

## **Black History Month: Take stock of how far we have come, pledge to do better**

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Richard Green



Telsula C. Morgan

As Black History Month winds down, we are reminded that we stand on the shoulders of giants that came before us and fought for us to be where we are today.

As a Black man from Louisville, Kentucky, and a Black woman, from Tallahassee, Florida, neither one of us envisioned that we would wind up in a statewide environmental, governmental and land-use law firm. While the paths to how we arrived here are different, our experiences at the firm are the same. Neither one of us were introduced to the practice of environmental and land-use law during

our law school careers. Nor did we have parents that were attorneys, grow up in homes on or near the water, or have family or friends that were engineers, developers or land-use planners. Instead, we found a firm that drew us in with its motto “We See Things Differently.” We found a firm that took a chance on us and provided us with an opportunity to learn and grow within a practice area where there are very few people of color. We found a firm that values our unique perspectives and ways of engaging with clients. We found a firm that sees us.

This is not to say that our road in this practice area has come easily. Every day we are surrounded by colleagues, clients and consultants who do not look like us. As a result, it has sometimes been difficult to find our voice. And because we recognize those who came before us, we know that we represent more than just ourselves. Our unique perspectives and experiences deserve to be voiced, considered and represented as they often contribute to more thorough solutions for our clients.

That is why Black History Month is such an important time of the year. Not only do we get to look back and reflect on what so many Black Americans have sacrificed and accomplished, but we’re also reminded of how far we have come. However, we still know that there is work to be done. Let this Black History Month serve as an opportunity for us to consider ways we can do better.

That starts by being intentional. Expand your recruiting efforts to historically Black colleges and universities. Invite a colleague of color out and introduce them to people within your field, especially where people of color are underrepresented. Volunteer to speak at a local school about unique and often ignored practice areas and explain why they are important. It is these small but meaningful actions that create a sense of partnership and trust within our community.

While we can never repay those who came before us, we are committed to continuing to make a difference. We all get better when different voices and perspectives have a seat at the table. We hope that our contributions to this area of law continue to make a difference and also make room for someone else to pull up a chair beside us.