

# The Reconstruction Amendments

Read the passage about Reconstruction after the Civil War. Then answer the questions below.

Before the Civil War, most African American people in the South were enslaved and had no legal rights. The Civil War ended slavery, but African Americans still faced many challenges in the South. They did not have citizenship, freedom from discrimination, or the right to vote.

In the decade after the war, a time known as **Reconstruction**, the federal government tried to make changes in the South. The South had just tried to leave the U.S. during the Civil War. So, Reconstruction was meant to bring those states back into the U.S. and protect the rights of African American people. But Southern states resisted these efforts by passing laws called **Black Codes**. These laws discriminated against African American people by denying their right to vote, use public services like schools and post offices, meet in groups, or do any work except farming or being a servant. Many African American people were even forced to go back to labor for their former enslavers.

## AMERICA IN 1865



■ Southern states

The **Radical Republicans**, a group of congressmen from the North, wanted to stop the Black Codes. They needed a way to prevent state laws from discriminating against African American people. So, they passed **the Reconstruction Amendments**, which were three changes to the U.S. Constitution to prevent discrimination. Because the Constitution governs the entire country, Radical Republicans hoped this could force all states to respect equal rights.

1.

What were the two main goals of Reconstruction?

The two main goals were to bring Southern states back into the United States and protect the rights of African American people.

2.

What was the purpose of the Black Codes?

The Black Codes were meant to discriminate against African American people. These laws prevented African American people from voting, using public services, and working or meeting freely.

3.

How did Radical Republicans respond to the Black Codes?

Radical Republicans in Congress responded to the Black Codes by passing the Reconstruction Amendments. These Amendments were three changes to the Constitution.

# The Reconstruction Amendments

To prevent discrimination in the South, the Radical Republicans passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. These are known as the Reconstruction Amendments. Read this selection from the 13th Amendment. Then answer the questions.

Neither slavery nor **involuntary servitude**, except as a punishment for crime . . . shall exist within the United States.”

**involuntary servitude:** being forced to serve and obey someone

4.

What did the 13th Amendment make illegal?

- a. discrimination
- b. inequality
- c. slavery**

5.

Although the 13th Amendment provided some rights, it did not guarantee equal citizenship. Which of the following forms of discrimination did the 13th Amendment not cover? Circle all that apply.

- a. preventing African American people from voting**
- b. requiring African American people to work without being paid**
- c. banning African American children from attending school**
- d. restricting African American people from attending public meetings**

The 14th Amendment went further, preventing other forms of discrimination. Read this selection from the 14th Amendment. Then fill in the blanks below.

All persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . are citizens of the United States . . . . No state shall make or enforce any law which shall **abridge** the privileges . . . of citizens of the United States . . . nor deny to any person within its **jurisdiction** the equal protection of the laws.

**abridge:** take away

**jurisdiction:** territory

Use the words below to fill in the blanks:

Word Bank: equally, unequally, taxpayer, legal, illegal, citizen, take away

6.

The 14th Amendment says that anyone who is born in the United States is a **citizen**. It also says that states can't pass laws to **take away** the rights of citizens and that the law must treat everyone **equally**. For example, the 14th Amendment made it **illegal** to ban African American people from attending public meetings or previously white church groups.

# The Reconstruction Amendments

Read this selection from the 15th Amendment. Then answer the question.

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**.

**abridged:** taken away

**previous condition of servitude:** being enslaved in the past

7.

Which of the following forms of discrimination was the 15th Amendment designed to prevent?

- a. buying people as property
- b. banning African American people from schools
- c. preventing formerly enslaved men from voting**
- d. preventing marriages between white and African American people

The table below shows five examples of state laws called Black Codes. Use what you have learned to decide which amendment was meant to protect against each form of discrimination. Think about whether each law involves voting, slavery, or other rights. Write 13th, 14th, or 15th Amendment in the table.

Description of Black Code	Amendment that protected against each Black Code
Many towns did not allow African American people to rent or own homes there.	The 14th Amendment
State laws often prevented non-white men from voting if their grandfathers were enslaved.	The 15th Amendment
African American people were often forbidden from meeting after dark. Daytime meetings were allowed only with written permission.	The 14th Amendment
State laws said that white landowners could rent African American workers from the state and that these landowners did not need to pay those workers.	The 13th Amendment
State laws forbid African American men from carrying or using weapons unless they had special permission from a judge.	The 14th Amendment