

# **LUCE**

## **SCHOLARSHIPS**



**PERSONAL STATEMENTS**

## Personal Statement

Full Name

Nominating Institution

Spelman College

I am racially black and white, ethnically Senegalese, German-American and British, religiously descended from Christians, Jews, and Muslims. My parents – a woman from a rural Midwestern farm and an African man raised in a bustling seaport city - remained culturally and ideologically separated during their marriage. My father had unequal expectations and stricter rules for me than my younger brother, based on his perspective of “a woman’s place.” Raised in a polygamous society, where his mother was the first of my grandfather’s three wives, he carried these views with him to the United States. These topics were often discussed during the heated religious debates between my Hassidic Jewish uncle and Muslim father. My young ears also soaked up the moralistic arguments between my right-wing Christian conservative grandfather and his homosexual son, as I listened closely, wondering how we all could possibly be related. Eventually, I realized that wherever opposing values collide, education and empowerment must begin the process to find solutions for peaceful coexistence.

In school, teachers recognized my ability to bring diverse groups of people together and they recommended me for the peer-mediation team. While helping resolve disputes between fellow students, I aided in the process of reconciliation at a very young age, gaining skills that helped me relate to others and eventually become Spackenkill High School’s first African-American Student Government President. I chose to attend Spelman College in an attempt to better understand what is perceived to be the African-American culture, since this is often how others define me. Throughout my matriculation, I gained new vantage points that aided me in understanding my own diversity. I spent a semester in my father’s home of Senegal and came back to the States with a new appreciation for this side of my heritage. Within a month of my return, I once again garnered the support of my peers and was elected President of the Student Government Association. In an effort to bring my two worlds together, I planned Spelman’s first international spring break trip by uniting Kaolack, Senegal and the Atlanta University Center through service, promoting the 10,000 Girls project which seeks to empower young women through education.

In this rural area of Senegal where girls are often taken out of school years before their brothers, females are often devalued members of society. 10,000 Girls uses academic and entrepreneurial education as a tool of empowerment. By providing them with the skills needed to run a bakery - from cooking to accounting and even advertising - their families (particularly fathers) begin to see the “worth” of their daughters. This newfound value allows them to stay in school longer. They have created a large workforce of women, while reducing the rate of domestic abuse, and thus improving society. My travels have show me that a common thread runs between the problems faced by citizens of rural Senegal and other parts of the world.

I was reminded of similar problems combated in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Uganda. During my visits to these camps, I learned of many initiatives started by women. Even after living without flushing toilets or running water, Ugandan and refuge women started “Beads for Life”; an organization that makes jewelry from rolled paper and other discarded items and sells these beautiful pieces to earn an income for their family. After witnessing genocide, rape, and violence committed against loved ones, their demonstrated endurance in the midst of adversity shows me first-hand that one cannot fall victim to circumstance, no matter how seemingly inescapable. I truly admire and respect their perseverance and plan to dedicate my life to improving the lot of women like these.

Shortly after returning to the U.S. from the Middle East, I joined the “Obama for America” presidential campaign. I worked with citizens from parts of the U.S. as diverse as West Philadelphia and Missoula, Montana. By initiating the “Women for Obama” group in Missoula, I effectively increased our volunteer base and community participation. In many ways this is similar to the work I hope to do abroad, as I now recognize that my ability to hear, understand, process, and reiterate different perspectives is a gift I wish to share with the world, and one I find deeply fulfilling.



## Personal Statement Continued

After spending a year in Asia, it will be as though a light switch is turned on, illuminating part of the world of which I have no experience and little knowledge, and provide language training to enhance my communication and understand my surroundings. I am attracted to the Luce Scholarship because as Asia plays an increasing role in the development of Africa, I believe that understanding Asian culture will enhance my work in the near future. Africans are increasingly working alongside Asians from the markets to development and construction projects. With the skills acquired through this year in Asia, I will have a more holistic view of the world and be better equipped to build bridges between Asians and Africans living side-by-side. My diverse background, resourceful leadership, and optimistic energy are qualities that will make me a worthy contributing member of the Luce community.

Viewing each new place from the vantage point of an outsider, and then conversing with the locals to learn their personal truths, I crafted a unique lens through which I interpreted regional problems. Above all, these conversations confirmed the effective role women can play as agents of change in their communities. Throughout my travels I have grown from personally witnessing the strength that exists when women come together to find solutions. It is for this reason that I wish to work towards the empowerment of women in the world by finding common solutions to shared problems. As Hillary Clinton said in 1995, "Women's rights are human rights!" I truly believe that in order for society to progress, people must experience these rights everywhere - regardless of where they happen to be born.

