

THE NATION'S BEGINNINGS**Issues Connector: Expanding and Protecting Civil Rights**

The story of civil rights in the United States is one of slow, gradual progress. Although the Declaration of Independence declared that "all men are created equal," for much of our history this was not true. Even after the ratification of the Bill of Rights, women, African Americans, and Native Americans did not possess the same rights as did white males, particularly white males who owned property. The primary sources on the following pages demonstrate how, over the course of more than 200 years, our understanding of "equality" has expanded.

Bill of Rights (1791)

Three years after the United States Constitution became the new law of the land, Congress ratified the first ten constitutional amendments, known collectively as the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights lists ten civil liberties that the government cannot withhold or violate. Originally, these rights applied only at the federal level, but the U.S. Supreme Court later expanded most liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights to the states. These ten amendments represent the foundation of individual freedom in the United States. Guaranteed rights include freedom of speech and religion, the right to a public trial by jury, the right to be free from unauthorized search and seizure, and the right to not be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment. The First Amendment secures the freedoms of speech, religion, press, and assembly.

Fourteenth Amendment (1868)

Following the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment further enhanced the protections guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. Shortly before the end of the war, the Thirteenth Amendment had abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment attempted to protect the rights of freedmen by extending full citizenship to African Americans and prohibiting both federal and state governments from denying any citizen the right to due process (basic fairness) as described in the U.S. Constitution and earlier amendments.

Nineteenth Amendment (1920)

Originally, each state had the authority to determine who could and could not vote. In 1870, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting states from denying citizens the right to vote based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude. This amendment was added to protect the rights of African American male citizens. Although the Fifteenth Amendment was not enforced until the 1960s, it was, at least in theory, the law. Women of any race, however, were not guaranteed widespread suffrage (the right to vote) until passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which prohibited federal and state governments from denying any citizen the right to vote based on sex.

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The territory of Wyoming had given women the right to vote in 1869, a year before the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Susan B. Anthony, a feminist, believed that the Fifteenth Amendment extended the right to vote to women. Anthony, along with 12 other women, persuaded election inspectors in Rochester, New York, to let them register and vote. Two weeks later, they were arrested. In the early 1900s, support mounted for women's suffrage and, by 1919, many states and territories had granted voting rights in various degrees to women. In 1919, Illinois became the first state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. Ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment by thirty-six states guaranteed suffrage to women throughout the United States.

Civil Rights Act (1964)

In May 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously decided, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that segregation of public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment. This ruling came after decades of work on the part of lawyers and civil rights leaders, but compliance with the ruling would take another decade. Discrimination and segregation continued. In the 1960s, President John F. Kennedy worked to pass a comprehensive Civil Rights Act that would end racial discrimination in employment and public accommodations. After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson continued Kennedy's efforts and signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This legislation protected African Americans' voting rights by eliminating certain registration requirements; prohibited segregation and discrimination by schools, employers, unions, and public accommodations involved in interstate commerce; and reinforced the *Brown* ruling by calling for desegregation of public schools. At the same time, the Twenty-fourth Amendment banned poll taxes, which had been instituted to keep African Americans from voting. A year later the Voting Rights Act further protected citizens' rights by eliminating literacy tests for voter registration and empowering the federal government to enforce voters' rights at the local and state levels.

Americans With Disabilities Act (1990)

In 1990, Congress passed the ADA, which prohibits discrimination against any qualified person on the basis of his or her disability. It also requires that people with disabilities have equal access to public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications. Different provisions of the ADA are enforced by different government agencies. For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission oversees employment provisions. Each of the ADA's five titles either prohibits discrimination or requires organizations that serve the public, whether privately owned or government agencies, to make their facilities and services accessible to people with disabilities.

THE NATION'S BEGINNINGS

Issues Connector: Expanding and Protecting Civil Rights

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
—First Amendment, 1791

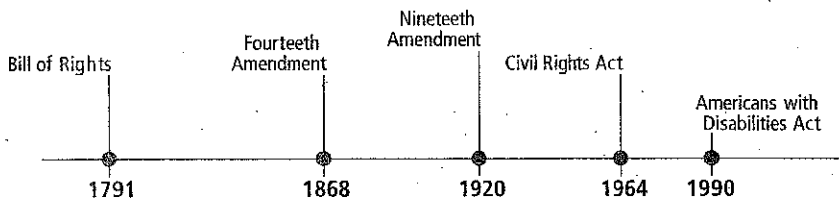
“No person acting under [the] law shall . . . in determining whether any individual is qualified under State law or laws to vote in any Federal election, apply any standard, practice, or procedure different from the standards, practices, or procedures applied under such law or laws to other individuals . . .”
—Civil Rights Act, 1964

“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. . . .”
—Fourteenth Amendment, 1868

Expanding and Protecting Civil Rights

“The Congress finds that . . . the Nation’s proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals. . . .”
—Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990

“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 sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”
—Nineteenth Amendment, 1920



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Directions: Read the quotes on the previous page and answer the following questions.

1. What two limits does the First Amendment place on federal involvement with religion?

2. What does the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee to all citizens?

3. Which amendment specifically bans discrimination on the basis of sex?

4. What purpose is served by the second sentence of the excerpt from the Nineteenth Amendment?

5. **Apply Information** Based on what you know about history, to what do you think the phrase "any standard, practice, or procedure different from the standards, practices, or procedures applied under such law or laws to other individuals" in the Civil Rights Act refers?

6. **Draw Conclusions** What effect do you think the Americans With Disabilities Act had on businesses in the United States?

7. **Link Past and Present** What rights do you think the federal government has an obligation to protect? What protections do you think should be added or removed from the Constitution? Explain your answer.
