

# THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Contact:**

Lenore Ostrowsky  
Acting Chief, Public Affairs Unit  
(202) 376-8591

## **U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS CELEBRATES THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964**

WASHINGTON, DC -- As we observe the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (hereafter “the Act”), which will take place on July 2, 2014, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (hereafter “the Commission) celebrates the strides in civil rights made in this nation as a result of the bipartisan passage of the Act. Because the work of the Commission contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and because the life of the Commission was extended as part of the Act, we feel it is important to reflect not only upon the gains that have resulted from the Act, but also on the work that remains yet to be done.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy received from the Commission its biennial civil rights report on the topics of voting, education, employment, housing, and other areas of concern, and urged the President and Congress to take action:

“A number of subject areas vital to the Nation’s safety and well-being have been reviewed. While the Commission has found hope in the civil rights progress that has been made, there remain serious matters of concern that can be corrected only by executive or legislative action.”

Fifty years ago, our nation took a major step in the direction of delivering to its citizens on the promise of freedom and equality both explicit and implicit in the covenant that created our nation over two centuries ago. As he signed the Act into law, President Lyndon B. Johnson said:

“We believe that all men are created equal. Yet many are denied equal treatment.

We believe that all men have certain unalienable rights. Yet many Americans do not enjoy those rights.

We believe that all men are entitled to the blessings of liberty. Yet millions are being deprived of those blessings—not because of their own failures, but because of the color of their skin.

The reasons are deeply imbedded in history and tradition and the nature of man. We can understand—without rancor or hatred—how this all happened.

*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Martin R. Castro and Commissioners Roberta Achtenberg, Gail Heriot, Peter Kirsanow, David Kladney, and Michael Yaki. Commission meetings and briefings are open to the general public. The Commission’s website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.*

*1331 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 1150, Washington, DC 20425*

*Telephone: (202) 376-7700*

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But it cannot continue. Our Constitution, the foundation of our Republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I will sign tonight forbids it.”

And with a stroke of the President’s pen, the reality of our nation came another step closer to its founding principles. A mere five decades ago, prior to the passage of the Act, Jim Crow reigned, segregation was the law of the land, and injury and death were often the result when Black Americans sought to exercise their freedoms. The Act opened the doors of opportunity to countless Americans previously excluded from the opportunity of our country merely because of their race, color, national origin, gender or religion. We are a better country today because of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Yet, while the country and the Commission have come a long way in advancing the civil rights of individuals in the last half century, more work remains to be done to assure the purpose of the Act and the purpose of our Union are achieved for all Americans.

So, on this the golden anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, when a child’s future can still be limited by her sex or by the color or her skin, our work remains unfinished.

When African Americans are almost twice as likely as other Americans to live in poverty, opportunity remains unequal.

When a same-sex couple is beaten while trying to walk down the street, when wearing a yarmulke on campus makes a Jew the target of bullying and harassment, when a Latino’s right to vote is threatened because of his perceived national origin, deprivations of liberty persist.

Therefore, let us resolve to strengthen our efforts to achieve the dream of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, for this generation of Americans, and those who shall succeed us.

The Commission hereby issues this PROCLAMATION, this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of July 2014, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, calling on all Americans to commit to working together for the benefit of the civil rights of all persons.

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