

What can grassroots' organization do to protect the legacy
and importance of fair housing given today's political climate?

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Any discussion of the legacy of civil rights and fair housing in today's political climate must begin with a review of the earliest days of our nation. America has a long history of treating people differently based on race, national origin, gender and more. In its first century, America went to war with itself to, at least conceptually, prohibit slavery, end segregation and require that all citizens of the United States enjoy the same protections and rights guaranteed by the Constitution, regardless of race. Although full freedom for African Americans would not be realized (at least on paper) until the 1960s, in the 1860s the Constitution was amended to eliminate discrimination that had been permitted. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) officially abolished slavery, the Fourteenth (1868) granted citizenship, and the Fifteenth (1870) established the right to vote.

Following these post-Civil War laws and Constitutional amendments, the United States remained a country of discrimination and segregation. In the first half of the 20th century, laws were passed by local governments to keep people in their place and restricting property ownership based on race, religion and national origin. Those who harbored bigoted sentiments dug in their heels and resisted demands for equal treatment under the law. Ultimately, demand for integration and equality were buoyed by Supreme Court decisions rejecting such concepts as "separate but equal" and the Civil Rights initiatives of the 60's were instrumental in breaking down these laws of segregation. Martin Luther King Jr. and those who joined and followed him are examples of grassroots leaders dedicated to breaking barriers and establishing an acceptance of diversity and integration.

Today, government policies and business practices that negatively impact the rights of the LGBT population, people of certain nationalities, rights of women and more, are being challenged by the "resistance" movement. Clearly, this is an "heir" to the grassroots efforts and legacy of the civil rights movement that grew strong in the 50's and 60's. One grassroots opportunity involves the Fair Housing Act principal of Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, initially established by the Act and recently advanced by the Obama administration. With over 14 million people – including over 4 million children – living in communities of concentrated poverty, the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule (AFFH), is designed to eradicate growing poverty and inequality. Under AFFH, state, public housing authority, and jurisdictional leaders receive support from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) towards creating diversity in housing, health, transportation, education, environmental and economic development. To be successful, this process anticipates input from the community and faith-based groups and individuals. This undertaking has a goal of transforming disinvested, high-poverty neighborhoods and providing the opportunity for all who choose, to move into accessible, affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods. A process, known as the Assessment of Fair Housing, offers guidance, data and mapping resources, and technical assistance to help identify and overcome persistent challenges related to disparities in opportunity and fair housing choice.

In 2017, grassroots responses to discrimination include the recent resistance to anti-woman rhetoric, nationalism and anti-middle east policies and sentiments, the persistent challenges to the rights of the LGBTQ communities and more. Today, the issues facing fair housing include, but go beyond race. America continues to confront prejudice in housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability and familial status (federally protected classes under the Fair Housing Act), but additionally, landlords and other housing providers discriminate against housing consumers based on a host of reasons; including gender identity, source of income (retirement benefits, housing assistance vouchers) and more. It remains up to all Americans to resist and fight discrimination to finally establish sustainable and diverse communities where everyone has the opportunity to live and coexist together.