Leading the Future of Civil Rights, NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc. Turns 75
Nation’s First Civil Rights Legal Organization Has Fundamentally Changed America

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(April 7, 2015) The nation’s most storied and influential civil rights legal organization is kicking off a year of celebrations and events to mark its 75th anniversary. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), founded by pioneering civil rights attorney and later Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall, was incorporated on March 15, 1940. Unveiling its anniversary tag line, “The Past Ignites The Future,” LDF announced plans this week that include a series of public and private events, and the creation of a new public policy hub within LDF—The Thurgood Marshall Institute. The Thurgood Marshall Institute will expand LDF’s engagement with researchers, policy experts and community organizers to work in collaboration with LDF’s highly regarded lawyers and enable more comprehensive advocacy around some of the nation’s most complex racial justice matters. The Thurgood Marshall Institute is supported in part by a generous $5 million challenge grant from Atlantic Philanthropies.

LDF, which has been a separate entity from the NAACP since 1957, is best known as the organization that developed and executed a twenty-year strategy to end legal segregation, culminating in a landmark Supreme Court victory in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Thurgood Marshall, who was LDF’s first Director-Counsel, assembled a team of many of the most brilliant minds in the legal profession with an ambitious agenda to defeat “Jim Crow” and dismantle the apparatus that maintained blacks as second class citizens—especially in the American South. For the past 75 years, LDF has continued to fulfill Marshall’s vision through litigation and advocacy at the highest level. In 2008, future President Barack Obama described LDF as “simply the best civil rights law firm in American history.”

Sherrilyn Ifill, LDF’s President and Director-Counsel stated, “The Legal Defense Fund, more than any other civil rights organization, fundamentally changed America. Every American alive today has been touched by the efforts that we’ve achieved over the past 75 years. Whether it was ending ‘white-only’ primary elections in 1944, defeating court-enforced racially restrictive covenants in housing, winning landmark employment discrimination cases, or challenging and briefly defeating the death penalty, LDF has fought against almost every aspect of inequality in America.” And, LDF’s victories are not just for African Americans, Ifill points out. “Few people realize that LDF litigated and won the first sex discrimination in employment case in the Supreme Court—a case we brought on behalf of a white woman in 1971.” LDF has filed numerous briefs in cases supporting the rights of immigrants and non-English speakers, marriage equality and access to justice for the indigent. LDF has argued more cases in the Supreme Court of the United States than any other entity, except the U.S. Solicitor General’s office.

Yet, Ifill points out that “despite LDF’s remarkable victories against unfathomable odds, we have a long way to go on the road to full racial equality.”

LDF continues to challenge discriminatory voting measures, including voter identification laws passed in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s 2013 *Shelby County Ala. v. Holder* decision, a case LDF also litigated and argued. LDF has also consistently advocated for criminal justice reform to eliminate racial disparities and bias in the criminal justice system, and has been a vocal presence in response to the recent police killings and assaults of unarmed African Americans.

Following its founder Thurgood Marshall, LDF has been led by a roster of legal luminaries including: Jack Greenberg (1961-1984), Julius Chambers (1984-1993), Elaine Jones (1993-2004), Ted Shaw (2004-2008), John Payton (2008-2012), and now Sherrilyn Ifill (2013-present). After 75 years, LDF continues to be a launching point for the next generation of civil rights lawyers, including through its annual Earl Warren Scholarship Program for incoming law students which was revamped in this anniversary year.

To learn more about LDF’s 75-year history and its transformative role in American democracy, visit www.ldf75.org.

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On March 15, 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) was formally chartered as a not-for-profit corporation for the following purposes:

To render legal aid gratuitously to such Negroes as may appear to be worthy thereof, to seek and promote the educational facilities for Negroes who are denied the same by reason of race or color and to conduct research, collect, collate, acquire, compile and publish facts, information and statistics concerning educational facilities and educational opportunities for Negroes.

