

The Civil War Amendments

✦ The 14th Amendment—Equal Protection of the Laws ✦

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. One of the changes, or amendments, made to the Constitution was the **14th Amendment**.

There are many important parts to the **14th Amendment**. One aspect important to groups who feel that they are not treated fairly has been: No State shall make or enforce any law which...nor deny to any person... the equal protection of the laws.

Constitutional experts have said that the 14th Amendment is one of the most important parts of the Constitution and that it is as important as the Bill of Rights.



The Bill of Rights makes sure that the **national** government treats people fairly. The **14th Amendment** makes it clear that both the **national** and **state** governments must treat people alike, or equally, under the law.

Here are just a few ways that the equal protection part of the **14th Amendment** has made things fairer for all Americans:

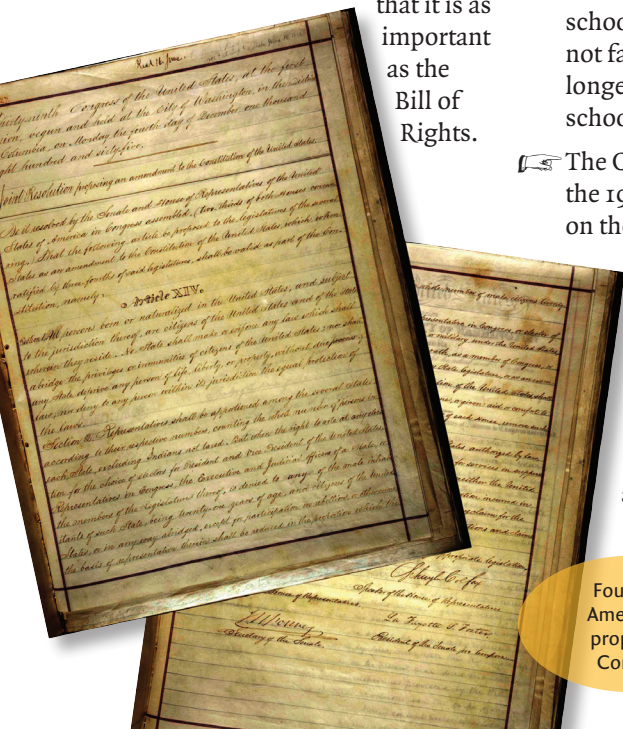
✦ The **14th Amendment** was the basis for the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* case where the Supreme Court ruled that having separate schools for whites and blacks was not fair and that states could no longer have laws requiring separate schools based on race.

✦ The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was based on the promise made in the **14th Amendment**—that all people are equal in the eyes of the law.

✦ The women who fought for the right for women to vote pointed to the **14th Amendment** to make their argument.

Discussion Points

1. In the Declaration of Independence, the men who founded our country stated that “all men are created equally.” Why didn’t they put that in our Constitution? Why did it take an amendment 80 years later to say that and why did it take another 100 years for our country to pass the Civil Rights Bill of 1964?
2. It’s not just citizens who must receive equal protection of the laws, it is anybody “subject to our laws.” For example, if a person visiting here from Denmark commits a crime, that person is entitled to a lawyer and a fair trial because we will punish him under our laws. Why do you think the men who wrote the 14th Amendment thought it was important to provide this protection for everyone?



Fourteenth Amendment proposal by Congress.

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

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