

Our Constitutional Amendment Rights

Key Constitutional Amendments

When asked, most people will say the rights guaranteed in our Constitution are the first ten amendments, also known as the Bill of Rights. After the Civil War, three key amendments, known as the Reconstruction Amendments, were enacted that expanded those rights and obligations to all citizens of the United States.

13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery throughout the United States and its territories, saying:

“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.”

14th Amendment

Perhaps the most significant of the Reconstruction Amendments is the 14th, **which spells out who is a citizen and how we are represented in Congress**. It also disqualifies anyone who has engaged in insurrection from holding elected office and affirms the country’s duty to pay its debts. Crucially, the 14th Amendment gives the federal government the power to overrule state laws that discriminate against citizens. Many other laws and amendments are based on this 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 2: “Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed....”

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....”**

Section 4: “The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, ... shall not be questioned.”

15th Amendment

The 15th Amendment simply states, **“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.”

After the Reconstruction Amendments were ratified, some states used non-race-based obstacles such as poll taxes or literacy tests to deny voting rights to former slaves and their descendants. These would also have disenfranchised poor, uneducated whites, so states enacted “grandfather clauses” to exempt anyone who had been able to vote before the Civil War ended or whose direct ancestor had been. Ultimately, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to enforce the 15th Amendment.

For more info on the facts stated in this poster, go to our website –
<https://cc4democracy.com>