At a time of heightened racism, deep national divide, and statesponsored discrimination, the work of LDF transformed our nation and ignited a commitment to equality that ushered in a new era of progress and opportunity for African Americans. LDF’s formation was the precursor to some of the most important civil rights developments that would shape our democracy over the following 75 years.

After LDF’s founding, two critical moments ensued that forever changed the American landscape. First, Brown v. Board of Education dismantled the legal doctrine of separate but equal and integrated our nation’s public school system. Not only did African-American students benefit from more equitable educational resources but, by rooting out deliberate and pernicious governmental racism, LDF helped set in motion a series of civil rights victories that led to a more equitable and inclusive democracy for all.

Second, LDF was instrumental to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, often referred to as the crown jewel of civil rights laws. In defending against attempts to strip key provisions of the law that protected African Americans and other racial minorities from laws that are intended to have the effect of denying or diminishing the right to vote, LDF has served as one of the most relentless defenders of the integrity of our democracy. LDF is still fighting to protect the integrity of our democracy and to restore the Voting Rights Act to its full strength and capacity.

Indeed, thanks to LDF’s efforts, the civil rights landscape has expanded significantly. Yet our job is far from done.

Today, LDF targets persistent obstacles to equality in the following four areas:

Education: From its inception, LDF has been engaged in the fight to remove barriers to educational access and opportunity. LDF’s education docket has involved a number of seminal Supreme Court decisions, including those upholding affirmative action and promoting diversity in education. Through its present work in and out of the courts, LDF is fighting to ensure racial equity in education for African-American students and secure a safe, inclusive and high quality education for all its students.

Economic Justice: Since its founding, LDF has fought for African Americans to be able to live, work and thrive without racial barriers. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF’s economic justice practice continues to fight to increase fairness and equal opportunity for African Americans in all aspects of the economy.

Political Participation: LDF is a pioneer in the struggle to secure and protect the voting rights of African Americans. LDF has been involved in nearly all of the precedent setting litigation relating to minority voting rights. LDF uses legal, legislative, public education and advocacy strategies to promote the full, equal and active participation of African Americans in America’s democracy.

Criminal Justice: LDF has always worked at the forefront of the effort to ensure that our nation’s criminal justice laws are administered fairly and without regard to race. Although the criminal justice system remains riddled with racial bias, LDF uses litigation, advocacy and public education to eliminate the improper role of race in the criminal justice system. We successfully but temporarily abolished the death penalty and continue to fight both for its abolition and unbiased application today, as well as to rid discrimination from every point in the criminal justice system.

To know more about our 75 year history of leading the charge for civil rights equality or to donate to our work, please visit www.ldf75.org.
A. Who is LDF?

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is America’s premier legal organization fighting for racial justice. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF seeks structural changes to expand democracy, eliminate disparities, and achieve racial justice in a society that fulfills the promise of equality for all Americans. LDF also defends the gains and protections won over the past 75 years of civil rights struggle and works to improve the quality and diversity of judicial and executive appointments.

B. What is LDF’s relationship with the NAACP, which shares part of its name?

Although originally associated with the NAACP and while sharing the same commitment to equality and justice for African Americans, LDF is not affiliated nor is it the legal arm of the NAACP. LDF has been a separate entity, with a separate board of directors and independent corporate status from the NAACP, since 1957.

C. What is the need for civil rights work in 2015? Didn’t the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s address the issue?

While it is true that there have been significant gains in the area of civil rights since the 60’s, there are many challenges that have persisted and many new and different challenges that have emerged. While racism, inequality and discrimination may not be as blatant or pervasive today as they were before, there remains fully entrenched structural problems, such as implicit and explicit bias, that plague African-American communities. For example, African Americans still face obstacles to voting that hearken back to the Jim Crow era, with cumbersome state laws that limit opportunities to vote.

