

Civil Rights Act

ANNCR: PASSING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT - on Today's Congressional Moment.

When President John Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963, civil rights leaders were unsure if his support of the civil rights movement would live on with his successor, Lyndon Johnson.

But on November 27, 1963, when Johnson addressed the Congress and the nation for the first time as President, he called for passage of the Civil Rights Act as a monument to the fallen Kennedy.

LBJ Audio clip: "(T)he ideas and the ideals which he so nobly represented, must and will be translated into effective action."

The heart of the Civil Rights Act states that African Americans could no longer be excluded from restaurants, hotels or any other public facilities. While the House of Representatives passed the measure, it was the Senate that had many worried. In the past, Senate filibusters had effectively killed nearly all civil rights legislation.

But Johnson, well-versed in Congressional procedure, along with key Senate supporters such as Hubert Humphrey and Everett Dirksen, artfully drafted the bill to avoid referral to an unsympathetic committee, and encouraged civil rights leaders to mount a massive lobbying campaign on the Capitol.

The strategy paid off, and in June the Senate voted to close debate. A few weeks later, it passed the most important piece of civil rights legislation in the nation's history, the Civil Rights Act. It was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2, 1964, following one of the longest debates in Senate history.

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