

The Civil War Amendments

✦ The 13th Amendment Made Slavery Unconstitutional ✦

The Civil War was fought from 1861-1865 between people from the northern part of the United States and people from the southern part. When the war ended, government leaders realized it was time to make some changes to the Constitution to make life fairer for some of the people living in this country. Three amendments were added to the Constitution:



✦ **The 13th Amendment** makes slavery illegal.

✦ **The 14th Amendment** has several important parts. It makes anyone born here an American citizen; police and other government officials must treat people fairly; everyone gets treated equally under the law.

✦ **The 15th Amendment** says that people of all races and creeds can vote.

These three amendments are called **The Civil War Amendments** because they changed problems that caused the disagreements that led to the Civil War.

The biggest disagreement that led to the war was slavery. People against slavery, some of whom were called abolitionists, argued that the United States was founded to be a place where all people would be free. The people who owned the slaves and needed their labor argued that every American had the right to own property, including the right to own slaves. **The 13th Amendment** ended the argument because it makes owning slaves against the law.

Throughout American history, people have questioned why the men who wrote the Constitution, the Framers, did not outlaw slavery from the very beginning of this country in 1787. After all, these men were dedicated to creating a government that would be fair to all people.

One explanation is that the Framers wanted to make sure that the Constitution got passed by all 13 states so that there would be one unified nation. Because some of the Framers owned slaves and represented states where there were many slave owners, there was very little debate about slavery. **The 13th Amendment** was an important step to making the Constitution a law that protects all people.

Discussion Points

1. If you had been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, would you have tried to put something in the Constitution outlawing slavery? Why or why not?
2. Some high school students have argued that requiring them to do service hours as a requirement for graduation is like slavery and against **the 13th Amendment**. What do you think?
3. At various times in our country, the government has drafted or required men to serve in the military. Some have argued that this is a lot like slavery. What do you think?

Missouri GLEs: Social Studies 1D, 3aB, 3aG, 3aH and 3aI

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