



**For Immediate Release**  
**April 20, 2020**

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## **U.S. Supreme Court Rules That State Juries Must Require Unanimous Verdicts for Conviction**

Today, the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff in *Ramos v. Louisiana*, establishing that the Sixth Amendment’s guarantee of a unanimous jury verdict applies to the states through the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), which filed an amicus brief in this case in June 2019, applauds the Court’s decision.

“Unanimous juries are a critical protection against injustice in criminal jury trials. They ensure that all jurors have a voice and a meaningful vote in the deliberative process,” said LDF President and Director-Counsel Sherrilyn Ifill. “The reality of historical and ongoing racial discrimination makes unanimous juries particularly essential to the legitimacy of trials in the American justice system. The Supreme Court’s decision today marks a step forward in the long road to ensuring an unbiased jury system, which is essential for protecting our democracy.”

While most states require jury unanimity as a matter of state law, Louisiana (up until 2018) and Oregon permit convictions by non-unanimous juries in most cases. Louisiana’s non-unanimous jury rule was one of a number of provisions adopted by the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1898 for the specific purpose of entrenching white supremacy in the State. The Convention’s drafters reasoned that allowing convictions by non-unanimous juries would limit the influence of any Black citizens who were able to overcome discriminatory barriers and serve on a jury.

Research shows that this provision has had discriminatory impacts. For example, Black jurors in Louisiana are 2.5 times more likely to be in dissent on non-unanimous jury convictions than their white counterparts. LDF’s amicus brief highlighted the recent experiences of two African-American jurors who voted to acquit a defendant in a racially-charged case without persuasive evidence, but were overruled by the remaining jurors, all of whom were white.

“An effective and fairly functioning jury is critical to our democracy. Louisiana’s rule that allowed for non-unanimous juries was adopted for a racially discriminatory purpose in

1898, and it continued to discriminate against Black defendants and Black jurors until it was repealed in 2018,” said Kristen A. Johnson, Assistant Counsel at LDF. “By holding that the Sixth Amendment unanimity rule applies to state jury trials, the Court has ensured the integrity of our juries and thereby our democracy.”

LDF has worked to combat racism in our justice system, including juror discrimination and the disproportionate and targeted arrests and convictions of members of communities of color, for decades. In 1985, LDF argued before the United States Supreme Court in *Batson v. Kentucky*, a case which established that the exclusion of jurors based solely on their race is a violation of the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments. The case created a new legal standard and opportunity to challenge racial discrimination in jury selection. Until both Black defendants and Black jurors are afforded equal protection under the law, LDF will continue to hold courts accountable for allowing racial bias into judicial proceedings.

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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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