

Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965)

Eight and a half years after Rosa Parks refused to move from her seat on the bus, the Civil Rights Act was enacted on July 2, 1964. It is a landmark civil rights and labor law in the United States that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It prohibits unequal application of voter registration requirements, and racial segregation in schools, employment, and public accommodations.

Initially, powers given to enforce the act were weak, but these were supplemented during later years. Congress asserted its authority to legislate under several different parts of the United States Constitution, principally its power to regulate interstate commerce under Article One (section 8), its duty to guarantee all citizens equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment, and its duty to protect voting rights under the Fifteenth Amendment.



United States President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
Among the guests behind him is Martin Luther King Jr.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964...was a major victory of the black freedom struggle, but the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was its crowning achievement. The 1965 Act suspended literacy tests and other voter tests and authorized federal supervision of voter registration in states and individual voting districts where such tests were being used. African Americans who had been barred from registering to vote finally had an alternative to the courts. If voting discrimination occurred, the 1965 Act authorized the attorney general to send federal examiners to replace local registrars.

The Act had an immediate impact. Within months of its passage on August 6, 1965, one quarter of a million new black voters had been registered, one third by federal examiners. Within four years, voter registration in the South had more than doubled. In 1965, Mississippi had the highest black voter turnout--74%--and led the nation in the number of black leaders elected. In 1969, Tennessee had a 92.1% turnout; Arkansas, 77.9%; and Texas, 73.1%.