Participants Look Back on Historic Brown v. Board of Education

By Hayley Miller

Marking the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark case in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state-imposed racial segregation in public schools violates the Fourteenth Amendment, Columbia and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) will host a yearlong celebration in honor of the ruling.

The inaugural event, which took place on Monday, Feb. 2, provided an opportunity for those who worked on this historic case to explore its origins and scope, and to evaluate its success. It brought together Mrs. Thurgood Marshall, the widow of the attorney who represented the plaintiff in the case, and lawyers who played integral roles in the case, including Hon. Robert L. Carter, Law ’41 LLM.; Law Professor Jack Greenberg, CC ’45; Law ’48; Judge Louis H. Pollak; and Judge Jack B. Weinstein, Law ’48; Judge Louis H. Pollak; and Judge Jack B. Weinstein, Law ’48, a longtime member of the faculty. Oliver Hill and Judge Constance Baker Motley, Law ’46, also participated via live video conference.

“When I look back, I do not simply happen,” said Columbia Law Professor Francis Deng, former United Nations representative on internal displacement. “I am part of that historical movement.”

Deng discussed the thorny political issues of humanitarian crises.

Hon. Robert L. Carter addressed the impact of the Brown ruling.

Dean David Leebrohn in his opening remarks, “This case, probably the most important constitutional law case of the last hundred years, is a demonstration of just how much talented and passionate lawyers can achieve.”

In a second event, to be held on Feb. 10, President Bill Clinton will deliver an address to Law School students and faculty at Low Library. He will be preceded by President Lee C. Bollinger, Law ’71, a noted First Amendment scholar, and Greenberg, who was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001 by Clinton for his enduring work in defense of civil rights.

Future anniversary events will explore topics such as “America Before Brown,” “Equality,” “The Mystery of Brown” and “Fairness in Equality in Criminal Justice.”

Speakers will range from academicians to civil rights leaders to world leaders.

The unanimous Brown v. Board of Education ruling declared that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” Greenberg and other Law School graduates and faculty were among the attorneys who represented the African-American plaintiffs. The Supreme Court also ruled that school segregation in the District of Columbia violated the Fifth Amendment, which guarantees due process of law.

From the perspective of the 21st century, it’s difficult to imagine that in 1950 in Topeka, Kansas, Linda Brown, then a 7-year-old girl, was denied admission to elementary school because of the color of her skin. She had to cross railway tracks to catch a bus that would take more than an hour to transport her to the nearest school for black students. The NAACP’s LDF, which was founded and led by

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Diplomats, Scholars Convene at SIPA to Address Humanitarian Crises

By Katherine Moore

During the next month, leading diplomats and scholars will gather at SIPA to take on some of the most complex questions in international affairs: the thorny political, military, conceptual and practical issues involved in mapping out the future of humanitarian efforts in modern war-torn countries.

Drawing past international community responses to humanitarian crises in recent years, four panels will lay the groundwork for a larger conference on March 4. At a time when world attention is focused on finding viable humanitarian and reconstruction solutions in volatile areas, the conference will move the dialogue forward on effective policies post-9/11.

What are the new norms and standards in humanitarian operations? Is the impact of defense interests on U.S. strategies and operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq what we should be doing? How do policymakers evaluate the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions? Which is more viable: coherence or neutrality? These are just some of the questions for debate.

An opening workshop, Thurs., Jan. 29, featured Francis Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, and Columbia faculty members Coralie Bryant, Fida Adely and Jacqueline Klopp discussing the relationships among poverty, displacement, forced migration, violence and war.

Deng, a former ambassador from Sudan to Canada, opened the series with a moving description of the plight of world’s internally displaced. Not deemed refugees, because they have not crossed international borders, the 25 million casualties of internal conflict and communal violence are uprooted in their own countries and cast out by their own governments.

“In [50] countries, torn apart by war and gross violations of human rights that lead to displacement, there are severe cleavages and crises of national identity,” explained Deng. “The people affected are perceived to be enemies of their governments... not citizens who merit assistance... but rather [are] neglected and maybe persecuted” by those who should be sworn to protect them. Deng outlined the complexities of coming to the aid of these victims when governments put up roadblocks to international help.

Subsequent workshops in February will address the other roots of current humanitarian crises, including the lack of security for aid workers, failed economic policies, poor governance and public health considerations.

Participants are drawn from interdisciplinary fields across the university and the international community, including: Lisa Anderson, SIPA dean; Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia’s Earth Institute; Julia Taft, assistant administrator and director, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UN Development Program; Ronald Waldman.

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