

Civil Rights Act of 1964

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COMMEMORATING THE ANNIVERSARY

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2, 1964. The Act prohibited discrimination in public places, provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities and made employment discrimination illegal based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The document was the most sweeping civil rights legislation since Reconstruction.

As we commemorate the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, we have an opportunity to teach and learn more about the history of discrimination and racism in the United States, the struggle for civil rights, the Civil Rights Act, and the strides we have made as well as the work that remains to be done.

Some of your students may not know that, despite the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that school segregation was unconstitutional, in the 1960s, in many communities in the United States, African American and white people were still segregated in schools, public transportation and restaurants. Discrimination prevented many African Americans from receiving equal consideration for employment and education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought to legally prohibit and punish these injustices. And while many leaders at that time reminded the public that laws alone cannot shape "the hearts and

minds” of people, the power of government through laws is critical to bring about change.

Download "[7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary](#)" to help you teach about the Civil Rights Act in your classroom.

BACKGROUND

The [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson fifty years ago on July 2, 1964. The Act banned discrimination in public facilities including private companies offering public services like lunch counters, hotels and theaters; provided for the integration of schools and other public facilities and made employment discrimination illegal based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The document was the most sweeping civil rights legislation since Reconstruction.

Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that school segregation was unconstitutional, in the 1960s, in many communities in the United States, African American and white people were still segregated in schools, public transportation and restaurants. Discrimination prevented many African Americans from receiving equal consideration for employment and education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought to legally prohibit and punish these injustices. And while many leaders at that time reminded the public that laws alone cannot shape “the hearts and minds” of people, the power of government through laws is a critical step to bring about change.

The road to passing the Civil Rights Act was a bumpy one. For decades after Reconstruction, Congress did not pass a single civil rights act. With protests throughout the south including one in Birmingham where police tried to suppress nonviolent demonstrators with dogs and fire hoses, President John F. Kennedy decided to act. In June 1963, he proposed the most far reaching civil rights legislation to date, saying the U.S. “will not be fully free until all of its citizens are free.” Following Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, Martin Luther King,

Jr. continued to press for the bill as did newly inaugurated President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#).

The House approved the bill with bipartisan support but when it moved to the Senate, a seventy-five day filibuster ensued. Finally, the Senate voted 73–27 in favor of the bill and President Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964. Upon signing it, he said, “Americans of every race and color have died in battle to protect our freedom. Americans of every race and color have worked to build a nation of widening opportunities. Now our generation of Americans has been called on to continue the unending search for justice within our own borders. We believe that all men are created equal. Yet many are denied equal treatment.”

TEACHER PLANS AND RESOURCES

[60 Years Later: The Legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education*](#)

Teach students about the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and analyze the modern day “school-to-prison pipeline” and the opportunity gap that exist in our public schools using infographics. (*Grades 6-12*)

[Brown v. Board of Education](#)

Provides information, lessons and resources relevant to *Brown v. Board of Education* for use in the classroom.

[The Civil Rights Act of 1964: 7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary](#)

A variety of teaching strategies and resources to help you commemorate the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act with your students. (*Grades K-12*)

[Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Exploring the Promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* in Contemporary Times](#)

Through research, discussion, case study and role play, students are challenged to investigate whether segregation is a problem that we *once* lived with or *still* live with. This teaching unit provides factual history about school integration in the U.S. and aims to connect past to present, challenge students to reflect on their

own beliefs about diversity, and inspire social action in local schools and communities. (*Grades 9-12*)

[Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights: Relevancy for Today](#)

How far do we still need to go in order to achieve equality and full civil rights in the United States? Use this multi-grade curriculum unit to help students examine civil rights in the United States past and present.

[The Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights](#)

High school students explore voting restrictions today and gain insight into what can be done to preserve the right to vote as they learn about the historical struggle for voting rights and the Selma to Montgomery March.

[Books for Children about Racism](#)

Book that focus on the topic of racism that promote respect for diversity, teach about bias and prejudice and encourage social action.

[Books for Children about Civil Rights](#)

Book selections that explore human rights, social justice movements in history and youth and other activists.