

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and President Lyndon Johnson signed the legislation into law on July 2, 1964.

The act forbids segregation in schools and public places in America. Framework for the legislation started in the 1960 presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy.

He thought the United States must outlaw segregation because segregation was immoral. Kennedy was elected president in 1960. Approximately seventy percent of African Americans voted for Kennedy. They believed he would honor his campaign promise of civil rights reforms. During the first two years of his administration, however, Kennedy did not press for legislation to outlaw segregation.

Finally, Kennedy's Civil Rights bill came before the United States Congress in June 1963. Kennedy argued that segregation damaged African-American children. He noted that only half of all African-American students graduated from high school. Kennedy's bill was debated in Congress until Kennedy's assassination in November 1963.

After Kennedy's death, Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States. Many African Americans worried about the future of the Civil Rights Movement. Because Johnson's voting record in the Senate was not supportive of civil rights legislation, African Americans were wary. However, Johnson pledged to continue many of the programs Kennedy had started, including the passage of a civil rights act.

Although Johnson had many supporters when he presented this bill to the Senate, there were detractors. Richard Russell was one of them. He had served as a mentor when Johnson was a senator. Russell opposed the civil rights bill. He spoke out that he was unwilling to have whites and African Americans in school together. Russell believed the intermingling of the races to be detrimental to the United States. Many Southern senators supported his view. Russell organized these like-minded senators to filibuster the bill. This did not work, and the filibuster quickly fell apart. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed the Senate with a vote of 73 to 37.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbid discrimination in public places such as schools, restaurants, and clothing stores. African Americans were entitled to the same rights as their white counterparts. In addition, employers of businesses also had to give African Americans equal job opportunities. Rather than hiring a less-qualified white person, employers were required to examine all the candidates, regardless of skin color. They then picked the person best qualified for the job. Government agencies contracting projects also had to follow the new regulations. If it were proven company employees on a government project were guilty of discrimination, the company lost federal funds. This made it difficult to complete the project.

The act also made it easier for African Americans to vote in the South. Some states had developed literacy tests blacks were required to pass in order to vote. These tests were almost impossible to pass, and were only given to black voters. Because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, segregation became illegal in the United States.

After completing the Guided Reading, answer the following questions. Be sure to include textual evidence to support your responses.

1. When did John F. Kennedy express his support for a civil rights act? Why did he support it?
2. What did Kennedy say when presenting his plan for a civil rights bill before Congress in June 1963?
3. Why were many African Americans worried when Lyndon Johnson became president? How did he surprise them?
4. Who was one of Johnson's opponents during the attempted passage of the Civil Rights Act? What were this man's feelings on desegregation?
5. How did Southern senators try to delay or kill the Civil Rights Act? What was the result?

1. When did John F. Kennedy express his support for a civil rights act? Why did he support it?
Kennedy expressed support for a civil rights act during the 1960 Presidential Campaign. Kennedy believed segregation to be immoral.

2. What did Kennedy say when presenting his plan for a civil rights bill before Congress in June 1963?

Kennedy argued segregation harmed African-American children. In addition, Kennedy noted that only half of all African-American students finished high school.

3. Why were many African Americans worried when Lyndon Johnson became president? How did he surprise them?

Johnson was not known to support civil rights legislation when he was a senator. However, Johnson pledged to continue many of Kennedy's programs, including passing a civil rights act.

4. Who was one of Johnson's opponents during the attempted passage of the Civil Rights Act? What were this man's feelings on desegregation?

One of his opponents was Richard Russell. He was unwilling to require whites and African Americans to attend the same schools. He believed intermingling the races was harmful for America.

5. How did Southern senators try to delay or kill the Civil Rights Act? What was the result?

Russell organized other senators to filibuster the bill. However, the filibuster effort quickly disintegrated. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed with a 73 to 27 vote.

6. How did the Civil Rights Act change the United States?

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed segregation in the United States.