

## Civil Rights Act

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## Civil Rights Acts

Most of us are familiar with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But did you know that long before that landmark legislation, there were other **Civil Rights Acts** passed in the United States?

Below read the history of how Civil Rights have changed over time and discover why even today, these rights are only secured through our continued vigilance.



The Civil Rights Acts of 1866 (14 Stat. 27) and 1870 (16 Stat. 140) were enacted to give newly freed slaves the same rights under federal law as those afforded to non-slaves. Such rights were the rights to sue and be sued, the rights to own real and [PERSONAL PROPERTY](#), and the rights to testify and present evidence in legal proceedings. Serious questions existed, however, as to the constitutionality of the 1866 act and to whether Congress actually had authority to enact such a measure. Subsequent to the passage of the [FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT](#) in 1868, Congress reenacted the act pursuant to its power under the amendment to enforce the amendment through appropriate legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was, therefore, superseded by the [CIVIL RIGHTS](#) Act of 1870.

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In 1875 Congress passed a third Civil Rights Act (18 Stat. 336) in response to the refusal of many whites who owned public establishments, inns, railroads, and other facilities to make them equally available to blacks. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 prohibited [RACIAL DISCRIMINATION](#) in such places and guaranteed "full and equal enjoyment" of such places.

Violations of this act abounded and criminal prosecutions ensued. A number of convictions were appealed to the [SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES](#) which in 1883 declared the act unconstitutional in the [CIVIL RIGHTS CASES](#), 109 U.S. 3, 3 S. Ct. 18, 27 L. Ed. 835. The Court reasoned that the social rights that the act safeguarded were not civil rights and, therefore, Congress was powerless to legislate on the social conduct of private individuals. Following this decision, states began enacting [SEGREGATION](#) into various laws, the most notorious of which were the [JIM CROW LAWS](#). It took more than eighty years before Congress would again attempt to legislate in this area.

The Civil Rights Acts of 1957 represented congressional recognition that the federal government had to bring about an end to racial discrimination. The **CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION** was established and the laws guaranteed qualified voters the right to vote, regardless of their color. In the years 1964 to 1968 Congress enacted extensive and far-reaching legislation affording blacks equal status under the law, ranging from full and free enjoyment of public accommodations and facilities to the prohibition of racial discrimination in employment as well as transactions affecting housing in the United States.



The Civil Rights Act of 1991 granted to victims of unlawful discrimination the right to seek money damages, jury trials, and back pay.

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Civil rights are the freedoms and rights that a person has as a member of a community, state, or nation. In the U.S., these rights are guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution and acts of Congress.

Since the 1960s, many laws have been passed to guarantee civil rights to all Americans. But the struggle continues. Today, housing, education, and political issues are still major concerns—where many African-Americans still do not enjoy equality with other Americans.

[More on Civil Rights](#)