Civil Rights Act of 1964

Goals

By rephrasing two paragraphs from the act and analyzing a photo and an advertisement, students will learn about its main provisions and why those were considered controversial in 1964. Activities challenge them to take a side in the conflict between civil rights and property rights and explain their stance.

Central Questions

What did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 say and do? Why did some people oppose it?

Background Information

Congress had passed various civil right bills for almost a century before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. All the bills aimed to articulate and guarantee rights that were outlined in the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution. These passed just after the Civil War and aimed to ensure equal protection under the law and protect the right to vote for African Americans. They generally failed because they had loopholes and enforcement was left to state and local officials.

After the federal government abandoned the South in 1877, many states all over the country passed explicitly segregationist laws. In 1896, the US Supreme Court held up these laws in its *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. For decades, millions of African Americans were denied their basic civil rights.

Following World War II, Congress passed bills desegregating the military and interstate transportation. In 1954, the Supreme Court's unanimous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision overturned segregation in public schools. The much-publicized Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama launched Martin Luther King Jr. to national prominence, and the use of federal troops to desegregate Little Rock's Central High School in 1957 demonstrated a revival of federal interest in civil rights.

Progress was slow, however, and during the early 1960s, the Council of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized hundreds of sit-ins and other direct actions. Photos revealing inequality and violence flooded the news media.

In a televised address on June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy Jr. proposed a new and more explicit civil rights bill. After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson continued to lobby for the bill in Congress, where a cohort of key segregationist senators from the South filibustered for 75 days to stop it. They relented in June 1964, at the start of Freedom Summer, and Johnson ultimately signed it into law on July 2, 1964. Although strengthened and supplemented in subsequent years, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially made racial discrimination and segregation illegal.

Documents Used in This Lesson:

- Civil Rights Act of 1964, July 2, 1964 (excerpts). http://wihist.org/1wK5oK4
- 2. Restaurant owner Lester Maddox drives away black customer at gunpoint. http://wihist.org/1yATFNk
- "\$100 Billion Blackjack." http://wihist.org/10jkIUA

Questions

Document 1: Excerpts from the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

With a partner, restate each paragraph from the act in a short sentence of your own:

SEC. 201. (a) All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, and privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin... [such as] any inn, hotel, motel, ... any restaurant, cafeteria, lunchroom, lunch counter, soda fountain... any motion picture house, theater, concert hall, sports arena, stadium...

SEC. 202. All persons shall be entitled to be free, at any establishment or place, from discrimination or segregation of any kind on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin, [even] if such discrimination or segregation is or purports to be required by any law, statute, ordinance...

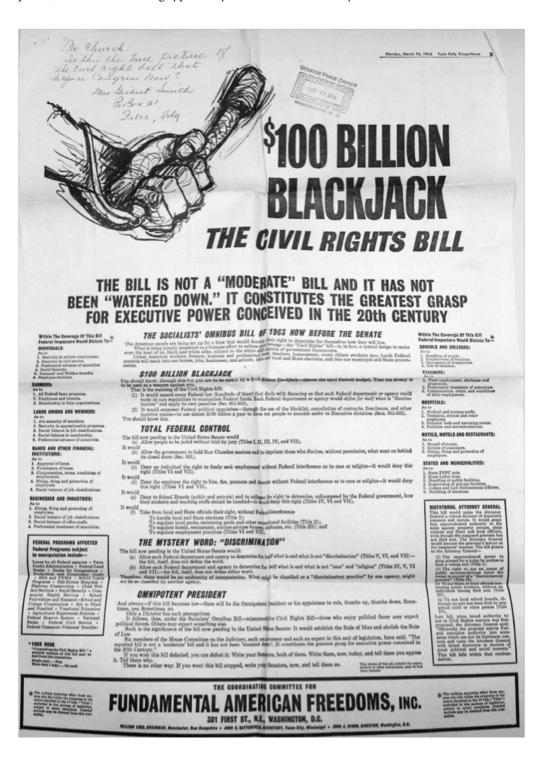
Document 2: Restaurant owner Lester Maddox drives a Black customer away at gunpoint.



If you can decide who gets to borrow your phone or your jacket, why can't he decide who to serve in his restaurant? What are some differences between these two situations?

Document 3: "\$100 Billion Blackjack." http://wihist.org/10jkIUA

This flier was distributed by mail and as a newspaper ad during the spring of 1964. Don't try to read the small print. Just focus on the big type that you can make out easily.



Questions

Document 3: "\$100 Billion Blackjack," spring 1964.

In a small group, agree on answers to the following questions. Don't try to read the small print. Just focus on the big type that you can make out easily.

- 1. Who produced and distributed this advertisement?
- 2. Were they for or against the Civil Rights Act? What images or words tell you that?
- 3. What's their main argument? Restate it in a phrase or sentence of your own.

4. Do you agree or disagree with their main point? Explain why.

5. Do you think the constitutional argument against civil rights may have just been a cover for racism? Why or why not?