

To what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 a success?

Virginia and United States History



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and other political leaders look on. Stoughton, C. (1964). President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1964 Civil Rights Act as Martin Luther King, Jr, and others, look on. [Photograph]. White House Press Office.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lyndon_Johnson_signing_Civil_Rights_Act,_July_2,_1964.jpg

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Standard(s)

VUS.16 The student will apply history and social science skills to analyze the causes and effects of the Civil Rights Movement by

- a. analyzing the origins of the Civil Rights Movement, the effects of segregation, and efforts to desegregate schools, transportation, and public areas;
- e. explaining how the tenets of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the 1963 March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had an effect on all Americans;

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed on July 2, 1964, was considered a massive step toward dismantling racial inequalities in the United States. The Act prohibited discrimination in public places, forbade employment discrimination, and led to the integration of public schools. This inquiry has students examine the goals of the Act, reactions immediately after passage, and more current data on race relations and discrimination to determine for themselves the long-term success of the Act.

Featured Sources

Source A: [The Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)

Source B: [Interview with Sam Mahone](#)

Source C: [A Letter examining violations of the Civil Rights Act](#)

Source D: [Graphic Data on Diversity in Congress](#)

Source E: [Racial Disparities in Prison rates](#)

Source F: [Black Representation in the US Congress](#)



Formative Performance Tasks

1. **COLLABORATE:** Students will use the “[three whys](#)” thinking routine to analyze the importance of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (source A) to themselves, the community, and the nation. They will then share with another student using the “[Give one, get one](#)” strategy.
2. **DELIBERATE:** Students will use the “[Tug of War](#)” strategy with sources B, C, D, E, & F to analyze the success of the Act both immediately and over time. Students create a chart weighing the successes and failures of the Act using information from the sources.
3. **PRODUCE:** Students then write individual responses to the compelling question, “to what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 successful”.

Instructional Snapshot

Students begin by using a Three Whys activity using an excerpt from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (source A). Students will identify the importance of the Act to themselves, their community, and the nation. Students will then share their why statements with a partner, then listen to the partner’s why statements (COLLABORATE). Students then work in groups on a [Tug of War activity](#): one side (group A) examines the sources from the perspective that the Act was successful, the other side (group B) examines the same sources from the perspective that the Act was not successful. The students then form small groups (two students from A, two from B) to create a Tug-of-War chart or visual, displaying the positive outcomes on one side and the negative outcomes on the other. Each outcome is then weighted by the group until the group comes up with a consensus on which side is of greater consequence (DELIBERATE). Students then write an individual response to the compelling question, “to what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 successful?” (PRODUCE).

To what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 a success?

Featured Source: The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Source A: National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). *Civil Rights Act (1964)*. U.S. National Archives.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act>

Excerpts from the Civil Rights Act of 1964

TITLE I--VOTING RIGHTS

No person.. shall...

...deny the right of any individual to vote in any Federal election because of an error or omission on any record or paper relating to any application, registration, or other act requisite to voting...

employ any literacy test as a qualification for voting in any Federal election...

TITLE II-- RELIEF AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN PLACES OF PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION

...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...without discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.

DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, SEX, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN

It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer.. to fail or refuse to hire...any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual...because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin;

-
1. Why is the Civil Rights Act of 1964 important to you?
 2. Why is the Civil Rights Act of 1964 important to your community?
 3. Why is the Civil Rights Act of 1964 important to the nation?

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Featured Sources: Interview with Sam Mahone

Source B: Library of Congress. (n.d.). *Civil rights activist Sam Mahone interviewed by Hasan Kwame Jeffries in 2013*. The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A long struggle for freedom. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/multimedia/sam-mahone.html>

Video transcript:

Mahone: “I began to... that’s when I finished high school and then immediately after that I joined SNCC. I began to continue working throughout America but I also worked in other counties– surrounding counties as well– continued doing voter registration, continued testing the laws of public accommodation and what have you. I remember the night the Civil Rights bill was passed, we decided we were going to test it at a local restaurant.”

