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Nov. 4, 2003

Cornell President Lehman receives NAACP National Equal Justice Award

By Linda Grace-Kobas

ITHACA, N.Y. -- Cornell University President Jeffrey S. Lehman will be honored Nov. 6 by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc. (LDF) with a 2003 National Equal Justice Award for his role in the successful defense of the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action policy before the U.S. Supreme Court. The award will be presented at a gala dinner at the Hilton New York in New York City. Emmy award-winning actress Alfre Woodard will be mistress of ceremonies at the event.

The Supreme Court last June upheld the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action policy in a decision widely hailed as a landmark in the law of higher education. Lehman served as dean of the University of Michigan Law School from 1994 to July 1, 2003, when he assumed the presidency of Cornell. During his tenure as dean, he helped shape the legal argument for universities' freedom to consider race as a limited factor in the admissions process in order to achieve meaningful levels of racial integration. When the Supreme Court upheld the Law School's admissions policy, Lehman said, "The question is no longer whether affirmative action is legal; it is how to hasten the day when affirmative action is no longer needed."

The event also will honor University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman, Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger (former president of the University of Michigan) and General Motors, a key corporate supporter of affirmative action policies. In a news release announcing the honorees, LDF President and Director-Counsel Elaine R. Jones called the Michigan cases a part of the continuing quest to realize the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision that overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine of legally sanctioned discrimination. LDF founder Thurgood Marshall led the legal team that secured the landmark ruling.

"The Legal Defense Fund is pleased to recognize Mary Sue Coleman, Lee Bollinger, Jeffrey Lehman and General Motors for their steadfast support of a diverse student body and the principle of educational equity enshrined in *Brown*," Jones said. "They held open the door of opportunity that LDF pried open 50 years ago, ensuring black and brown students continued access to the nation's institutions of higher education." At Cornell, Lehman is a tenured professor of law in the Cornell Law School. He earned his A.B. at Cornell in 1977 and his J.D. degree from the University of Michigan Law School (where he was editor in chief of *Michigan Law Review*) in 1981. He also earned a master's degree in public policy from the University of Michigan Institute of Public Policy Studies in 1981.

He clerked for Chief Judge Frank M. Coffin of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit and for Associate Justice John Paul Stevens of the U.S. Supreme Court. He also was an associate with the Washington, D.C., chartered law firm of Caplin & Drysdale, where he prepared the Supreme Court *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of 72 Nobel laureates and 17 state academies of science in *Edwards v. Aguillard*. In that case, the court's decision in 1987 struck down the state of Louisiana's "Creationism Act," which forbade the teaching of the theory of evolution in public elementary and

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secondary schools unless accompanied by instruction in the theory of "creation science."

In 1987, Lehman joined the faculty of the University of Michigan Law School, where he taught law and public policy. In 1995, the *National Law Journal* named him one of 40 "Rising Stars in the Law." He is immediate past president of the American Law Deans Association.