

After 18 Years, ADL's Amanda Susskind Moves to the Constitutional Rights Foundation

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Over the past few years of her 18-year tenure as the Los Angeles Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Amanda Susskind said she began noticing a subversion of the democratic process throughout the nation. The trend, she said, may have been brought into focus by the current administration, but it certainly didn't start there.

Nonetheless, when trends that she considers “existential threats” rear their heads, the Berkeley-raised Susskind runs toward the conflict with a mindset geared toward bringing about meaningful change.

“The thought that there has been this shift is what wakes me up in the middle of the night and makes me want to leap out of bed the next morning to go to work,” she said. “What am I doing to fix this? What am I doing to give back?”

Susskind will start answering those questions this week as she kicks off her new position as the president of the Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF). Through curriculum-based programs, the 58-year-old nonprofit works to educate and empower youth around the principles of democracy.

In certain ways, the position at CRF will have demands that tap the same skill set she used at the ADL. Raising funds and awareness are a perpetual challenge for any nonprofit. The fact that CRF is well known in the legal community and uses lawyers as volunteers and consultants to develop many of its programs puts Susskind — a former public policy and environmental law attorney — on comfortable ground.

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“The challenge — and I hope I say this with utter respect for everything that has come before me — is that not enough people know about the CRF,” Susskind said. “Unlike the ADL or the American Civil Liberties Union, it doesn’t seem to be as much of a household name. In current times, when this is a topic on everybody’s mind, it feels like the opportunity is there to bring a little more awareness and show how you can be involved in the cause.

“CRF has a great record of responding to the moment,” she continued, “whether it’s the (1992) riots after the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King, to the moment we’re in now, combating systemic racism in police forces. These are opportunities for civic engagement by high schoolers through CRF programs. There has to be a certain nimbleness to respond to whatever the issue is of the day.”

During her nearly two decades at the ADL, Susskind was nothing if not nimble as well as creative. Hailed as a first-rate bridge-builder, Susskind opened up partnerships between the ADL and new sets of community organizations and leaders across the entertainment, sports, high-tech, finance and fashion industries. She takes pride in the establishment of a Latino-Jewish roundtable and of the LA For Good steering committee that united diverse Los Angeles groups in an effort to combat hate. When she arrived at the ADL in 2002, the Los Angeles office had a staff of 36 and was raising \$2.1 million per year. By the time she left this past June, a staff of 21 was raising \$6.5 million.

“I was proud as I built those connectors to different sectors of the community and diversified the fundraising base, but I was also able to lift up and diversify the message itself,” Susskind said. “It’s all related to building up an organization’s profile, which is what I want to do at CRF.”

At CRF, Susskind succeeds Marshall Croddy, who had led the organization since 2013. Croddy had been scheduled to retire after the organization’s May gala, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of the event and changed the timeline of his retirement. Although the CRF offices have undergone some recent remodeling, the staff will largely be working remotely.

But whether Susskind will be doing her CRF work in person or on the other end of a Zoom call, the nonprofit is delighted to have her aboard, said CRF Board Chair Kimberly Dunne.

“The fact that in a time of COVID we were able to find somebody of her experience in the educational arena with a focus on equity and issues and rights and values embedded in the Constitution, we couldn’t be more thrilled,” Dunne said.

As a child and grandchild of Holocaust survivors, Susskind is gratified to have led an organization that brings education and awareness to new generations. She wishes her successor, Jeffrey Abrams, and the ADL team continued success. The organization’s mission, she said, is no less urgent today than it was when she arrived.

“Working with the Museum of Tolerance, the Museum of the Holocaust and the Shoah Foundation, we have been working consecutively every year for over 30 years to bring Holocaust education to high school teachers and even more diverse stakeholders,” Susskind said. “Teaching about the Holocaust is one of the best antidotes to Holocaust denial. Give people the facts.”