



The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act

Clay Risen

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The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the single most important piece of legislation passed by Congress in American history. This one law so dramatically altered American society that, looking back, it seems preordained--as Everett Dirksen, the GOP leader in the Senate and a key supporter of the bill, said, "No force is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." But there was nothing predestined about the victory: a phalanx of powerful senators, pledging to "fight to the death" for segregation, launched the longest filibuster in American history to defeat it.

The bill's passage has often been credited to the political leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson, or the moral force of Martin Luther King Jr. Yet as Clay Risen shows, the battle for the Civil Rights Act was a story much bigger than those two men. It was a broad, epic struggle, a sweeping tale of unceasing grassroots activism, ringing speeches, backroom deal-making, and, finally, hand-to-hand legislative combat. In *The Bill of the Century*, Clay Risen delivers the full story, in all its complexity and drama.

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