

Civil Rights Acts

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Civil Rights Act of 1866

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was passed to protect the rights of freed blacks in the South during Reconstruction. At this time, the Radical Republicans controlled Congress. When this act was passed it was used to counter the Black Codes former slave owners instituted in the South. Black Codes were passed to restrict the freed blacks and counter the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

President Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill because he thought blacks were not citizens of the United States. The Republicans overrode the veto. The act stated that “all persons born in the United States not subject to foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed” were citizens. Those who denied free blacks citizenship were subject to persecution. This act, however, did not say anything about segregation.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

This legislation outlawed segregation in American schools and public places. Although it was intended to help African Americans, the bill was amended prior to its passage to protect women and to include white citizens. This legislation protected the civil rights of all Americans. The bill also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

With the passage of this act, discrimination was prohibited in public facilities, government, and employment. It also invalidated the South’s Jim Crow laws. The Civil Rights Act makes it illegal to segregate the races in schools, housing, or employment. The federal government’s power to enforce the bill initially were strong, but were weakened in later years. The act also led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that eliminated the Southern poll tax and outlawed literacy tests.

Similarities

There were many similarities between the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Each was responsible for protecting the rights of African Americans in the United States. Southern politicians such as President Andrew Johnson in 1866 and Mississippi Senator James Eastland in 1964 strongly opposed the Civil Rights Acts. Both acts did not have an immediate impact when they were passed. Implementation of Jim Crow laws, unwritten laws in the South former slave owners enforced, followed the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1866 and effectively nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1866 after Reconstruction ended in 1877. In addition, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not immediately desegregate all schools and public places. Years passed before all were officially integrated, and more years passed before *de facto* segregation was affected.

