**The 13th Amendment**

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Wording:

## Amendment XIII

## *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.

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Analysis:

“The 13th amendment, which formally abolished slavery in the United States, passed the Senate on April 8, 1864, and the House on January 31, 1865. On February 1, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln approved the Joint Resolution of Congress submitting the proposed amendment to the state legislatures. The necessary number of states ratified it by December 6, 1865. The 13th amendment to the United States Constitution provides that "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."

In 1863 President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring “all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” Nonetheless, the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery in the nation. Lincoln recognized that the Emancipation Proclamation would have to be followed by a constitutional amendment in order to guarantee the abolishment of slavery.

The 13th amendment was passed at the end of the Civil War before the Southern states had been restored to the Union and should have easily passed the Congress. Although the Senate passed it in April 1864, the House did not. At that point, Lincoln took an active role to ensure passage through congress. He insisted that passage of the 13th amendment be added to the Republican Party platform for the upcoming Presidential elections. His efforts met with success when the House passed the bill in January 1865 with a vote of 119–56.

With the adoption of the 13th amendment, the United States found a final constitutional solution to the issue of slavery. The 13th amendment, along with the 14th and 15th, is one of the trio of Civil War amendments that greatly expanded the civil rights of Americans.”

*Adapted from ourdocuments.gov*

**The 14th Amendment**

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Wording:

## Amendment XIV

## Section 1.

All persons born or naturalized 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 the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

## Section 3.

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any state, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any state legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any state, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

## Section 5.

The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

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Analysis:

“Following the Civil War, Congress submitted to the states three amendments as part of its Reconstruction program to guarantee equal civil and legal rights to black citizens. The major provision of the 14th amendment was to grant citizenship to “All persons born or naturalized in the United States,” thereby granting citizenship to former slaves. Another equally important provision was the statement that “nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” The right to due process of law and equal protection of the law now applied to both the Federal and state governments. On June 16, 1866, the House Joint Resolution proposing the 14th amendment to the Constitution was submitted to the states. On July 28, 1868, the 14th amendment was declared, in a certificate of the Secretary of State, ratified by the necessary 28 of the 37 States, and became part of the supreme law of the land.

Congressman John A. Bingham of Ohio, the primary author of the first section of the 14th amendment, intended that the amendment also nationalize the Federal Bill of Rights by making it binding upon the states. Senator Jacob Howard of Michigan, introducing the amendment, specifically stated that the privileges and immunities clause would extend to the states “the personal rights guaranteed and secured by the first eight amendments.” Historians disagree on how widely Bingham's and Howard's views were shared at the time in the Congress, or across the country in general. No one in Congress explicitly contradicted their view of the Amendment, but only a few members said anything at all about its meaning on this issue. For many years, the Supreme Court ruled that the Amendment did not extend the Bill of Rights to the states.

Not only did the 14th amendment fail to extend the Bill of Rights to the states; it also failed to protect the rights of black citizens. One legacy of Reconstruction was the determined struggle of black and white citizens to make the promise of the 14th amendment a reality. Citizens petitioned and initiated court cases, Congress enacted legislation, and the executive branch attempted to enforce measures that would guard all citizens’ rights. While these citizens did not succeed in empowering the 14th amendment during the Reconstruction, they effectively articulated arguments and offered dissenting opinions that would be the basis for change in the 20th century.”

*Adapted from ourdocuments.gov*

**The 15th Amendment**

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Wording:

## Amendment XV

## 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.

## Section 2.

The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

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Analysis:

“To former abolitionists and to the Radical Republicans in Congress who fashioned Reconstruction after the Civil War, the 15th amendment, enacted in 1870, appeared to signify the fulfillment of all promises to African Americans. Set free by the [13th amendment](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=40), with citizenship guaranteed by the [14th amendment](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=43), black males were given the vote by the 15th amendment. From that point on, the freedmen were generally expected to fend for themselves. In retrospect, it can be seen that the 15th amendment was in reality only the beginning of a struggle for equality that would continue for more than a century before African Americans could begin to participate fully in American public and civic life.

African Americans exercised the franchise and held office in many Southern states through the 1880s, but in the early 1890s, steps were taken to ensure subsequent “white supremacy.” Literacy tests for the vote, “grandfather clauses” excluding from the franchise all whose ancestors had not voted in the 1860s, and other devices to disenfranchise African Americans were written into the constitutions of former Confederate states. Social and economic segregation were added to black America’s loss of political power. In 1896 the Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson legalized “separate but equal” facilities for the races. For more than 50 years, the overwhelming majority of African American citizens were reduced to second-class citizenship under the “Jim Crow” segregation system. During that time, African Americans sought to secure their rights and improve their position through organizations such as National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League and through the individual efforts of reformers like Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and A. Philip Randolph.

The most direct attack on the problem of African American disenfranchisement came in 1965. Prompted by reports of continuing discriminatory voting practices in many Southern states, President Lyndon B. Johnson, himself a southerner, urged Congress on March 15, 1965, to pass legislation “which will make it impossible to thwart the 15th amendment.” He reminded Congress that “we cannot have government for all the people until we first make certain it is government of and by all the people.” The Voting Rights Act of 1965, extended in 1970, 1975, and 1982, abolished all remaining deterrents to exercising the franchise and authorized Federal supervision of voter registration where necessary.”

*Adapted from ourdocuments.gov*