



**For Immediate Release**  
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### **LDF Issues Statement on Critical U.S. Supreme Court Ruling in Capital Case Regarding Federal Due Process and Texas's Post-Conviction DNA Statute**

Today, the United States Supreme Court [issued a ruling](#) in *Rodney Reed v. Bryan Goertz*, reversing lower court rulings that had closed the courthouse doors on an effort by Rodney Reed, a Black man on death row in Texas, to access DNA evidence that could demonstrate his innocence. After being denied access to post-conviction DNA testing by Texas state courts, for a crime he likely did not commit, Mr. Reed filed suit in federal court under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 arguing that the Texas courts had interpreted their state's post-conviction DNA testing statute to deny his due process rights under the federal constitution. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed Mr. Reed's suit without considering the merits, incorrectly determining that the statute of limitations for filing such claims had passed.

In July 2022, the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) filed an [amicus brief](#) urging the Supreme Court to reverse the judgment of the Fifth Circuit, arguing that Mr. Reed was wrongfully denied post-conviction DNA testing that could help prove his innocence and underscoring the relationship between racial discrimination and wrongful convictions.

"We applaud the Supreme Court's decision to reverse the Fifth Circuit's judgment. The Court's decision will allow Rodney Reed the opportunity to pursue his federal constitutional claim to access critical evidence in his capital case," said Janai S. Nelson, LDF President and Director-Counsel. "Today's ruling signifies the vital role of due process in our democracy. Our criminal-legal system has a responsibility to abide by principles of fundamental fairness, and Mr. Reed's case raises grave concerns of racial bias causing an innocent man to be convicted and sentenced to death. It is critical that the DNA evidence that could establish his innocence be appropriately considered."

"We commend the Supreme Court for applying well-established principles about when the clock starts running for statute of limitations purposes, which will allow a federal court to review the merits of Rodney Reed's constitutional claim," said Adam Murphy, LDF Assistant Counsel. "There are serious questions about the validity of Mr. Reed's conviction and the role that racial bias may have played in the process. Those questions must not be left unaddressed, especially because death penalty cases demand heightened reliability."

"DNA evidence has helped to free hundreds of wrongfully convicted people — the overwhelming majority of whom have been Black and other people of color," said Catherine Logue, Policing Fellow at LDF. "Today's decision means that Mr. Reed is now one step closer to being able to test the crime scene evidence, which means that we are one step closer to getting to the truth behind a tragic case where the objective evidence of guilt points away from Mr. Reed."

Mr. Reed was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a white woman, Stacy Stites, despite considerable evidence that the victim's fiancé was the actual perpetrator. The prosecution's case ultimately relied on one piece of evidence: a small amount of sperm connecting Mr. Reed to Ms. Stites. At trial, the defense presented evidence that Mr. Reed and the victim were romantically involved. But the prosecution told the all-white jury, which ultimately convicted Mr. Reed, that the prospect of their being romantically linked was "preposterous." In fact, multiple witnesses who had no connection to Mr. Reed but who knew Ms. Stites confirmed that the two had a romantic relationship. Another police officer at the time of Ms. Stites's murder swore that her fiancé complained to him in the weeks leading up to the crime that she was involved with a Black man. Following his conviction, Mr. Reed requested DNA testing of several pieces of evidence from the crime scene — including the murder weapon — and was repeatedly denied.

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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.*