

Marchers

(Continued from Page 1) anniversary, but we really are not going to be celebrating."

While some victories will be celebrated on the anniversary date, King says, "We really cannot celebrate because the masses of Black people are suffering and struggling."

What a difference four decades make.

The elder King was surrounded by thousands of dedicated protesters, who demanded change and won passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

But, the son—who was 10 years old when his father was assassinated on April 4, 1968—is witnessing less of a commitment to civil rights at the federal level, underutilized Black voter power, and a Black community that is not so quick to take to the streets to secure human rights.

"You could say the ball was dropped in '68 and it never really has been picked back up," says King.

Saturday's commemoration is aimed at recovering the momentum of the 1960s.

The SCLC is joining more than 500 organizations at the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the march. On Friday, the day before the march, there will be a leadership meeting, a poetry reading and prayer vigil.

Organizers are calling the event a "rolling mobilization," hoping that local demonstrations and voter registration drives will continue through next year's presidential election.

"The goal is to energize and mobilize more people than we ever have mobilized before for the Nov. 2 election in 2004," says King.

NAACP President and Chief Executive Officer Kweisi Mfume will be part of that mobilization.

"I hope that people will look at the march and be forced to look at the last 40 years, that they see it as a historical event that says to us while we've been out in the wilderness for the last 40 years, that we can't just look at that time and not assess where we've come from," says Mfume, a former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. "We've got to be able to ask, 'Are things better in this area or that area? And if they're not, why not?'"

Statistics show that in some areas, Blacks are close to reaching the Promised Land. In others, however,

they may as well be singing, "We Shall Overcome."

For example:

- The number of Black elected officials across the country increased from approximately 300 in 1965 to 9,040 in 2000. Still, that's only 1.8 percent of all elected officials;

- In 1964, 58.5 percent of the Black voting-age population cast ballots in the presidential election, compared to 53.5 percent in 2000, repre-

senting a drop of 5 percent. However, Whites voted 70.7 percent in 1964 but only 56.4 percent in 2000, a decrease of 14.3 percentage points, nearly three times the decline of Blacks;

- In 1972, the percentage of unemployed African-Americans was 10.4 percent. Currently, the unemployment rate for African-Americans is 11.1 percent. White unemployment remains around 5.5 percent;

- In 1974, the percentage of Black families living below the poverty level was about 32 percent and White families were at 8 percent. Currently, the percentage of Black families living below the poverty line has dropped to about 27 percent as the percentage of White families in poverty has remained unchanged;

- Since 1964, the high school graduation rate for Blacks has increased from 20

percent to 70 percent. The college graduation rate jumped from 5 percent to 15 percent. The White graduation rate rose from 50 percent to 82 percent over that same period. At the college level, the rate has increased from 10 percent to 28 percent;

- From 1967 to 2001, the median income for Black families went from \$26,570 to \$43,938. In the same time period, the median income of White families grew from

\$40,943 to \$69,856.

"Today, more than ever before, all of the organizations and leaders need to come together the same way we came together 40 years ago with a single message, a unified message," says Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.

At the time, Lewis was chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He is the only surviving speaker from the original march.

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This publication was supported by Grant/Cooperative Agreement Number U50/CCU917255-02 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's REACH 2010 Initiative. REACH stands for Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health. These contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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