Abstract

Executive Summary Civil rights problems remain entrenched in American society, the stubborn result of unequal treatment over time. Discrimination in housing, employment, and the voting booth, unequal educational opportunity, and other problems still stand between some Americans and true equality. Presidential leadership is necessary to break down obstacles and realize the promise of civil rights. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) examined the George W. Bush administration’s commitment to that end. What follows are the results of the Commission’s examination, expressed in terms of: (1) whether civil rights enforcement is a presidential priority; (2) federal efforts to eradicate entrenched discrimination; (3) expanding and protecting rights for disadvantaged groups; and (4) promoting access to federal programs and services for traditionally underserved populations. This report finds that President Bush has neither exhibited leadership on pressing civil rights issues, nor taken actions that matched his words. The report reaches this conclusion after analyzing and summarizing numerous documents, including historical literature, reports, scholarly articles, presidential and administration statements, executive orders, policy briefs, documents of Cabinet-level agencies, federal budgets and other data.
The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is a bipartisan, independent commission of the United States federal government, created in 1957, that is charged with the responsibility for investigating, reporting on, and making recommendations concerning civil rights issues in the United States. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 1975d, all statutory authority for the commission terminated on September 30, 1996, and Congress has not passed new legislation, but has continued to pass appropriations. A 2004 report titled “The Civil Rights Record of the George W. Bush Administration, 2001-2004” by the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights details where the president fell short on civil rights for Native Americans. “President Bush has acknowledged the great debt America owes to Native Americans. However, his words have not been matched with action,” the report states. To back up its claims, the report details how Bush did not provide sufficient funding for tribal colleges and universities, and even proposed cutting $1.5 billion in funding for education programs that benefit Native Americans. In a report titled “Redefining Rights in America — The Civil Rights Record of the George W. Bush Administration, 2001-2004,” CCR criticized the administration’s disinclination to promote affirmative action; condemned it for subjecting immigrants and visitors from Arab and Middle Eastern countries to racial profiling; and alleged that it had been indifferent to the effects of environmental contamination in minority communities. When Berry’s term as Chairman expired on December 5, 2004, President Bush replaced her with black Republican Gerald Reynolds. Berry initially refused to vacate her position, insisting inaccurately that her term had not yet been completed.