In a recent report co-authored with the Center for American Progress, LDF found that Alabama’s strict voter ID laws during the 2014 midterm elections likely affected 250,000 to 500,000 voters. Sixty years after Brown v. Board of Education, our nation’s schools have returned to a segregated model with persistent racial residential segregation, exclusive state-subsidized schools and discriminatory standardized testing admissions requirements. In New York City, despite offering more admission slots in 2015, African Americans accounted for only 5% of the city’s total enrollment in specialized public schools. Latinos accounted for only 7%.

Students of color face harsher punishments in school than their white peers, leading to a higher number of youth of color incarcerated.

D. What are the biggest challenges to civil rights now?

Today, civil rights work must embrace the progress and advancement of some while tackling the entrenched forms of structural inequality and bias that affect the many. We have elected the first black President of the United States – twice – and yet African Americans remain victims of excessive police force. African Americans have attained leadership positions at Fortune 500 companies and yet the housing and financial crisis of 2008 resulted in the largest wealth drain for African Americans in our nation’s history. African Americans have achieved iconic status in entertainment and related industries and yet images of African Americans in the media continue to reflect age-old stereotypes. The incarceration of African Americans continues at a devastating rate, even as the nation’s highest law enforcement officer is African American. Changing demographics portend a majority-minority nation in the next twenty years, yet a virulent anti-immigrant fervor has once again taken hold. The number of African-American and Latino elected officials is at an all-time high, yet the ability to leverage political power to make real and lasting change in minority communities has proved elusive.

These dichotomies have left some Americans confused and dispirited about the prospects for racial equity and justice. Some have come to question the project of civil rights work itself. Still others have doubled down on the status quo, accepting the progress we have achieved as sufficient and suggesting that we abandon efforts to expand opportunities for those still trapped at the bottom. Despite these challenges, LDF continues to re-engage the public’s consciousness about racial disparities, inequality, and fairness. LDF celebrates the progress of the past 75 years, but remains relentless in its mission to pursue and protect racial justice and equality for all Americans.

E. How can people become involved in your work?

LDF’s 75-year movement requires significant partnerships and support. The first thing that we ask people to do is to become more familiar with our work, our history, our cases and the issues we work on to build a nation free of racial discrimination. By regularly visiting our website at www.naacpldf.org and following us on social media, you will be introduced to LDF’s most important work.
Second, we ask that you monitor what is happening in your community related to education, political participation, policing and local governance and report instances of racial discrimination. While LDF fights the legal battles in the halls of power to ensure fairness and equality, it is critical that we stay connected to the communities we serve. You are our eyes and ears on the ground.

Finally, our work is only possible through the financial support of donors. Your donation – no matter how small – makes possible the work that we do. Please visit our website and become an LDF donor today.

F. What are the specific areas of civil rights work that LDF is currently engaged in?

LDF currently works in four specific areas to achieve racial equality and opportunity for African Americans and other people of color. These areas include:

**Education:** From its inception, LDF has been engaged in the fight to remove barriers to educational access and opportunity. LDF’s education docket has involved a number of seminal Supreme Court decisions, including those upholding affirmative action and promoting diversity in education. Through its present work in and out of the courts, LDF is fighting to ensure racial equity in education for African-American students and secure a safe, inclusive and high quality education for all its students.

**Economic Justice:** Since its founding, LDF has fought for African Americans to be able to live, work and thrive without racial barriers. In one of our first cases in 1940, LDF secured a vital decision that required equal pay for black and white teachers. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF’s economic justice practice continues to fight to increase fairness and equal opportunity for African Americans in all aspects of the economy.

**Political Participation:** LDF is a pioneer in the struggle to secure and protect the voting rights of African Americans. LDF has been involved in nearly all of the precedent setting litigation relating to minority voting rights. LDF uses legal, legislative, public education and advocacy strategies to promote the full, equal and active participation of African Americans in America’s democracy.

