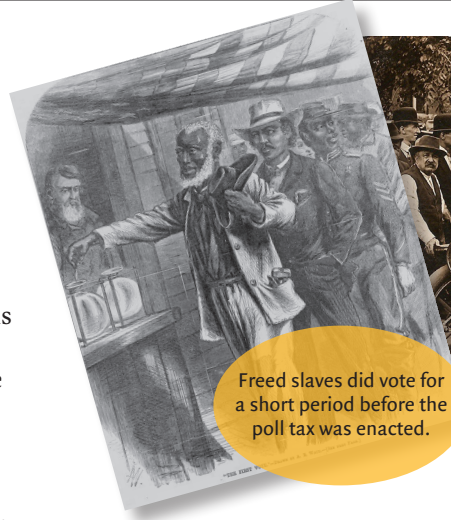


# The Civil War Amendments

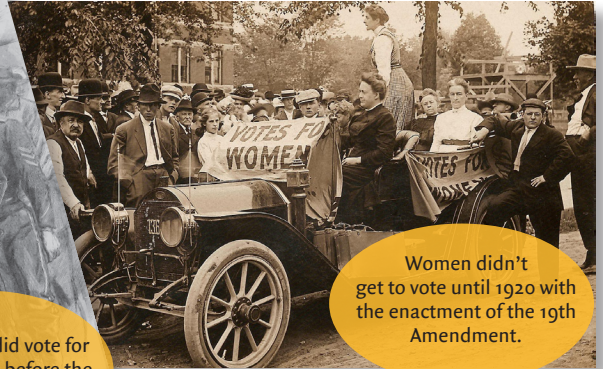
## The 15th Amendment—The Right to Vote

**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 **15th Amendment**.

There are two sections to the **15th Amendment**. The first part states that the right to vote cannot be denied to anyone because of race or color, or because someone was once a slave. This section guaranteed that freed slaves would have the right to vote. The second part gave Congress the power to pass laws to make sure everyone had the right to vote.



Freed slaves did vote for a short period before the poll tax was enacted.



Women didn't get to vote until 1920 with the enactment of the 19th Amendment.

Unfortunately, it took almost 100 years for African-Americans to really get the right to vote. After the **15th Amendment** was passed, some states made laws or rules about who could vote and all of them were aimed at making sure freed slaves would not be able to vote.

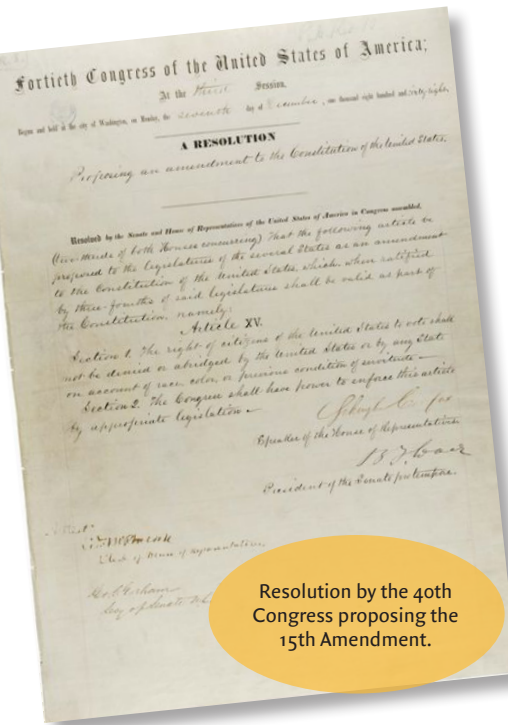
One of the laws required people to pay a poll tax before voting. In other words, people had to pay to vote. At that time, many freed slaves could not afford this tax nor could many of their children and grandchildren.

Another law required that people pass a test about government before voting. Many freed slaves could not read and so they could not vote. As more African-Americans learned to read, the tests got harder. There were exceptions to this rule so that white people were not required to take these tests.

Finally, in 1965, Congress used its power under the **15th Amendment** to make laws that ensure everyone has the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 makes poll taxes and literacy tests illegal, as well anything else that would interfere with the right to vote.

### Discussion Points

1. Find stories in the newspaper about elected officials in your town, your county, your state and our country. What are they saying and doing? Why is it important for everyone to have the right to vote for these people?
2. Is age 18 too old or too young for citizens to have the right to vote? Would you change this age?
3. E-mail Millie Aulbur (milliea@mobar.org) at The Missouri Bar to get a short version of the Alabama Literacy test that was used before 1965. Take the test as a class and discuss whether everyone who wants to vote should be required to take such a test.



Resolution by the 40th Congress proposing the 15th Amendment.

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

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