

# 60th Anniversary of Civil Rights Act: Reflecting on Progress and Persistent Challenges

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March 7, 1965. The Martin Luther King March in Selma, Alabama. The landmark legislation emerged from a period of intense struggle and demand for the fulfillment of the 14th Amendment's promise of "equal protection of the laws."

(NNPA) - As the United States commemorates the 60th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the nation reflects on a transformative law that reshaped American society by prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The landmark legislation emerged from a period of intense struggle and demand for the fulfillment of the 14th Amendment's promise of "equal protection of the laws."

Due to widespread opposition to desegregation and the assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers, President John F. Kennedy urged Congress to pass a comprehensive civil rights bill in June 1963. After Kennedy's death, President Lyndon B. Johnson, with crucial support from civil rights leaders Roy Wilkins and Clarence Mitchell, championed the bill's passage.

On July 2, 1964, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The law prohibited discrimination in hiring, promoting, and firing, extending these protections to public accommodations and federally funded programs. It also strengthened the enforcement of voting rights and mandated the desegregation of schools.

"The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the nation's benchmark civil rights legislation, and it continues to resonate in America," said Melanie Campbell, president of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. The Act dismantled "Jim Crow" laws upheld by the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which had deemed racial segregation constitutional under the "separate but equal" doctrine.

The Act's impact has been profound and far-reaching. "It propelled a movement that was able

to make major civil rights gains," stated Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League. "It has not only changed the arc for Black people. It has changed the arc for women and for other people of color in a profound way."

Maya Wiley, president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, highlighted the tangible benefits of the Act, particularly in healthcare and education. "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 added years, literally about three to four years, onto the life expectancy of Black people when healthcare had to open its once-segregated doors," Wiley explained. The Act also significantly reduced segregation in Southern schools, benefiting both Black and white students.

Despite these advancements, the 60th anniversary comes amid concerns over recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings perceived as eroding civil rights protections, including affirmative action, legalized abortion, and diversity initiatives. Critics argue that the Court's favorable ruling in former President Donald Trump's immunity case further threatens American democracy. The ruling, which rejected Trump's sweeping immunity claim but maintained protections for actions tied to presidential duties, has sparked intense debate about the boundaries of presidential power and accountability.

"Securing our civil rights remains the unfinished fight of our time," President Joe Biden said in a proclamation commemorating the anniversary. "Our country is still facing attacks on some of our most fundamental civil liberties and rights, including the right to vote and have that vote counted and the right to live free from the threat of violence, hate, and discrimination. That is why my adminis-

tration is remaining vigilant—fighting actively to protect the rights of every American."

Biden emphasized his commitment to reversing the legacy of segregation and creating new opportunities for all Americans. "My administration is investing more money than ever in Black families and Black communities," Biden asserted. "We are reconnecting historic business districts and neighborhoods cut off by old highways, redlining, and decades of discrimination and disinvestment. We have invested over \$16 billion in historically Black colleges and universities, which will help raise the next generation of Black leaders. At the same time, we are creating good-paying jobs on which people can raise a family; making capital and loans for starting small businesses and buying homes more accessible; and making health insurance and prescription drugs more affordable."

In popular memory, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was seen as a legislative response to the demands of the March on Washington. "Sixty years later, we must be honest: the federal minimum wage, indexed for inflation, is lower than it was in 1964," said Rev. William Barber, president of Repairers of the Breach and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign. "What's more, because the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in its 2013 Shelby decision and Congress has failed to remedy it, we have less voting rights protections today than we did on August 6, 1965."

Barber continued, "The celebration of historic wins alongside this egregious decay is a source of discontent among everyday Americans. But we have no time for despair. We are determined to channel discontent for a resurrection rather than an insurrection."

## U.S. Supreme Court Gives Immunity to Trump's Alleged Criminal Acts

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(NNPA) - On Monday, July 1, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that former President Donald Trump has immunity for some of his conduct during his presidency in his federal election interference case. However, other actions may not be protected. This decision adds another layer of complexity to the potential trial proceedings.

In a closely watched case exploring the boundaries of presidential power, the justices voted 6-3 along ideological lines to reject Trump's sweeping immunity claim. The ruling means that charges related to his efforts to overturn the 2020 election results will not be dismissed outright. However, the court indicated that actions closely tied to his presidential duties are off-limits to prosecutors.

Trump has already been convicted on 34 felony charges related to a hush-money scheme to con-

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ceal an extramarital affair with an adult film star while Melania Trump was pregnant.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, emphasized the need for lower courts to examine further which actions Trump can be prosecuted for. Specifically, the court determined that Trump's interactions with Justice Department officials and Vice President Mike Pence in the lead-up to the January 6 Capitol attack by his supporters are considered core presidential powers and thus immune from prosecution.

"The president is not above the law," Roberts wrote. "But Congress may not criminalize the president's conduct in carrying out the responsibilities of the executive branch under the Constitution."

The ruling leaves the future of the case uncertain, requiring further proceedings before U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. Judge Chutkan will now review other alleged conduct by Trump, including his communications with state election officials, private parties, and members of the public, to determine if they qualify as official acts.

The court's liberal justices dissented, with Justice Sonia Sotomayor arguing that the ruling undermines a fundamental constitutional principle that no individual is above the law. "Trump will now be insulated from criminal prosecution. In every use

of official power, the President is now a king, above the law," said Sotomayor.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, in a strongly worded dissent, accused the conservative majority of creating a dangerous precedent by establishing a new model of presidential accountability that grants undue immunity to the highest office.

"With that understanding of how our system of accountability for criminal acts ordinarily functions, it becomes much easier to see that the majority's ruling in this case breaks new and dangerous ground," Jackson wrote.

"Departing from the traditional model of individual accountability, the majority has concocted something entirely different: A Presidential accountability model that creates immunity — an exemption from criminal law — applicable only to the most powerful official in our Government," she added.

Justice Jackson further warned of the broader implications of the ruling, suggesting that even a hypothetical president who commits grave crimes, such as ordering assassinations of political rivals or instigating a coup, could potentially claim immunity under the new model.

Trump, who faces about 50 other charges related to the 2020 election, has openly discussed executing his rivals.