**Criminal Justice:** LDF has always worked at the forefront of the effort to ensure that our nation’s criminal justice laws are administered fairly and without regard to race. Although the criminal justice system remains riddled with racial bias, LDF uses litigation, advocacy and public education to eliminate the improper role of race in the criminal justice system. We successfully but temporarily abolished the death penalty and continue to fight both for its abolition and unbiased application today, as well as to rid discrimination from every point in the criminal justice system.

G. What areas is LDF involved in beyond litigation?

After 75 years, advocacy continues to be a signature component of LDF’s work. We know that decision makers at the local, state and federal levels play an integral role in shaping public institutions and racial outcomes. Our D.C. office serves as the hub of LDF’s advocacy work, monitoring civil rights legislative issues before Congress and federal agencies responsible for civil rights enforcement, as well as strengthening civil rights laws and opposing efforts to undermine them. LDF also continues to rely on community organizing as a way of engaging and supporting local leadership in various communities across the nation and helping to mobilize and amplify voices to bring about change. In 2014, LDF community organizers were on the ground in Ferguson, MO in the aftermath of the Michael Brown killing to provide technical assistance and other support to local organizers.

This year, LDF will launch the Thurgood Marshall Institute to complement our current litigation work in our four key practice areas. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute will combine research, communications and advocacy to educate all Americans and spur action towards social change. Drawing on the resources of the Thurgood Marshall Institute, LDF will maximize a variety of tools at its disposal – particularly its leadership and expertise on law, policy, and organizing– in the pursuit of racial justice and a more just society.

The ultimate goal of the Thurgood Marshall Institute is to enhance LDF’s ability to conduct and integrate research, policy advocacy, community organizing, and strategic communications to make the issues we work on part of dinner table conversations.

LDF has already begun to incorporate some of the methods and systems envisioned as part of the Thurgood Marshall Institute into our existing work with a high degree of success. During our rapid response efforts to the police killings of unarmed African-American men in Ferguson, MO, Staten Island, NY, and elsewhere, LDF drew from broad multidisciplinary expertise and advocacy to tackle contemporary civil rights challenges. Rather than immediately seeking redress through litigation, LDF marshalled research on the underlying issues for its report *Ferguson in Focus*; is pursuing strategies with the Department of Justice; and has conducted trainings requested by community residents and activists – all designed to supplement our work in the courtroom.

H. What is the Thurgood Marshall Institute at LDF?

LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute will serve as a resource and policy hub not just for LDF but also for the entire civil rights community. It will deepen LDF’s relationships with longtime partners grappling with complex issues of race, law and public policy, including the Legal Defense Funds that LDF has birthed over years. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute will also yield new relationships and collaborations as it links and finds common ground among the
struggles of African Americans, women, LGBTQ people, all people of color, and others who experience discrimination.

LDF will refresh the civil rights story in the public imagination and drive the discourse with new language, grounding the story in the deeper truths about today’s multiracial America. It will seek new language to open minds to old problems and new solutions, and then embed that terminology in laws, standards, and policies – in much the same way that advocates recently used “reentry”, “stop and frisk”, and “marriage equality” to frame these important civil rights issues.

The institute will focus on three key areas: Cross-Disciplinary and Collaborative Research, Strategic Communications, and Advocacy and Organizing

I. Who are the faces and voices that have benefitted from the work of the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund?

The faces and voices of those who have been uplifted by LDF are many. We have represented a young college student’s right to vote in her first election after being denied because of strict Texas voter ID laws that would not allow her to use her university issued identification. In that same state, we represented the voting rights of a woman in her 80’s born during Jim Crow era laws and who did not have access to formal healthcare. Born at home, a contemporaneous birth certificate did not exist and her eventual birth certificate did not have accurate information about her parents which denied her application to receive a “free” voter ID.

