

Civil Rights Act of 1964 Document Set

Document 1: King Letter

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling, for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. ...

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never."

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"

Source: Part of a letter written by Dr. Martin Luther King from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama on April 16, 1963. He wrote in response to a letter published in the local newspaper by a group of local religious leaders who criticized his protests. King had been arrested for leading a mass public demonstration in Birmingham. Found at

https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

Document 2: Kennedy Speech

Source: Video recording of a speech given by President Kennedy on June 11, 1963, telling about his civil rights goals. Found at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/televised-address-to-the-nation-on-civil-rights> (Transcript can be found at the same site)

Document 3: Political Cartoon

Political cartoon available through the Library of Congress showing Senators Hubert Humphrey as a baker and Frank Lausche in a business suit protecting a freshly baked loaf of bread, labeled Civil Rights Bill, from demonstrators and extremists. The caption reads, "IF THEY DON'T WATCH OUT THEY'RE GONNA RUIN IT!" (A freshly baked loaf of bread will "fall" or collapse if bumped or exposed to loud noises.)



Source: Political cartoon created by Gib Crockett and published in the Washington Star on April 15, 1964, showing lawmakers Hubert Humphrey and Frank Lausche defending the Civil Rights Bill from extremists. Found at http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/civil-rights-act-of-1964.html#obj281_01

Document 4: Johnson Speech 1

We will serve the whole nation, not one section or one part, or one group, but all Americans. These are the United States—a united people with a united purpose. Our American unity does not depend upon being the same. We have differences. But now, as in the past, we can get from those differences strength, not weakness, wisdom, not despair. Both as a people and a government, we can unite on a plan, a plan which is wise and fair, smart and helpful. . . .

On the 20th day of January, in 1961, John F. Kennedy told his countrymen that our national work would not be finished “in the first thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. “But,” he said, “let us begin.” Today, in this moment of new firmness, I would say to all my fellow Americans, let us continue.

This is our challenge. Not to wait. Not to pause. Not to turn around and stay at this evil moment. But to continue on our way so that we may fulfil the destiny that history has set for us. Our most immediate tasks are here on [Capitol] Hill [with lawmakers].

First, no memorial speech or praise could more powerfully honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long. We have talked long enough in this country about equal rights. We have talked for 100 years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter. It is time to write it in the books of law. I urge you again, as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to pass a civil rights law. Then we can move forward to get rid from this nation every bit of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color. There could be no greater source of strength to this nation both at home and overseas.

Source: Part of a speech made by President Lyndon B. Johnson on November 27, 1963, after the death of President Kennedy to a joint session of Congress. [Changed to make it easier to read]. Transcript found at http://www.pbs.org/ladybird/epicenter/epicenter_doc_speech.html and video recording at <https://www.vsotd.com/featured-speech/let-us-continue> (starting at 8:35 and 13:47)

Document 5: Debate

Source: Opening statements of a recorded debate between Senators Hubert Humphrey (a Democrat from Minnesota) and Strom Thurmond (a Democrat from South Carolina) considering the Civil Rights Bill, hosted by Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). Found at <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/multimedia/hubert-humphrey-and-strom-thurmond.html>

Document 6: Russell Letter

I will oppose this misnamed civil rights bill with all the strength I have. I must say, however, that we are terribly disadvantaged in our opposition. The two major parties have combined in trying to get minority votes in a way that ignores states' rights. The opinion of Southern white people means nothing to them.

Source: Part of a letter written by Democratic Senator Richard Brevard Russell to a voter in Georgia on December 9, 1963. Cited in Clay Risen's (2014) book, The Bill of the Century, published by Bloomsbury Press. [Changed for easier reading].

Document 7: Editorial Letter

Civil wrongs do not bring civil rights. Civil disobedience does not bring fair laws. Disorder does not bring law and order. . . . Unruly demonstrations and protests bring hardship and unnecessary problems to others. Even when led by those who have been treated unfairly for a long time, they are not helping the cause of civil rights. Indeed, they are hurting our efforts in Congress to pass an effective civil rights bill—JOINT STATEMENT BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY, *majority whip*, AND SENATOR THOMAS H. KUCHEL, *minority whip*.

