

Speech of Clarence Mitchell, Esq.
NEA Conference on Human and Civil Rights
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On this day, twenty years ago, we were gearing up for a crucial vote in the United States Senate on civil rights. H.R. 7152 which had been passed by a massive vote of 290 to 130 ^{in the House} was in danger of being buried in the Senate Judiciary Committee by a hostile chairman, Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi. ^{Fortunately,} Under the Senate rules the bill could be brought to the floor without reference to the committee. Those of us backing the bill supported the move for direct floor consideration. Efforts at the White House and hard work, both in and outside the senate, paid off. On February 26, 1964, the Senate voted 54 to 37 for putting the bill on the calendar instead of sending it to committee. There followed the long fight that was climaxed when the Senate voted 71 to 29 to invoke cloture on June 10. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964.

There is no question about the great value of this law which is popularly known as the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It has made possible changes in our society that some believed could not be accomplished in another hundred years after the abolition of human slavery. The change for the better has been so complete that many of those in our country who were children of tender years in 1964 cannot believe that conditions that the law was designed to correct actually existed.

A. Philip Randolph/

The great names of 1964 like Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young and James Farmer are somehow merged into a composite that usually mentions only Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Even Dr. King's memory is sometimes blurred by the passage of time and there are those in the new generation who do not know why we honor him.

Thus it seems that one of our first tasks in the education of children