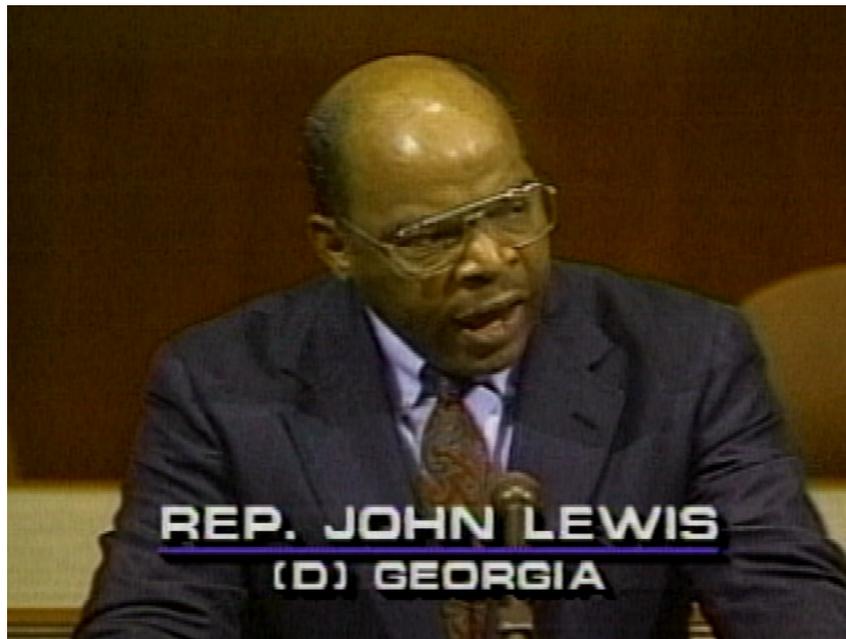


President George H.W. Bush Vetoes Civil Rights Bill, Drawing Fire in Congress

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Description

President George H.W. Bush causes an uproar when he refuses to sign the 1990 Civil Rights Bill, which lessens the burden of proof minority workers must provide to prove racial discrimination by private companies.

Keywords

President, George H.W. Bush, Veto, Power, Legislation, Civil Rights Act of 1990, 1990, Civil, Rights, Bill, Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment, 14th Amendment, Equal Protection, Clause, Job, Work, Employment, Discrimination, Jim Crow, Laws, Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Desegregation, Racism, Congressman, Representative, John Lewis, Senator, Ted Kennedy, Fred Krebs, Chamber of Commerce, Claudia Withers, Women's Legal Defense Fund, Civil Rights Act of 1964, John F. Kennedy, JFK, Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJ

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Transcript

President George H.W. Bush Vetoes 1990 Civil Rights Bill, Drawing Fire in Congress

TOM BROKAW, anchor:

This was expected to be a dull election year, but now there are two explosive issues on the national political agenda: the budget mess and civil rights. When President Bush vetoed a major civil rights bill on job discrimination today, he guaranteed a stormy political showdown. NBC's John Cochran is at the White House tonight. John:

JOHN COCHRAN reporting:

Tom, for months, the White House and Congress seemed this close to getting a compromise on the civil rights bill, but in the end all the negotiating, all the arguing produced nothing but a veto. The bill is aimed at undoing the effective recent Supreme Court decisions on job discrimination, especially a decision against minorities working at a salmon hatchery. The court put more burden on workers to prove that they are being unfairly treated, but President Bush agrees with the business community that this civil rights bill goes too far, that it would require hiring and promotion "to turn on factors of race, sex, ethnicity, or religion...rather than on qualifications."

Mr. FRED KREBS (US Chamber Of Commerce): The so-called Civil Rights Act is a good example of a bill that is a--has a good title but is bad law.

COCHRAN: In Congress, the president's veto drew fire, as expected.

Representative JOHN LEWIS (Democrat, Georgia): By vetoing this bill, the President is giving cover to the like of David Duke, the Klan, and Skinheads and companies that discriminate against minorities and

women.

COCHRAN: Women's rights advocates have focused more on other issues, such as abortion, so the civil rights bill has been viewed more as a racial issue, even though it greatly affects women.

Ms. CLAUDIA WITHERS (Women's Legal Defense Fund): We consider the civil rights act just as important for women workers as it is for workers who are people of color.

COCHRAN: Although White House polls show that Bush's veto will be popular among white voters, his aides say politics played no part in his decision. But the bill's co-author claims Bush is trying to please extremists in his party.

Senator TED KENNEDY (Democrat, Massachusetts): The President's veto of this legislation is going to be a major step back for equality in the workplace for all Americans.

COCHRAN: President Bush does have the votes in Congress to sustain his veto, but he may not have the votes to get his own version of a civil rights bill passed; and if there's no bill at all, then the Supreme Court's rulings will stand. Tom:

BROKAW: Thank you, John.

The struggle over civil rights, of course, has been going on for a long time in this country. Today's standoff has its roots in a political tug-of-war going back more than a quarter of a century.

1964--Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, but the battle to bring the law to life had just begun.

President LYNDON JOHNSON (March 1965): We intend to fight this battle where it should be fought, in the courts and in the Congress and in the hearts of men.

BROKAW: And that's where it's been fought ever since. Congress has passed laws defining civil rights, Supreme Court rulings have interpreted those laws. But with new Reagan and Bush appointments, the more conservative court began in the late 1980s to curtail the use of civil rights laws. So this year's civil rights act passed overwhelmingly by Congress was an attempt to undo what the court had done, an attempt now blocked by the President.