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LDF Mourns the Loss of Louis Gossett Jr., Beloved and Trailblazing Actor

The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is deeply saddened by the death of Louis Gossett Jr., a trailblazing actor and benefactor of human and civil rights. Gossett Jr. died at 87 years old on March 29, 2024 in Santa Monica, California.

LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson issued the following statement:

“We mourn the passing of Mr. Louis Gossett Jr., the pioneering actor, and extend our deepest condolences to his loved ones. An extraordinary talent who illuminated our screens and whose passion for racial and social justice reverberated offstage, Mr. Gossett’s dedication to using his platform for positive change exemplified the critical intersection of art and activism. Mr. Gossett extended his time and wisdom to many, including the Legal Defense Fund.

“Through his compelling performances, Mr. Gossett brought characters to life that captivated audiences worldwide, breaking barriers in the entertainment industry and winning the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor—the first Oscar recognition for a Black actor in that category. During his life, Mr. Gossett persistently advocated for an end to systemic racism and spoke out in support of increased diversity in Hollywood. His philanthropic efforts included serving as a member of the Legal Defense Fund’s Southern California Executive Committee, a fundraising effort for the organization. Mr. Gossett also founded the Eracism Foundation to ‘create a society where racism doesn’t exist,’ with a distinct focus on building community partnerships and inspiring young people.

“Mr. Gossett will be missed and leaves behind a powerful legacy that will undoubtedly continue to inspire future generations with his exceptional talent and humanity.”

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Founded in 1940, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. 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 Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that 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.