

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

In the United States, legislation is passed every year by Congress. But there are some pieces of legislation that are so influential that they are discussed for decades to come. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are pieces of legislation that are still commonly discussed today.

President John F. Kennedy proposed the Civil Rights bill in June of 1963 but was assassinated five months later in November of 1963. It was the next president, Lyndon B. Johnson, who supported the Civil Rights bill which passed and became The Civil Rights Act of 1964. This act was important because it banned segregation in public places. No longer could minorities be denied the right to accommodation in restaurants, hotels, parks, and courthouses.

Before this time, efforts to deny African Americans access to pools, drinking fountains, parks and lunch counters were common, particularly in the South. The bill also provided money to assist schools to desegregate. The act also said that if institutions continued to discriminate, they would no longer be able to receive federal funds.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has been expanded now to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was another very important piece of legislation that is still discussed today. The Voting Rights Act banned communities from preventing minorities from voting by using such things as literacy tests or poll taxes to suppress voting.

These pieces of legislation are termed “landmark” legislation, because they changed the American landscape so profoundly. Politicians and presidents do not come up with ideas for change on their own. These pieces of legislation were the result of many decades of advocacy by civil rights leaders and citizens who fought for change.