

A History of the 15th Amendment

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.07.17

Word Count **551**

Level **940L**



This photo shows participants and an American flag at a civil rights event in Selma, Alabama, in 2000. They were commemorating “Bloody Sunday,” which happened on March 7, 1965, when a peaceful protest in Selma turned violent and the protesters were suppressed by state troopers. After Americans saw it broadcast on TV, there was greater support for guaranteeing the right to vote to everyone. Photo courtesy of the White House

The 15th Amendment granted African-American men the right to vote. It was formally adopted into the U.S. Constitution on March 30, 1870. The amendment reads: “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.” Despite the amendment, African-American men were still prevented from exercising their right to vote. This mainly occurred in the South, where slavery had recently been abolished. Discriminatory practices continued for many years, until the Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965. This law was aimed at ending legal barriers that denied blacks their right to vote under the 15th Amendment.

Reconstruction and the 15th Amendment

In 1867, following the American Civil War, the Republican-dominated U.S. Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act. It divided the South into five military districts. It also outlined how new local governments would be formed, given that every adult male -- regardless of race -- was now

allowed to vote. With the adoption of the 15th Amendment in 1870, African-Americans joined with their white allies in the Southern states to elect the Republican Party to power. At the time, Republicans had a more progressive, liberal agenda than Democrats. They brought about huge changes across the South. By late 1870, Confederate states that had left the Union during the Civil War had been readmitted. Most were controlled by the Republican Party, thanks to the support of black voters.

In the same year, Hiram Rhoades Revels was elected to the U.S. Senate. Revels was a black Republican from Mississippi. He became the first African-American ever to sit in the U.S. Congress. Black Republicans were never proportionately represented in government. However, Revels and a dozen other black men served in Congress during Reconstruction, the period after the Civil War. More than 600 served in state governments and many more held local offices.

Post-Reconstruction

In the late 1870s, conditions worsened for African-Americans in the South. The Southern Republican Party vanished with the end of Reconstruction. Southern state governments effectively nullified the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship to African-Americans. They also revoked the 15th Amendment, stripping blacks of their right to vote. In the years that followed, various forms of discrimination were used to prevent African-Americans from voting. These tactics included poll taxes, which many African-Americans could not afford. Some were given literacy tests that they were not able to pass. Intimidation and violence were also used against blacks who attempted to vote.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on August 6, 1965. It aimed to bring down barriers that denied African-Americans their right to vote.

The act banned the use of literacy tests. It also authorized the U.S. government to investigate the use of poll taxes in state and local elections.

After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, state and local enforcement of the law was weak. Sometimes the law was outright ignored. This mainly occurred in the South, where the proportion of blacks was high and their votes threatened existing political conditions. Still, the Voting Rights Act gave African-American voters the legal power to challenge voting restrictions. It also helped to vastly improve voter turnout.

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What
is
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A History of the 15th Amendment Notes Example

Newsela - <https://newsela.com/read/lib-history-15th-amendment/id/25696/>

Article	My notes:
<p>1 The 15th Amendment granted African-American</p> <p>2 men the right to vote. It was formally adopted</p> <p>3 into the U.S. Constitution on March 30, 1870.</p> <p>4 The amendment reads: “The right of citizens of</p> <p>5 the United States to vote shall not be denied or</p> <p>6 abridged by the United States or by any State on</p> <p>7 account of race, color or previous condition of</p> <p>8 servitude.” Despite the amendment, African-</p> <p>9 American men were still prevented from</p> <p>10 exercising their right to vote. This mainly</p> <p>11 occurred in the South, where slavery had</p> <p>12 recently been abolished. Discriminatory</p> <p>13 practices continued for many years, until the</p> <p>14 Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965. This law</p> <p>15 was aimed at ending legal barriers that denied</p> <p>17 blacks their right to vote under the 15th</p> <p>18 Amendment.</p>	<p>Amendment to the constitution</p> <p>Gave African-American men the right to vote – what about women?</p> <p>What does abridged mean?</p> <p>Servitude?</p> <p>African-American men were still stopped from voting? Why and how?</p> <p>Took the Voting Rights Act in 1965 – wow – almost 100 years later!</p>

Reading graphic organizer

Topic:	
What is the author's claim?	

Claims	Answer Yes or No. If the answer is No, explain why using evidence from the text.
#1	<p>Is the reasoning sound?</p> <p>Is the evidence relevant? (Does all of the evidence presented relate directly to the claim/argument?)</p> <p>Is the evidence sufficient? (Is there enough evidence in the text to support the claim?)</p>
#2	<p>Is the reasoning sound?</p> <p>Is the evidence relevant? (Does all of the evidence presented relate directly to the claim/argument?)</p> <p>Is the evidence sufficient? (Is there enough evidence in the text to support the claim?)</p>
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18 proportion of blacks was high and their votes threatened existing political conditions. Still, the
19 Voting Rights Act gave African-American voters the legal power to challenge voting restrictions.
20 It also helped to vastly improve voter turnout.

Use the passage to answer these questions:

In line 6, what does the phrase “previous condition of servitude” mean?

According to the text, what were some of the barriers that denied African-Americans the right to vote even after the 15th Amendment was passed?

According to the text, what were some of the impacts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?