This Black History Month, LDF Revisits Key Milestones in Civil Rights

This year marks the anniversaries of two major milestones in Black history: the 150th anniversary of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the 50th anniversary of 1968—a year of tremendous loss, but also several key advances in civil rights.

The 14th Amendment guarantees all citizens equal protection of the laws, making it one of the most powerful amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But it is especially powerful for African Americans who, in 1868, would finally receive rights and responsibilities assured through full citizenship. Following Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era ushered in decades of government-sanctioned discrimination that prevented the full realization of the Amendment’s power. Yet, the 14th Amendment made some of the landmark Supreme Court decisions of 1968 possible.

A signature civil rights victory of 1968 was the passage of the Fair Housing Act. But that landmark legislation came at a steep cost – after months of stalling, it was passed by Congress in response to the urban unrest in cities across the country following the April 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“This month, as we celebrate and honor Black history, let us be reminded that 150 years after the ratification of the 14th Amendment, the promise of racial equality and justice remains unfulfilled. Indeed, the events of the past year has shown us just how far away we remain from achieving that goal. The progress we have made has come as a result of hard work, sacrifice, bold strategies, and the determination and vision of ordinary people to live as full citizens in our country,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF). “This year LDF will kick off a series of convenings focused on the unfinished work of the 14th amendment. We will also be engaged in a rigorous effort to explore the lessons we must draw from the challenges of 1968.”

South African anti-apartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu once remarked “the past does not lie down quietly.” This Black History Month we actively seek to stir up our past – the triumphs, tragedies, the lessons – as we chart our way forward at this challenging moment in our country.

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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 and 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.