

## Historical Highlights

# The Civil Rights Act of 1875

February 04, 1875



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Before entering Congress in 1873, Representative James Rapier of Alabama worked as a newspaperman, a cotton planter, and as a state civil servant.

On this date, the House passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875 by a vote of 162 to 99. First introduced by one of Congress's greatest advocates for black civil rights, Senator [Charles Sumner](#) of Massachusetts, in 1870, the original bill outlawed racial discrimination in juries, schools, transportation, and public accommodations. Republican leaders were forced, however, to chip away at the legislation's protections in order to make it palatable enough to pass in the face of growing public pressure to abandon racial legislation and embrace segregation. A record-number seven African-American Representatives carried debate in favor of the bill, offering personal accounts of discrimination on railroads and in restaurants. "Every day my life and property are exposed, are left to the mercy of others, and will be so long as every hotel-keeper, railroad conductor, and steamboat captain can refuse me with impunity," Representative [James Rapier](#) of Alabama said. He later added, "After all, this question resolves itself into this: either I am a man or I am not a man." The weakened legislation—which only passed after all references to equal and integrated education were stripped completely—failed to have any lasting effect. The Supreme Court struck down the 1875 Civil Rights Bill in 1883 on the grounds that the Constitution did not extend to private businesses.

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