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LDF Media

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Thurgood Marshall Institute to Collect, Share Oral Histories and Digitize Archival Material from LDF's 83 Years Defending Civil Rights

Today the Legal Defense Fund (LDF) announced *Sharing Our History, Informing Our Present, Envisioning Our Future*, a new archives initiative led by the Thurgood Marshall Institute. The initiative will encompass a collection of oral histories and first-person stories from key civil rights figures, including lawyers and clients from past cases, as well as a digitization program to enhance the preservation of LDF's archival records. The project will also feature a platform for members of the public to access archival information related to LDF's history of advancing racial justice and the evolution of this country's multi-racial democracy.

Through in-depth interviews, the oral history component of the project will document the strategies, stories, and people behind LDF's history and explore the personal accounts and unwritten context behind its efforts for over 80 years to defend and advance the full dignity and citizenship of Black people in America. The oral histories associated with the initiative will be created in collaboration with the University of North Carolina's Southern Oral History Program, one of the nation's oldest oral history programs.

"It is immensely gratifying to announce the establishment of LDF's newest initiative within the Thurgood Marshall Institute, which will leverage LDF's robust and rich archival collection to reach more people, ultimately expanding public education about our nation's history," said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson. "LDF's archives are one of its most cherished and valuable resources, and we are honored to share this treasure in service of knowledge. Through the preservation and sharing of history — via stories, records, and artifacts — we have a unique opportunity to learn about and continue to build on the legacy of those who came before us."

"Within the work of *Sharing Our History, Informing Our Present, Envisioning Our Future*, not only do we have the opportunity to make significant headway in our archival tools and collections — we will illuminate the past to better inform our future," said LDF's Senior Deputy Director of Strategic Initiatives Anne Houghtaling. "This work honors the past and deepens our engagement throughout the broader community."

The core of LDF's archival collection are briefs, pleadings, research, and correspondence related to the more than 6,000 cases LDF has litigated since its founding in 1940. The LDF Archives, managed by a team of dedicated archivists, inform LDF's work by providing the facts and context for the ongoing fight for racial justice in America today. LDF's archival collection also includes advocacy materials; correspondence; photographs; videography; administrative materials; as well as documentation of LDF's sustained efforts in community organizing and social science research.

The initiative, launched with the generous support of the Mellon Foundation, will operate independently but in parallel with an ongoing project to expand access to the collection of early LDF records at the Library of Congress.

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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.*