



For Immediate Release
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LDF Issues Statement on Verdict in Charlottesville Civil Trial

Today, the jury in the civil trial *Sines v. Kessler* involving over a dozen defendants charged with conspiracy to interfere with civil rights under 42 U.S. Code § 1985, civil conspiracy to commit a crime under state Virginia law, and other counts found defendants liable under Virginia state law. The jury returned no decision on the two federal counts of engaging in a conspiracy to commit racial violence – two of the most important counts, which causes some concern. The jury awarded over \$25 million in damages.

In August 2017, self-identified neo-Nazis, alt-right, white nationalists, members of the KKK, and other extremist groups gathered in Charlottesville for the “Unite the Right” rally. The event erupted in violence, resulting in James Fields Jr. deliberately driving his car into counter-protesters, injuring 19 people and killing Heather Heyer.

In response, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill issued the following statement:

“We congratulate Integrity First for America and the broader legal team for their creative and determined efforts to bring some measure of accountability in this critical case.

“Today’s decision brings a degree of justice to the victims of white supremacist violence on that dark day in 2017. But it does not offer a full measure of healing or accountability, nor does it bring Heather Heyer back to her friends and family. Indeed, this trial was a painful and traumatic reliving of that day for those who were attacked, and our thoughts go out to them and their families.

“The trial highlighted the threats from white nationalists that communities face around the country today and further served as a disturbing window into the minds of white nationalists. Defendants claimed in testimony that they were willing to risk incarceration for their cause and detailed extensive digital communications that exposed the scope of their organizing and the desire some held for violence. Despite the jury not reaching a verdict on claims about whether the defendants committed or conspired to commit racial violence, the trial reveals the depth of animus that continues to threaten us. The testimony and evidence during the trial laid bare the participants’ clear racial hatred: from certain defendants brazenly using racial slurs through testimony, to a defendant self-identifying as a racist and white supremacist, and a deposition by a former white nationalist iterating that a certain defendant supported the extermination of particular races. White nationalists used the trial as a platform to further attack communities of color by calling into the Court’s public access line and voicing racial slurs into the courtroom when they appeared able to unmute themselves, according to reports.

“Disturbingly, instead of coming together to condemn the violence of that day, some of our country’s elected leaders – including former President Trump – embraced the violent members of ‘Unite the Right’ and racially discriminatory policies including in education, voting rights, and immigration. The last administration’s embrace of racism and disregard for the rule of law led to the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol — an event we now know was supported by numerous elected leaders at the local, state, and federal levels.

“Let us be clear. There is no place for white supremacy in any aspect of government, public policy, law enforcement, our public schools, or any area of public life in our country. We must redouble our efforts to root out this scourge on our nation and demand that our elected officials come together regardless of political affiliation to ensure the safety, justice, and equity of our multiracial democracy.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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