We fought for a father of four children who had a job offer as a bus driver rescinded because of a 27 year-old conviction, even though he disclosed this information during the interview process. We defended the rights of public housing residents and their guests in New York City to be treated with dignity and respect by law enforcement and to not be targeted just because they are visible. We empowered a community of voters to elect their candidate of choice in the state of Georgia by challenging that state’s discriminatory voting laws. This successful challenge resulted in the highest turnout of any county in Georgia and after nearly two centuries a person of color was elected as County Commissioner.
Constance Baker Motley
After graduating from Columbia's Law School in 1946, Baker was hired by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) as a civil rights lawyer. As LDF's first female attorney, she became Associate Counsel to the LDF, making her a lead trial attorney in a number of early and significant civil rights cases. Baker visited churches that were fire bombed, sang freedom songs, and visited Rev. Martin Luther King while he sat in jail, as well as spending a night with civil rights activist Medgar Evers under armed guard. In 1950 she wrote the original complaint in the case of Brown v. Board of Education. The first African-American woman ever to argue a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, in Meredith v. Fair she successfully won James Meredith's effort to be the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962. Motley was successful in nine of the ten cases she argued before the Supreme Court. The tenth decision, regarding jury composition, was eventually overturned in her favor. She was also a key legal strategist in the civil rights movement, helping to desegregate Southern schools, buses, and lunch counters. She was also the first African-American woman to serve as a New York State Senator and the first woman to become Manhattan Borough President.

Deval Laurdine Patrick
is a politician and civil rights lawyer who served as the 71st Governor of Massachusetts from 2007 to 2015. A member of the Democratic Party, Patrick served as the United States Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division under President Bill Clinton. He was first elected in 2006, succeeding Mitt Romney who chose not to run, and re-elected in 2010. He is the first (and, currently, the only) African American to have served as Governor of Massachusetts. Patrick served as Assistant Counsel at LDF from 1983 to 1986.

Bill Lann Lee
is a Chinese-American civil rights lawyer who served as Assistant United States Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division for the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division under President Bill Clinton. While a law student, Lee worked as a research assistant for Jack Greenberg, Thurgood Marshall’s successor at LDF. After graduating from law school, he returned to LDF and worked there as a civil rights attorney until 1982. While still affiliated with LDF, from 1979 - 1980, Lee served as Counsel for the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. He then moved to Los Angeles in 1983, where he was Supervising Attorney for Civil Rights Litigation at the Center for Law in the Public Interest until 1988. He then returned to LDF to serve as the director of its Western Regional Office.

Marian Wright Edelman
is an activist for the rights of children. She has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional life. She is president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund.

Edelman was the first African-American woman admitted to practice law in Mississippi. She began practicing law with LDF’s Mississippi office, working on racial justice issues connected with the civil rights movement and representing activists during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. She also helped establish a Head Start program.

Professor Lani Guinier
is a civil rights theorist; she is the Bennett Boskey Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and the second American woman Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. She was also nominated by President Clinton to be the first African-American woman Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

Jacqueline Berrien
is the former Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). She came to the EEOC from LDF, where she served as Associate Director-Counsel for five and a half years. From 2001 to 2004, Berrien was a Program Officer in the Governance and Civil Society Unit of the Ford Foundation’s Peace and Social Justice Program. Before joining the Ford Foundation, Berrien practiced civil rights law for more than 15 years. Between 1994 and 2001, she was an Assistant Counsel with LDF, where she coordinated all of LDF’s work in the area of voting rights and political participation Between 1987 and 1994, Berrien worked as an attorney with the Voting Rights Project of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights in Washington, D.C., and with the National Legal Department and Women’s Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in New York. A Harvard Law School graduate, she began her legal career in 1986, working as a law clerk to the Honorable U.W. Clemon, the first African-American U.S. District Court Judge in Birmingham, Alabama.
**Cornelia Thayer Livingston “Nina” Pillard**  
is a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the  
District of Columbia Circuit. Before becoming a judge, Pillard was a tenured law professor at Georgetown University. She also served as a Deputy Assistant Attorney General and Assistant to the Solicitor General. Pillard served as Assistant Counsel at LDF in New York and Washington, D.C. from 1989–1994.

