

The Reconstruction Amendments

Background: Between 1861 and 1865 the Northern States and Southern States fought the American Civil War. Following the war, the United States underwent a period known as "Reconstruction" as individuals and leaders began to decide what the nation would look like as it came back together. Between 1865 and 1869, three amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution in an attempt to address questions regarding citizenship and the rights of formerly enslaved people. The text of each amendment is below:

I. The 13th Amendment

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.

Passed by Congress January 31, 1865. Ratified December 6, 1865.

II. The 14th Amendment

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.

Passed by Congress June 13, 1866. Ratified July 9, 1868

III. The 15th Amendment

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—

Passed by Congress February 26, 1869. Ratified February 3, 1870