Jeffries: “So this is July 64?”

Mahone: “Exactly yeah. Myself and John Padu, who I believe is here, who was one of the America’s four, SNCC worker; Bob Mantz of Morehouse, who recently passed away, and four other students. We went down to a place called The Hasty House restaurant and we sat there and we ordered. Or we tried to order the food but no the waitress never came. One of us–one of the guys who were with us decided he needed to go to the restroom and the restroom was outside. You had to go outside and go around to the side of the building. Well while we were waiting, no one came to take our order. But about 10 minutes past we noticed that he hadn’t come back from the restroom so we finally decided to get up and leave. And as we get up to leave to go to the car we’re met by a group of whites who would come across the street from a service station with tire irons and baseball bats. And so they wait until we get into the car which was a convertible car and then they just rain out on the car with baseball bats and tire irons and beat us on top of our heads. We finally get the car started and we just got out of there without the guy who had gone to the restroom. Well he shows up about two days later and he says what happened was that when he went to the restroom he was attacked and beaten and he just ran off and never came back. And so...but that was the first evening we decided to test the laws of public accommodation.”

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Featured Source: Letter Examining Violations of the Civil Rights Act

Source C: Downs, R. (2004). *Randa Jo Downs to the Voices of Civil Rights Project, February 2004*. [Letter]. Voices of Civil Rights Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/images/cr0276_enlarge.jpg

Excerpt from the letter:

One of the areas that the South's Jim Crow laws severely impacted was healthcare. Fortunately, the passage of the Civil Rights Act included Title VI and it... required that no citizen should be denied the benefits of any program that received federal funding...

It also gave civil rights groups leverage to lodge complaints against noncompliant hospitals...my father...as a federal worker, he heard those complaints and traveled to Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, and other states to instruct hospital administrators to remove all vestiges of segregation. For safety, he always traveled with a fellow federal worker, an African American gentleman, and they became adept at watching each other's back. One day my father asked if I wanted to go with him on one of his trips... So, off we went to Little Rock, Arkansas - still a hotbed of racial tension. I remember one particular evening when the three of us went to dinner at a popular restaurant. Before going in, my father reminded me of how to behave if someone made any remarks about us. We were, after all, an unusual trio in those parts. Two men - one white, one black, dressed in suits, and a young white woman. The restaurant was busy, but all conversation stopped when we entered. People stared. I remember the sound of a fork hitting a plate hard. The waitress was not smiling when she led us to a table...