**Vanita Gupta**  
is the acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division and the top civil rights prosecutor for the United States Department of Justice. Formerly, she was a civil rights lawyer and the Deputy Legal Director of the ACLU, where she oversaw the ACLU’s national criminal justice reform efforts.

Her first and most famous case, working for LDF, involved 40 African Americans and six white Americans in Tulia, Texas, who had been convicted by an all-white jury on drug dealing charges. In almost every case, the only evidence was the testimony of an undercover agent, Tom Coleman. Coleman did not use wiretaps, and records showed that he had “filed shoddy reports”, and had a previous misdemeanor charge for stealing gasoline from a county pump. Gupta won the release of all of the defendants in 2003, four years after they were jailed, then negotiated a $5 million settlement for those arrested.

**Peter Sherwood**  
began his career in 1971 as a law secretary to New York City Civil Court Judge Fritz Alexander. He then worked from 1974 to 1984 as assistant counsel to LDF. Also, from 1980 to 1987, he taught as an adjunct assistant professor at the New York University School of Law. From 1984 to 1986, he worked for the New York State Department of Law as a Deputy Solicitor General and from 1987 to 1991 as Solicitor General. From 1991 to 1993, he was Corporation Counsel for the City of New York. In 1994, he served briefly as a visiting professor at the CUNY Law School. Also that year, he joined the firm of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, where he was a partner until 2008, when he was appointed judge of the New York Court of Claims and became an Acting Supreme Court Justice in 2008.

**Victor Bolden**  
is a judge of the United States District Court for Connecticut and former Corporation Counsel for the City of New Haven, Connecticut. Bolden graduated from Columbia University and Harvard Law School. He began his legal career as a Marvin Karpatkin Fellow, from 1989 to 1990, and then as a staff attorney at the ACLU, from 1990 to 1994. He served as Assistant Counsel at LDF from 1994 to 2000. From 2000 to 2005, he worked at the law firm of Wiggin & Dana, where he handled a wide variety of commercial litigation matters. From 2005 to 2009, he returned to LDF as General Counsel. From 2009 to 2014, he served as Corporation Counsel for the City of New Haven, Connecticut.
"The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund is simply the best civil rights law firm in American history."

President Barack Obama

"On behalf of the United States Department of Justice, I congratulate the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund on 75 years of passionate legal advocacy and extensive educational outreach in its tireless pursuit of equality and justice throughout the nation. Since 1940, the NAACP LDF has stood at the forefront of America’s struggle to ensure that equality under the law is protected by the law. From the historic victory in Brown v. Board of Education, achieved under the leadership of legendary founder Thurgood Marshall, to the wide-ranging efforts of the visionaries who continue to build on Brown’s promise today, the NAACP LDF has made once-unimaginable progress in expanding democracy, drawing attention to persistent disparities, and securing the more just society that all Americans deserve. As this vital organization celebrates 75 years of civil rights achievements, I look forward to all that it will accomplish in the days and years to come."

Eric Holder
United States Attorney General

"This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. one of the great civil rights organizations in the Nation’s history. Seventy-five years ago, Thurgood Marshall established LDF or the “Inc. Fund” – as it was commonly known then – as a separate legal entity. The efforts of the men and women of this organization throughout the years have transformed our Nation for the better."

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (Vermont)

"The Congressional Black Caucus appreciates the work of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. We recognize LDF’s enormous contribution to the United States of America for its work in challenging long-standing practices of racial discrimination in education, political participation, economic justice and criminal justice. We urge LDF to continue its advocacy as we resist the new generations of barriers being erected to disenfranchise minority voters and efforts that make it more difficult to realize the American dream of a quality education and economic security."

U.S. Representative G. K. Butterfield (1st District of North Carolina)
Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus

"There are at least three principles and values that have made America great: freedom, democracy and opportunity. I want to say thank you to LDF for making sure the principles enshrined in our Constitution mean something not just on paper and in writing but in the everyday lives of Americans."

