

Primary Source



The Reconstruction Amendments: Thirteenth Amendment, 1865, Fourteenth Amendment, 1868, and Fifteenth Amendment, 1870

To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans from Reconstruction to the end of the nineteenth century?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice from the colonial era to the outbreak of the Civil War.
- ☐ I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest to end slavery.
- ☐ I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- ☐ I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

Essential Vocabulary

Naturalize	To legally become a citizen of a country
Abridge	In a legal or political context, to deprive someone of something, usually a protected right
Privileges and immunities	Wording in the first clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that bans states from violating the rights of any citizen
Due process of law	The principle by which the government must interact with all people according to the duly enacted laws and apply these rules equally to all

Building Context

After the end of the Civil War, the United States was faced with huge challenges, including defining the status of the nearly 4 million freed African Americans. A group of Republican politicians in Congress, known as Radical Republicans, looked

for permanent solutions to champion a formal end to slavery, as well as citizenship and civil rights for African Americans. Together, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments are referred to as the Reconstruction Amendments. The Fourteenth Amendment in particular has been invoked in landmark Supreme Court cases up to the present day.

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Source: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiii>

<p>The Thirteenth Amendment, 1865 SECTION 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. SECTION 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.</p>	<p>Notes</p>
<p>The Fourteenth Amendment, 1868 SECTION. 1. All persons born or naturalized [to legally become a citizen of a country] in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge [to deprive someone of something] the privileges or immunities [bans states from violating rights of a citizen] of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law [apply rules equally]; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws SECTION. 5. The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.</p>	

The Fifteenth Amendment, 1870

SECTION 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

1. What important legal change is made by the Thirteenth Amendment?

2. What legal status does the opening line of the Fourteenth Amendment confer upon all people born or naturalized in the United States?

3. What limits does the Fourteenth Amendment place on states?

4. How is securing the right to vote a significant factor in ensuring [or guaranteeing] legal status and full membership in civil society?