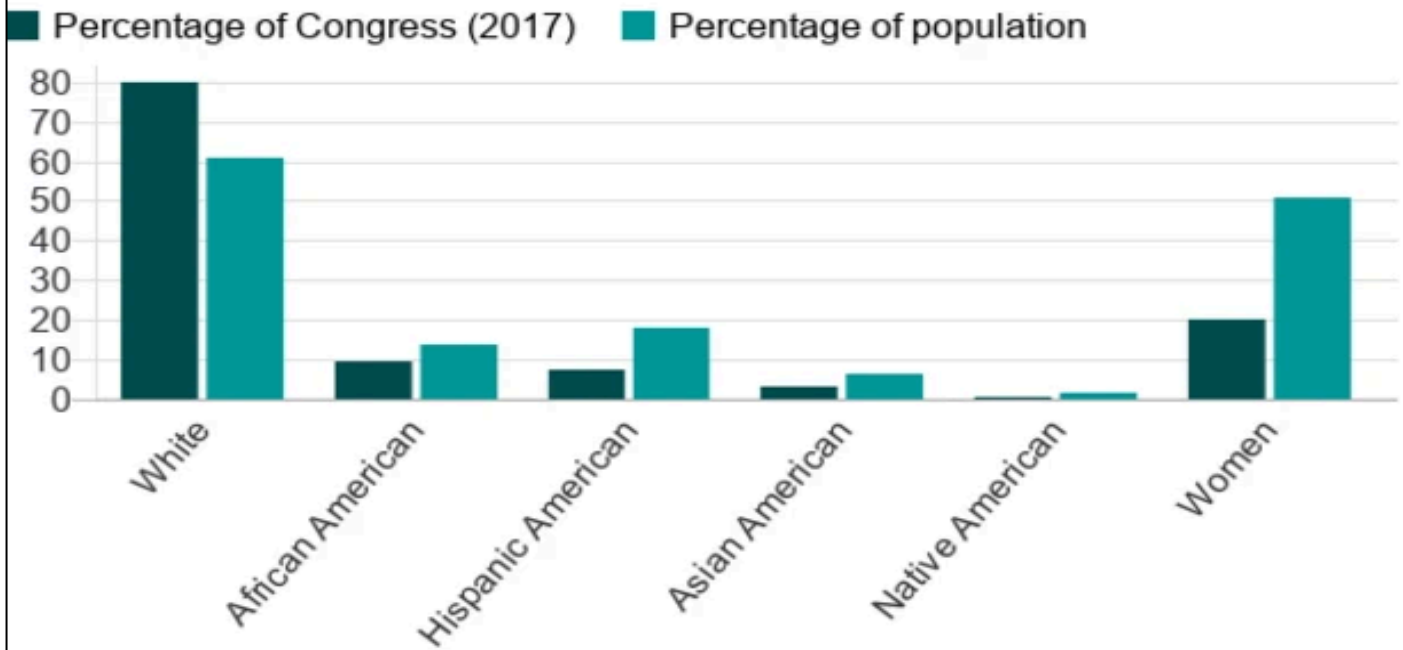
What my father and his partner found in those halls of healthcare and healing was astounding. Black and white patients were segregated with black patients sometimes housed in attics, basements, or separate buildings and they usually had to enter a hospital through a back entrance. Most African American doctors were denied professional privileges in white hospitals and white doctors tended to white patients first before addressing the health needs of black patients. The restrooms and water fountains were clearly labeled who was allowed to use them. In some instances, even the patient files were segregated. I remember my father telling me that the files of African American patients in one hospital had no surnames - only their first names such as Aunt Bessie or Ida Mae

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Featured Source:
Graphic Data on
Diversity in
Congress (2017)

Source D: *Black Representation in the US Congress* [graphic]. 2025/
GZero Media. <https://assets.rbl.ms/51222209/origin.png>

Diversity in Congress compared to American population



Sources: Congressional Research Service/US Census



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Featured Source:
**Racial Disparities
in Prison Rates
(2022)**

