

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

May 2014

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”
--Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in a speech to the Medical Committee for Human Rights, 1966

OCR News

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services joins in celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On June 20, 2014, HHS, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, will jointly host “From Segregation to Integration: Celebrating Landmark Anniversaries,” a day commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the 15th Anniversary of the *Olmstead* decision. We hope you will visit <http://www.hhs.gov/live> to view a webcast of the event.



PHOTO: Chinese children posing on the steps of San Francisco's Immigrant Development Center, circa 1970.

Source: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

This Month in Civil Rights History

May 17, 1954 – The Supreme Court unanimously rules “separate but equal” as unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*.¹

May 6, 1960 – President Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1960.²

May 13, 1964 – Senators Dirksen and Humphrey, with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, agree to sponsor a “clean” civil rights bill to get it out of filibuster; that bill would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³

May 13, 1966 – Federal funding is denied to 12 Southern school districts for violations of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.²

May 22, 2002 – A Birmingham, Alabama jury convicts Ku Klux Klan member in the 1963 murder of four girls in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.²

Sources

¹ The Leadership Conference, *Brown v. Board of Education*, CIVILRIGHTS.ORG, <http://www.civilrights.org/education/brown>.

² *Today in Civil Rights History*, HISTORYORB.COM, <http://www.historyorb.com/politics/political-movements/civil-rights>.

³ Dirksen Congressional Center, *Major Features of the Civil Rights Law*, CONGRESSLINK, http://www.congresslink.org/print_basics_histmats_civilrights_64text.htm.

Spotlight on Language Access and Equality: *Lau v. Nichols* (1974)

In honor of Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, HHS spotlights the Supreme Court's decision in *Lau v. Nichols*,¹ a class-action lawsuit brought on behalf of non-English-speaking Chinese students in the San Francisco school system. Although the students only spoke Chinese, the school's policy was to provide instruction only in English and require proficiency in English prior to graduation from grade 12. The Court found that this policy made “a mockery of public education” by denying students a “meaningful opportunity to participate in the educational program.” The Court stated that “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum, for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.” Thus, the Court confirmed that discrimination prohibited by Title VI includes methods of program administration that have a disproportionate and adverse-impact on persons of a particular national origin. Importantly, while applied in an educational setting under Title VI, *Lau*'s reach extends to any federally assisted program or activity. As a result, *Lau* has provided a fundamental foundation for helping to ensure federally assisted health and human services programs provide language assistance services to limited English proficient individuals at no cost.

¹ *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 653 (1974).



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