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LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute Launches New Digital Archive, Gives Public Access to Powerful Civil Rights History

Today, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF)'s Thurgood Marshall Institute announced the launch of [*Recollection: A Civil Rights Legal Archives*](#), a first-of-its kind, searchable archival collection of oral histories, legal briefs, press releases, and correspondence related to more than 6,000 cases the organization has litigated since its founding. This effort is the culmination of five years of work by LDF's dedicated team of archivists.

Recollection will give litigators, advocates, researchers, students, and the general public insight into eight decades of records on history-making work in educational equity, political participation, economic justice, and criminal justice. This archival website is a "living" resource that will be continuously updated to include newly digitized materials, including oral histories and editorial content that highlights LDF's critical work to advance racial justice in the United States.

Given the importance of Black political participation and protecting the right to vote in the upcoming election, the first tranche of digitized content specifically focuses on voting rights. Among the collection released today, some highlights include:

- [The story of Lani Guinier](#), former LDF voting rights attorney who litigated landmark cases such as *Major v. Treen*, and went on to become the first tenured Black woman on faculty at Harvard Law School.
- [Archival documents from Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder](#) – advocates jailed for assisting elderly Black voters in Alabama.
- [An oral history of G.K. Butterfield](#), who devoted his life to reversing North Carolina's racist voting procedures.
- [A comprehensive timeline](#) exploring more than 80 years of LDF's bold and visionary civil rights leadership.

"The launch of *Recollection* comes at a time when access to reliable information about the civil rights movement and the broader history of the United States is critically important to preserving and protecting our democracy," said **Janai Nelson, LDF's President and Director-Counsel**. "By making our vast collection of archival resources digitally accessible to the public, we have removed a significant barrier to education. As a result, the knowledge of our shared history can become a living, actionable resource in the preservation of truth and the fight to strengthen our democracy and protect civil rights."

“After five years in the making, we are thrilled to introduce *Recollection*—a transformative resource that we believe will make a meaningful difference for everyone who engages with the website,” **said Karla McKanders, Director of LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute.** “Archival documents and oral histories are critical sources of power, inspiration, and education. With a clear understanding of how history impacts our current reality, we can confidently charge ahead in the fight to advance civil rights. We hope access to LDF’s archives, along with editorial content, will serve as a much-needed catalyst to engage people in understanding the past and revisioning the future of our multiracial democracy.”

To explore the new website, visit [***Recollection: A Civil Rights Legal Archives.***](#)

Today’s announcement comes after a major portion of LDF’s early records were recently made available online for the first time through the Library of Congress in September 2024. About 80% of the approximately 80,000 items have been digitized thus far, resulting in approximately 210,300 images in the digital collection. The digitization significantly expanded research access to primary source materials for scholars and students studying the civil rights movement. Learn more about this collection [here](#).

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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.