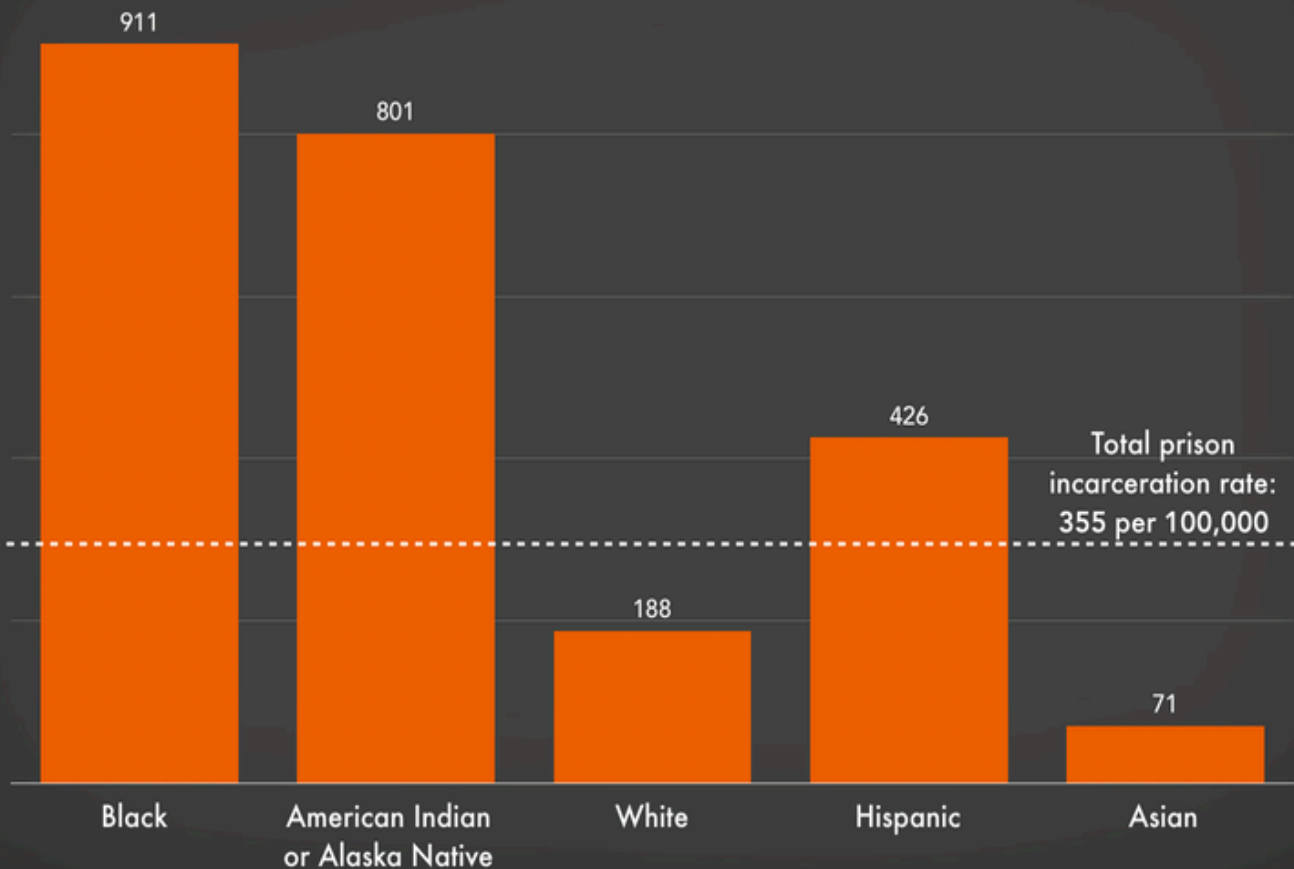
Source E: *Racial Disparities in Prison Incarceration Rates, 2022*

[graphic]. 2022. Prison Policy.

https://static.prisonpolicy.org/images/prison_rates_by_race_2022.png

Racial disparities in prison incarceration rates, 2022

Number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons per 100,000 in each racial or ethnic category