Source: Part of an opinion editorial in The New York Times, April 19, 1964, coauthored by Senator Hubert Humphrey (Democrat) and Senator Thomas Kuchel (Republican) in response to protesters' plans to sabotage the New York World's Fair. [Changed to make it easier to read]. Found at <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/04/19/archives/opinion-of-the-week-at-home-and-abroad.html>

Document 8: Johnson Speech 2

Source: Video clip of the speech delivered by President Lyndon Johnson when he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2, 1964. Found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKfoJJA5xWM>

Document 9: Goldwater Speech

I am absolutely opposed to discrimination or segregation based on race, color or creed, or for anything else. Not only my words, but more importantly my actions through the years have always shown how I feel about this.

I wish to make myself perfectly clear. There are two parts of this bill which I have always opposed. They are so important that they caused me to vote against the whole bill. I oppose those parts that would start to let the Federal Government control private businesses. These include the area of so-called “public accommodations” and in the area of employment. To be more specific, I oppose Titles II and VII of the bill.

I do not find anything in the Constitution that lets the Federal government control either of these areas. I believe that trying to take that power is a big danger to the very heart of our basic system of government. It goes against the idea of a constitutional republic in which 50 ruling states have kept for themselves and for the people those powers not specifically granted to the central or Federal Government.

To effectively enforce this bill will take the creation of a huge Federal police force. It will also probably create an “informer” psychology in big areas of our national life. Neighbors will spy on neighbors. Worker will spy on workers. Businessmen will spy on businessmen. Those who want to bother their fellow citizens for selfish purposes will have enough reason to do so. These, the Federal police force and an “informer” psychology, are the signs of the police state. They are signs of the destruction of a free society.

Source: Part of an explanation given by Republican Senator and presidential candidate Barry Goldwater for his opposition to the Civil Rights Bill on June 18, 1964. [Changed to make it easier to read]. Found on pages 14318-14319 of the Congressional Record at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1964-pt11/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1964-pt11-2-1.pdf>

Document 10: Story

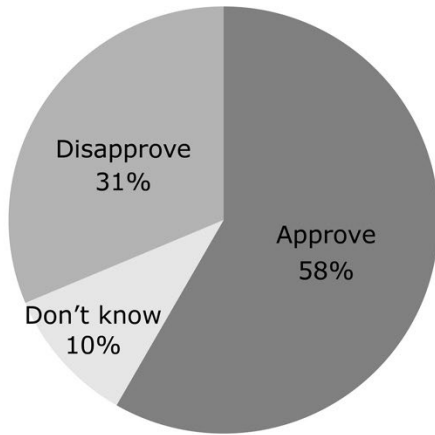
At 8:00 A.M. on July 3, 1964, a thirteen-year-old boy in Kansas City, Missouri, named Eugene Young went into the barbershop at the historic Muehlebach Hotel to get a haircut. He hopped into the chair of Lloyd Soper, one of the barbers. He gave him two dollars. A few minutes later, Young left, another satisfied customer. Young’s satisfaction went beyond the mere [haircut]. He was black, and the day before he had been refused service at the same shop.

Source: Story from the day after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, told in the book The Bill of the Century by journalist Clay Risen (2014), published by Bloomsbury Press. [Changed for easier reading].

Document 11: Poll Results

Broad Support for New Civil Rights Law in 1964

Percent ... of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

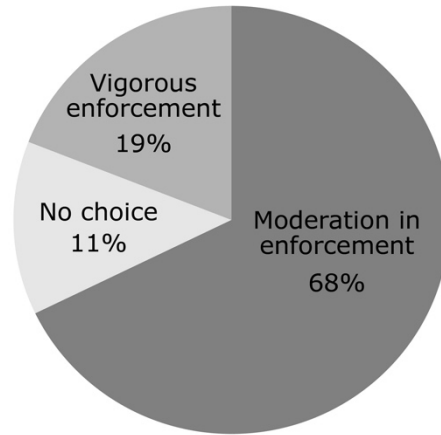


Source: Gallup, October 1964

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Moderate Enforcement of 1964 Law Much Preferred

Percent who prefer ... of the new civil rights law



Source: Opinion Research Corporation, Nov. 4-8, 1964

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Results of an October 1964 Gallup Poll asking about the public's approval or disapproval of the recently passed Civil Rights Law (left) and the public's views about the enforcement of the law (right). Found at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/05/50-years-ago-mixed-views-about-civil-rights-but-support-for-selma-demonstrators/>