Where Do Civil Rights Come From?

Most laws prohibiting discrimination, and many legal definitions of "discriminatory" acts, originated at the federal level through either:

- **Federal legislation**, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. Other federal acts (supplemented by court decisions) prohibit discrimination in voting rights, housing, extension of credit, public education, and access to public facilities.

OR

- **Federal court decisions**, such as the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was the impetus for nationwide racial desegregation of public schools. Other Supreme Court cases have shaped the definition of civil rights violations like sexual harassment, and the legality of anti-discrimination remedies such as affirmative action programs.

Today, most states have civil rights laws of their own which mirror those at the federal level. For example, in the state of Texas, Title 2 Chapter 21 of the Labor Code prohibits employment discrimination. Many of the mandates in this Texas law are based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the federal law making employment discrimination unlawful.

Municipalities within states (such as cities, counties, and towns) can create their own civil rights laws or ordinances, which may or may not resemble the laws of the state itself. For example, a city may pass legislation requiring domestic partner benefits for city employees and their same-sex partners, even though no such law exists at the state level.
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