U.S. Representative Joaquin Castro (20th District of Texas)

"For 75 years, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has staunchly defended the civil rights of Americans who have been denied equal protection under the law, including litigating the seminal case of Brown v. Board of Education. I congratulate and celebrate LDF’s dedicated leadership and unwavering commitment to move our nation toward a more perfect union."

U.S. Representative Marcia L. Fudge (11th District of Ohio)

"The NAACP Legal Defense Fund led the way, and continues to remind us all that there is more to be done to move the needle of progress forward. I join in congratulating LDF for 75 years of service to the founding principles of our country."

Eric Schneiderman
New York State Attorney General

"The terror of racial injustice hides today in plain sight causing as much damage as it did when it was not quite as subtle. LDF remains at the forefront of this fight, forcing us to open our eyes to that which we wish to avert. Thank goodness."

Gerald Adolph and David Mills
LDF Board Co-Chairs

To know more about our 75 year history of leading the charge for civil rights equality or to donate to our work, please visit www.ldf75.org.

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“Over the past decade, Atlantic has invested substantially in organizations and initiatives determined to challenge the ongoing legacy of racial inequity in the United States. As a leading voice for justice and civil rights, LDF has long played an essential role in these efforts. The opportunity to launch the Thurgood Marshall Policy Institute comes at a time of growing urgency in addressing systemic racial disparities and institutionalized bias. We are confident that this new initiative at LDF will be transformative, revitalizing civil rights advocacy and shifting the larger narrative about race and equality in our country.”

Christopher G. Oechsli
President and CEO of The Atlantic Philanthropies

“The Legal Defense Fund has been the legal mind and arm of the Civil Rights Movement since it was conceived by that master jurist, Charles Hamilton Houston. When Houston embarked on his strategy to dismantle de jure segregation through the courts, not even the great pioneer of the movement, W.E.B. Du Bois, could imagine that he would be successful. “I have lived to see the impossible!” Du Bois proclaimed when told about the Court’s decision on Brown v. Board. Since then, LDF has been achieving the impossible every day.”

Henry Louis Gates

“Few organizations can claim to have fundamentally changed America. LDF can. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund began with a dream and hard work of young, visionary lawyers. They imagined an America that did not yet exist. They believed that they could use the rule of law to force America to confront and honor the promises enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. When tough racial issues break out, LDF is there, raising questions that no one else raises.”

Samuel L. Jackson
Actor

“Seventy-five years ago, the LDF began to build its reputation as the most essential and irreplaceable legal organization behind the battle for civil rights in American courts. Thurgood Marshall would, I’m certain, be proud to see that this tradition of excellence at the LDF continues today, while at the same time acknowledging that there is still much work to be done in the fight for racial justice in this country.”

Gilbert King

“What a difference the brilliant, strategic and courageous LDF lawyers have made over 75 years in crumbling the walls of legal segregation and discrimination and pushing America closer to honoring its promise of equal opportunity for all. LDF was an indispensable partner to those mounting nonviolent direct action campaigns across our nation and is in the forefront of those seeking just law enforcement policies today. I’m very proud to have been a part of this historic organization which inspired me to begin the Children’s Defense Fund after four years as an LDF frontline attorney in Mississippi. As some seek to turn back the clock of racial and economic progress today, LDF’s clarion voice for equal justice and opportunity for all and skillful leadership is needed more than ever.”

Marian Wright Edelman
President and Founder of the Children’s Defense Fund

“For 75 years, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has been a bulwark against bigotry and an engine of social and economic progress—for black people and, indeed, for all people. Whenever the civil rights movement has confronted a legal problem, we have turned to the Legal Defense Fund—to trailblazing attorneys like Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, Jack Greenberg, and Constance Baker Motley—to be our champion and our guide, supporting us like a tree planteth by the waters. From Brown v. Board to Barack Obama, the Legal Defense Fund has been and continues to be a most necessary and effective disturber of the unjust peace.”

Vernon Jordan
Business Executive and Civil Rights Activist