

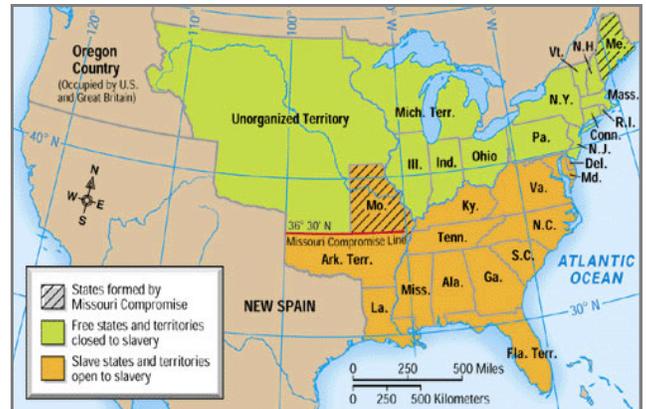


The Constitution: Something's Missing

The Constitution set up the rules for our government. The first ten constitutional amendments, called the Bill of Rights, listed the rights that citizens should expect. But when these documents were written, over one third of the population of the United States was not considered citizens. These were the slaves and free blacks living in the United States. They were born in the U.S., worked in the U.S., and died in the U.S. — but were not protected by the founding documents or by state laws. It took a war between the states to bring changes to the Constitution that would end slavery and set the path for greater equality.

States Taking Sides

We don't hear much about new states being added to the United States anymore. But in the early 1800s, several new states were added to the union. One of the hot topics of the day was whether these new states would allow slavery (like the Southern states) or ban it (like most of the Northern states). Over time these two regions had developed in different ways, which led to conflict. Check out the map to see which states allowed slavery and which didn't.



Civil War!



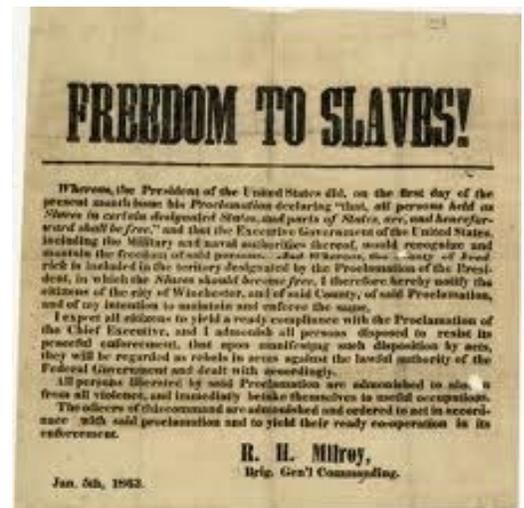
Soldier with battle flag

The debate over slavery and rights was a main factor leading to the bloodiest war in our country's history. The slave states in the South decided they would be better off as a separate nation, so they *seceded* from the United States. **Secession** means separation or breaking away. But President Abraham Lincoln did not want the nation to be divided. War began between the southern states, which called themselves the Confederate States of America, and the northern states, which were still known as the United States of America. President Lincoln led the United States during the war. The Confederate States set up its own government and military. This "War Between the States," now called the Civil War, deeply and bitterly divided Americans on both sides.

Emancipation

In the middle of the war (1863), President Lincoln issued the **Emancipation Proclamation**, declaring that all the slaves in the South were free. (Emancipation means freedom). Although it was a huge and important step, it didn't have much immediate effect. It did not help slaves in the South, because the Confederate States of America had its own government and did not feel bound by proclamations by the United States president. It also did not help slaves in states that had not seceded.

Even so, the Emancipation Proclamation was a big deal. Although it failed to free any actual slaves, it did send a strong message: When the war was over, slavery in the U.S. would end. The U.S. government took this as a sign to move forward with additional laws that changed citizens' rights in America.

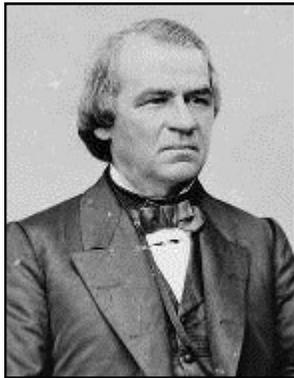


Ending the War, Ending Slavery

In January 1865 – three months before the war ended – Congress passed the **13th Amendment** to the Constitution, outlawing slavery in the United States. The war ended when the Confederacy surrendered in April 1865. After that, all states were once again part of the United States of America. In December 1865, slavery was finally abolished in the entire United States when the last state ratified (passed) the 13th Amendment.



Soldiers buried at Arlington Cemetery



President Johnson

Reconstructing a Nation

President Abraham Lincoln is said to have saved or “preserved the Union” by winning the war to keep all the states together. But the war left much of the South destroyed and disorganized, and the Southern states needed to be made part of the United States again. The new president, Andrew Johnson, believed the Southern states should be let back into the U.S. with no consequences. But many in Congress wanted to make sure the Southern politicians were punished for seceding. They also did not want Southern politicians to interfere with the new freedom of African Americans. This period of rebuilding after the Civil War is known as **Reconstruction**. Many in the South resisted the changes, and the federal government had to send troops to enforce the new civil rights laws.

Changing the Constitution

The 13th Amendment did not end the former slaves’ troubles. Many Southern states quickly passed laws to restrict what little freedom the former slaves had. Something more was needed to expand and protect the rights of the former slaves. As part of the Reconstruction effort, Congress added two more amendments to the Constitution. In 1868, the **14th Amendment** guaranteed citizenship to all people born in the U.S. This amendment also gave all citizens the right to *due process* and *equal protection under the law*. In 1870, the **15th Amendment** gave all men the right to vote regardless of their race or whether they had been slaves before the war.



Due Process

Due process means people have the right to be treated fairly by the government. There are two kinds of due process. One has to do with what a law actually says. Laws must be fair and reasonable. The government cannot pass laws that unfairly limit people’s life, liberty, or property. The other type of due process has to do with how laws are enforced. Government officials must follow certain rules or procedures when they enforce laws. They cannot take away or limit someone’s life, liberty, or property without following those rules.

Equal Protection

Equal protection under the 14th Amendment means the government must treat people equally. Unreasonable discrimination by the government is not allowed. If a law does treat one group of people differently, the government must prove there is a good reason for it. Courts will decide if that reason is good enough to let the law stand. Both equal protection and due process were rights that African Americans lacked due to their race and former state of slavery. By granting these rights, as well as the right to vote, the Constitution expanded citizenship to a whole new group of Americans.