Signature

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I am humbled by the possibility of a year of professional immersion in Asia or Southeast Asia as a Luce Scholar. I am one who thrives in international settings and who embraces a more complete sense of self when interacting within cultures different than my own. The continent of Asia is one on which I have spent little time, and if given the opportunity, I view this scholarship as a chance to further add dimension to my creative work in the media industry both professionally and personally.

In fall 2006, just before departing for my Fulbright year in Prague, Czech Republic, a good friend gave me a copy of Anna Deavere Smith's, Letters to a Young Artist. My friend had the book signed by the author and in it she wrote, "To Juliana, Be New! Anna Deavere."

The book and sentiment was the perfect reminder about how I seek to live my life as a human being and as an artist. During my Fulbright year I produced and directed a documentary about feminism and images of women in Czech visual culture. It was a process that allowed for an incredible 10-months of research and exploration in a country that I consider a second home. I feverishly sought newness in my documentary production -- newness in presentation, approach, research, and a better understanding of another culture. As I express in my documentary, it was a "search for identity within a seemingly unidentifiable place." That year was an unparalleled one of growth in my craft. It became a remarkably clear time of transition between my early-professional/academic creative work and a career path that more formally began to take shape.

My work in production began during a 2-year break between high school and college when I worked at a film office in Northern California. It continued with an independent undergraduate film study major that involved a semester abroad and a semester participating in a domestic exchange program. My undergraduate years included research with an independent filmmaker/producer as well as internships with production companies, an independent news network and a primetime news network in New York City. Next was my Fulbright documentary production in the Czech Republic, then freelance documentary work in the US and in Afghanistan. Among these opportunities was also internship work in Eastern Europe where my focus was post-war education reform initiatives.

I am motivated by my interest to tell visual stories that inform and inspire a viewer. Ultimately, I wish to produce independent feature films; however, I find that the process to attain this interest and aspiration is fluid and thus, the aspiration itself is open to fluidity.

Currently, I work as part of a broadcast production team in commercial advertisement in Portland, Oregon. Each experience in my previous and current work brings me closer to producing films. It is through these experiences that I have and continue to develop tools to better understand the interconnectedness, depth and reach of visual media. I view every form of media as in some way existing within a storytelling ethos. Essentially, short form visual content such as advertising is a facet of longer form content like feature length films. It is primarily the timing available to express the story that changes. Commercial advertisement production allows one to work with a broad range of industry professionals

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- from directors to cinematographers to editors to musicians. As well - platforms such as animation, visual effects, live action and sound design for content execution are merely the beginning of directions one can explore on a given project. A producer brings together the best participants and best elements to execute a project -- then manages the entire process through to completion. The result is 40 or more productions per year of varying length and scope in which my production skills are honed each day! It is a leadership role for which I have talent because my strengths and weaknesses are simultaneously challenged. My advertising agency is incredibly supportive of my endeavors, and I am prepared to request leave should a Luce Scholarship become available to me.

One component of the Luce Scholars Program of particular intrigue( ?? interest/excitement for me) is the similarity between Luce's vision as an entrepreneur at the helm of a media empire, and my aspirations in a contemporary era of media. Stephen Stept, producer, writer and director of the PBS American Masters film on Henry Luce noted: "...[Luce] took very seriously his responsibility to inform and educate his readers, to raise the level of discourse in this country. Whether he succeeded or not is subject to debate, but there is no denying the depth of his commitment." Luce's work to "raise the level of discourse" is in many ways aligned with my own goals in the media industry.

There is an unavoidable responsibility that accompanies one's purpose to "raise the level of discourse". It requires that the diversity of one's experiences inform a larger expression in commentary. It also means upholding the integrity of what is projected on the public and with what one's name and work represents.

I have had the opportunity to travel internationally for academic, athletic, personal and professional endeavors. In these travels the individuals who create the landscape of the destinations are of unparalleled grace and inspiration. Working in the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Afghanistan are wonderful examples of how this is true for me. From an international perspective, "[raising] the level of discourse" becomes even more significant as it means committing to global awareness and requiring one self to at all times respect the paramount importance of that awareness. A Luce Scholarship will allow for meaningful analysis of a parallel media engine in Asia. In turn, it will allow for the stories and people of my host country to become part of the larger story that I will share within my community and that will further shape my creative work. I take seriously my role and involvement in all of these charges and am committed to pursue work that embraces heightened discourse.