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Boston College Law School

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Arthur Harris, Class of 2004

12/4/03--Boston College Law School is greatly saddened by the loss of a remarkable member of its community, Arthur Harris, class of 2004. Arthur died suddenly on Sunday, November 23, 2003. A memorial service in the Law School chapel on Thursday drew a crowd of hundreds of people, as friends and colleagues remembered and honored a young man's memory with words, songs and tears.

"All of us who knew Arthur will remember him as a gentle man who was passionate about improving the life of the poor and disenfranchised in America," said Dean for Students Norah Wylie. "He was an inspirational speaker, organizer and advocate, and no one who had the privilege of listening to Arthur speak on issues of social justice could remain unmoved. His death diminishes us all."

Arthur's journey from modest circumstances to less than a year away from a law school degree is nothing short of extraordinary. Born and raised in Montgomery, Alabama, he lived with his mother and brother in public housing in some of the poorest areas of the state. Arthur wrote in his personal statement on his law school application that while his family's circumstances were often difficult, his mother instilled in him the importance of education, and the need to take advantage of every opportunity. As an African-American in a poverty stricken area, he and his friends and family were often the targets of police profiling and searches, though they had done nothing wrong. These experiences gave him the desire to fight for change and inspired him to work even harder to get the educational background he felt he needed to be able to become an effective advocate for the poor and the homeless.

Arthur went on to attend the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where it became quickly apparent to everyone that he was destined to be a powerful leader and advocate for change. He graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2000, having served as President of the Undergraduate Student Government Association, President of the Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society, Chairman of the Black Student Awareness Committee, and Vice-President of the Black Student Union. He also served on the University's Mock Trial Team, its Cultural Committee, and Leadership Planning Committee, among others. He served as a YWCA Mentor, and volunteered at a local soup kitchen for the homeless. In addition to Omicron Delta Kappa, he was elected to the Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society, Who's Who Among American College and Universities Students, and the Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars.

While he was serving as Student Government Association President and trying to keep up with his studies, Arthur was working 35 hours a week at two jobs, at the Health Science Bookstore and a local CVS Pharmacy, to help provide support for his family. But he remained well-known and loved on campus. When he applied to law schools, one of his recommendation letters was written by the President of the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Arthur wrote in his personal statement that his desire for a law degree came from a need to help others, particularly the homeless and downtrodden in society. He wanted to become a voice for change, and assist in urban renewal efforts to revitalize the inner cities of America. "I believe that true urban renewal will take inner-city originated policies that will allow residents to control and provide remedies for their own communities," he wrote. "I plan to work as a

lawmaker representing and providing leadership to inner-city residents." He also planned to open a legal foundation to help inner-city residents start their own businesses and provide criminal defense and protect against police brutality.

During his time at BC Law, Arthur influenced a number of people, both students and administrators. He was actively involved in the Solomon Amendment Task Force and the Coalition for Equality, and an active member of the Black Law Students Association, among others. Those who knew him recalled him as a quiet, thoughtful man, who was suddenly in his element when provided an opportunity to speak forcefully about improving the lives of the poor. During his last few months, Arthur moved into a homeless shelter to live among the poor and get a feel for their daily lives. He did this by choice, refusing numerous offers of other housing and assistance, saying simply that this was his calling, something he "needed to do."

"We are all struggling with how to make sense of Arthur's death, but I know that each of us in our own time will find a sense of understanding," Dean Wylie said in a note to students. "Remembering Arthur's gifts and talents, and how deeply he touched our lives will, I hope, provide each of us with a measure of comfort. The words of the Book of Wisdom are a fitting tribute to Arthur: 'Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years. The righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest.'"

Another memorial service will be held at the Hall Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama on Saturday, December 6 at 1 p.m. Internment will take place at the New Elam Cemetery in Montgomery. Floral tributes may be sent to Cummings Funeral Home 1120 Bragg Street, Montgomery, AL 36108.