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LDF Issues Statement on the Convictions in the Murder of Ahmaud Arbery

Today, Travis McMichael was found guilty on all charges in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, including one count of malice murder, four counts of felony murder, two counts of aggravated assault, one count of false imprisonment, and one count of criminal attempt to commit a felony. One of his accomplices, Gregory McMichael, who is also Travis McMichael's father, was found guilty on all of the same charges except malice murder, while the third man convicted, William "Roddie" Bryan, was found guilty on all charges except one count of malice murder, felony murder, and aggravated assault.

In response, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) Associate Director-Counsel Janai S. Nelson issued the following statement:

"These convictions represent an important and necessary rebuke of lawlessness, vigilante violence, and white supremacy. Our hearts go out to the family and loved ones of Mr. Arbery who fought for and secured accountability for the loss of his life. While the men who murdered Arbery have been convicted for their horrifying crimes, these convictions will never be justice in the truest sense, as no conviction can be a substitute for Mr. Arbery's life.

"Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William Bryan hunted, trapped, and brutally killed Mr. Arbery. Two of them chased Mr. Arbery in a vehicle with a license plate featuring a Confederate flag, while another helped to prevent his escape. Mr. Arbery was unarmed, made no threats, and attempted to run away from his killers. His killing was wholly unjustified—a fact resoundingly recognized by the jury.

"We must not forget that what happened to Mr. Arbery on the day he was killed remained buried and obfuscated by local law enforcement and only became known as a result of public outcry and demands from the Arbery family. Then-District Attorney Jackie Johnson of Brunswick, who had previously employed Greg McMichael, reportedly directed officers to refrain from making an arrest. It took the release and sharing of a video depicting the deadly killing, sustained activism, and national attention for local government officials to act. The District Attorney was later arrested and indicted for obstructing a police officer and violating her oath as a public officer. In total, it took 74 days for Travis McMichael and Gregory McMichael to be arrested after they killed Mr. Arbery.

"The trial of Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William Bryan further highlights the challenges to equal citizenship for Black people that persist in this country, from the street to the courtroom. From the murder of Mr. Arbery for jogging while Black, to the selection of 11 white jurors and 1 Black juror which the Court stated appeared to have been 'intentional discrimination' but permitted

it because defense counsel offered a race-neutral explanation, to opposing counsel denigrating the presence of Black pastors in the public courtroom by claiming their presence ‘intimidated’ the jury, the defense counsel stating that peaceful protest outside of the courthouse was a ‘public lynching’ of the defendants, to the vile and dehumanizing description of Mr. Arbery by the defense, this trial underscored how discrimination continues to infect our legal system. Even the basis provided by defense counsel for the McMichael’s and Bryan’s purported ‘citizens’ arrest’ was a law rooted in deputizing civilians to protect and preserve a system that enslaved Black people. In the face of today’s positive verdicts, the trial of Mr. Arbery’s killers nonetheless crystalized ongoing injustices that pervade our criminal legal system and often deny accountability to far too many victims of racial violence.

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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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