible for the welfare of 4,400 personnel. His overall order of merit, combining athletic, military and academic factors is 2 of 1059. He was named a Truman Scholar this year from Maryland, where he graduated from high school. Arye will do the M.Sc. in Global Governance and Diplomacy and the Master of Public Policy at Oxford.

South Dakota

Hattie J. Seten, Sioux Falls, is a senior at South Dakota State University, where she is a triple major in Political Science, Global Studies, and Spanish. She serves as student body president and has steered the university's student-led coronavirus task force during the pandemic. Hattie aspires to a career as a Foreign Service Officer serving in Latin America and the Middle East. She has received multiple fellowships from the U.S. Department of State to pursue Arabic language studies. She recently interned at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City where she worked on visa application issues. At Oxford, Hattie plans to pursue an M.Sc. in Global Governance and Diplomacy as well as an M.Sc. in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.

DISTRICT 14

Alaska

Wilfried J.K. Zibell, Noorvik, is a senior at Harvard College where they major in Comparative Literature and Near Eastern Languages and Civilization. Wilfried comes from an Inuit (Noorvik) subsistence village in the Alaskan arctic, and through education policymaking, language preservation and labor activism, has focused on the effects of colonialism. This past summer, he worked with his tribal association on its initial COVID-19 outbreak. His senior thesis compares comparative aspects of imperialism in Yiddish, in which he has done archival research, and Inupiat poetry. Wilfried served for two years on the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development. At Oxford, Wilfried will do the M.Phil. in Economic and Social History.

Oregon

Avital Z. Balwit, Portland, is a senior at the University of Virginia, where she is a double major in Politics and Social Thought and Cognitive Science. Her senior thesis analyzes the regulatory challenges posed by large technology companies in the areas of taxation, antitrust, privacy, and attention. She is an accomplished writer who has published several short stories and poems and she also practices karate. Avital aspires to study existential risks like climate change in order to examine ways in which international collaboration could help prevent catastrophe. At Oxford, Avital proposes to pursue a B.Phil. in Philosophy.

DISTRICT 15

California - North

Garima P. Desai, Fremont, graduated in May 2020 from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a double major in Environmental Studies and Economics. She currently works as a transportation planner in Oakland, California. While at UC-Santa Cruz, Garima worked as a research assistant on issues related to housing and transportation. She is passionate about using economics as a tool to solve pressing climate issues. At Oxford, Garima plans to pursue an M.Sc. in Economics for Development and an M.Sc. in Environmental Change and Management.

California - North

Alondra Vazquez Lopez, San Rafael, is a senior at Yale College where she majors in Ethnicity, Race and Migration. Her senior thesis, including exhibition of her art, is on Modern Illicit Migration Corridors in the Americas. Alondra has also studied Arabic in Morocco. She is a founding member and president of an undergraduate chapter of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, an active advocate for DACA students, and vice president of a non-profit dedicated to creating portraits for children internationally who have endured significant adversity. She has also worked directly for asylum clients in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. Alondra plans to do the M.Sc. in Migration Studies and the M.Sc. in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies at Oxford.

DISTRICT 16

California - South

Carissa J. Chen, Tustin, is a senior at Harvard College, where she majors in History. A nationally recognized poet and visual artist, Carissa is also editor-in-chief of the Harvard Economics Review. While conducting archival research, Carissa identified the first known living descendants of Harvard's slaves and initiated efforts to begin discussions on reparations and reconciliation to these families. During the pandemic, she has founded organizations aimed at addressing domestic violence and social isolation. At Oxford, Carissa will pursue an M.Phil. in Economic and Social History.

California – South

Elijah C. DeVaughn, Compton, is a senior at Harvard College, where he concentrates in History and Literature. A Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, his academic interests lie in exploring how rhetoric is used by Black political leaders to combat racial injustice. Elijah has worked on issues of legal representation, clemency, and prison advocacy. Most recently, he worked for the Secretary of Legal Affairs in the Office of Governor Gavin Newsom where he reviewed state prisoners' applications for commutations and pardons. He is an actor, dancer, and singer and has worked on housing issues as an intern in the office of Senator Kamala Harris. At Oxford, Elijah proposes to pursue an M.Phil. in History.

PLEASE NOTE: Given the time challenge and complexity of 16 concurrent district selections across the United States, initial versions of the short bios and winners' list included with this press release may contain small errors, typographical and otherwise. Most are corrected within 24 hours, so always check www.rhodesscholar.org for the most up-to-date versions. In addition, you may find photos of the winners on the global Rhodes Trust website, www.rhodestrust.ox.ac.uk, where they will be uploaded as soon as practicable.