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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Civil Rights Act of 1964 | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_clark_james_gardner_1922_2007) | |
| |  | | --- | | http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/resources/uploads/civil_rights_act_1964.gif | | Public Domain, www.commons.wikimedia.org |   In an 11 June 1963 speech broadcast live on national television and radio, President [**John F. Kennedy**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_kennedy_john_fitzgerald_1917_1963/) unveiled plans to pursue a comprehensive civil rights bill in Congress, stating, ‘‘this nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free’’ (‘‘President Kennedy’s Radio-TV Address,’’ 970). King congratulated Kennedy on his speech, calling it ‘‘one of the most eloquent, profound and unequivocal pleas for justice and the freedom of all men ever made by any president’’ (King, 12 June 1963).  The earlier Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first law addressing the legal rights of African Americans passed by Congress since Reconstruction, had established the Civil Rights division of the Justice Department and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission to investigate claims of racial discrimination. Before the 1957 bill was passed Congress had, however, removed a provision that would have empowered the Justice Department to enforce the [***Brown v. Board of Education***](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_brown_v_board_of_education_of_topeka_kansas_347_us_483_1954_349_us_294_1955/) decision. [**A. Philip Randolph**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_randolph_a_philip_1889_1979/) and other civil rights leaders continued to press the major political parties and presidents [**Dwight D. Eisenhower**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_eisenhower_dwight_david_1890_1969/) and John F. Kennedy to enact such legislation and to outlaw segregation. The civil rights legislation that Kennedy introduced to Congress on 19 June 1963 addressed these issues, and King advocated for its passage.  In an article published after the 1963 [**March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_march_on_washington_for_jobs_and_freedom/) that posed the question, ‘‘What next?’’ King wrote, ‘‘The hundreds of thousands who marched in Washington marched to level barriers. They summed up everything in a word—NOW. What is the content of NOW? Everything, not some things, in the President’s civil rights bill is part of NOW’’ (King, ‘‘In a Word—Now’’).  Following Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, King continued to press for the bill as did newly inaugurated President [**Lyndon B. Johnson**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_johnson_lyndon_baines_1908_1973/). In his 4 January 1964 column in the [***New York Amsterdam News***](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_new_york_amsterdam_news/), King maintained that the legislation was ‘‘the order of the day at the great March on Washington last summer. The Negro and his compatriots for self-respect and human dignity will not be denied’’ (King, ‘‘A Look to 1964’’).  The bill passed the House of Representatives in mid-February 1964, but became mired in the Senate due to a filibuster by southern senators that lasted 75 days. When the bill finally passed the Senate, King hailed it as one that would ‘‘bring practical relief to the Negro in the South, and will give the Negro in the North a psychological boost that he sorely needs’’ (King, 19 June 1964). On 2 July 1964, Johnson signed the new Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law with King and other civil rights leaders present. The law’s provisions created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to address race and sex discrimination in employment and a Community Relations Service to help local communities solve racial disputes; authorized federal intervention to ensure the desegregation of schools, parks, swimming pools, and other public facilities; and restricted the use of literacy tests as a requirement for voter registration.  **Sources**  Carson et al., ed, *Eyes on the Prize*, 1991.  Kennedy, ‘‘President Kennedy’s Radio-TV Address on Civil Rights,’’ *Congressional Quarterly* (14 June 1963): 970–971.  King, ‘‘In a Word—Now,’’ *New York Times Magazine*, 29 September 1963.  King, ‘‘A Look to 1964,’’ *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 January 1964.  King, Statement on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 19 June 1964, MLKJP-GAMK.  King to Kennedy, 12 June 1963, DJG-GEU.  Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 2005. |