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2022*, Table 5

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

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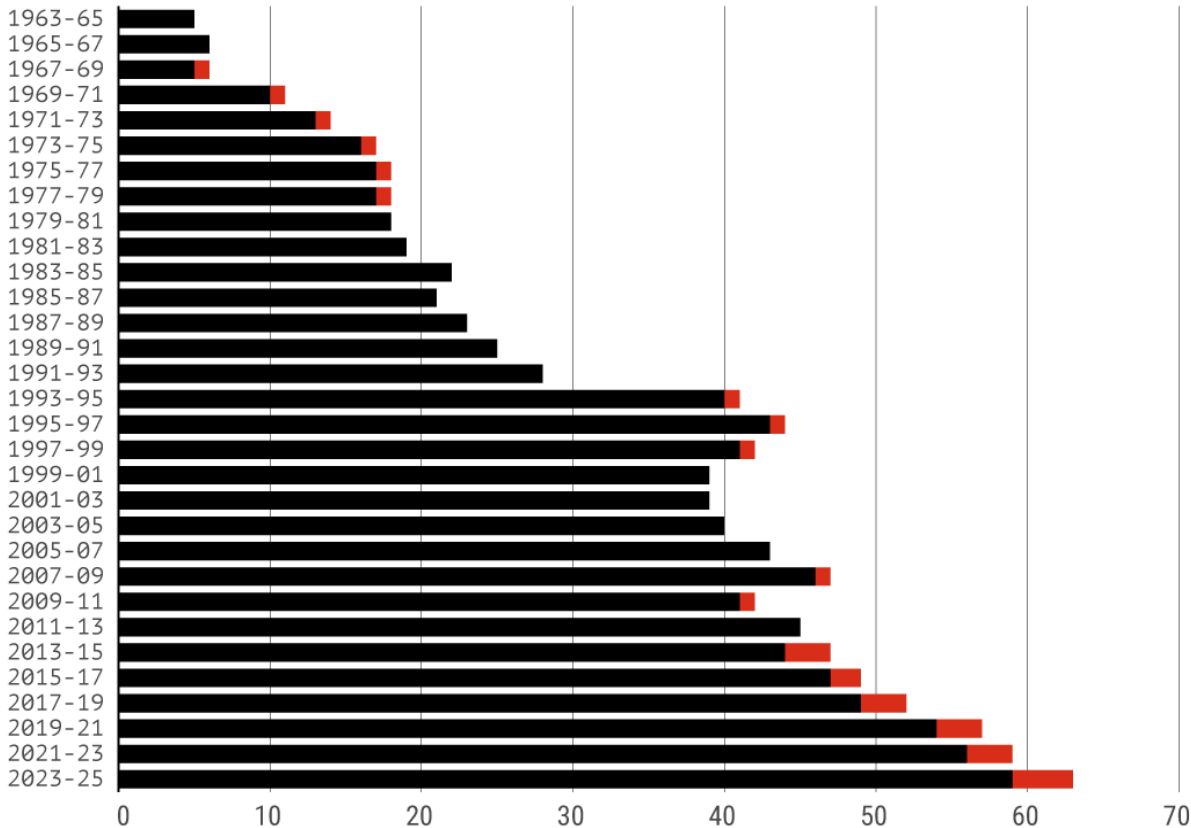
Featured Source:
Black Representation in the US Congress

Source F: *Diversity in Congress compared to the American Population* [graphic]. 2017. BBC.
https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/ace/ws/640/cpsprodpb/4CFD/production/104090791_mondaychart-congressvamerica-cdtly-nc.png.webp

Black Representation in the US Congress

Members of Congress who identify as Black, 1963-2025

■ House ■ Senate



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Source: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, Pew Research Center

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everything is political

To what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 a success?

Directions: Students are split into two groups (A and B).

Group A examines sources B, C, D, and E from the perspective that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was successful. Group B examines the same sources from the perspective that the Act was not successful. The students then form groups of four (two students from A, two from B) to create a Tug-of-War chart or visual, displaying the positive outcomes on one side and the negative outcomes on the other. Each outcome is then weighted by the group until the group comes up with a consensus on which side is of greater consequence. Students then write an individual response to the compelling question, “to what extent was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 successful?”.

Group A:

How can source B be seen as a success of the Civil Rights Act?

How can source C be seen as a success of the Civil Rights Act?

What data from sources D & E can be used to argue the Civil Rights Act was successful?

Group B:

How can source B be seen as a failure of the Civil Rights Act?

How can source C be seen as a failure of the Civil Rights Act?

What data from sources D & E can be used to argue the Civil Rights Act was not successful?

Mixed group:

Create a chart showing the ways in which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 can be seen as successful and ways it can be seen as not successful. As a group, indicate which of the factors are most important to you in determining if the Act was ultimately successful or not.

Individually:

Based on the sources and group work, to what extent do you think that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was successful?

Sources list:

Black Representation in the US Congress [graphic]. 2025/ GZero Media.

<https://assets.rbl.ms/51222209/origin.png>

Diversity in Congress compared to the American Population [graphic]. 2017. BBC.

https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/ace/ws/640/cpsprodpb/4CFD/production/104090791_mondaychart-congressvamerica-cdtly-nc.png.webp

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