

H. Reconstruction (1865-77)

1. Once the Civil War was over, the government began to change the Constitution to end slavery once and for all.
2. The first new “amendment” (addition) to the Constitution was the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which reads: “*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.*”
3. After being accepted by 2/3 of the House of Representatives and Senate, the amendment was passed on to the state governments, of which 3/4 had to agree as well before it could become an amendment. Since some of the slave states were not part of the government yet, enough states agreed and the amendment became law.
4. The government also created the **Fourteenth Amendment**, which said that all former slaves were citizens, and thus they were protected by the laws of the United States like everyone else.
5. When some Southern states refused to accept the Fourteenth Amendment, they were ruled by the Union army, and not allowed to rejoin the Federal government.
6. To complete the transformation of former black slaves into free American citizens, the federal government passed the **Fifteenth Amendment**. It said that all citizens had the right to vote.
7. To make sure that Southern states respected this amendment, the government also created laws called the “Force Acts,” which said that the police should protect all voters.
8. Although the feeling of Union had certainly not returned, when Southern governments seemed to have been reorganized in a stable manner, the Union army withdrew in 1877.

I. Citizenship and the Long Struggle for “Civil Rights”

1. Although the Reconstruction amendments to the Constitution freed the slaves, made them citizens, and gave them the right to vote, it would be a full *one hundred* years before the social contract of America was really changed to make these promises fully true.
2. During that hundred years, it would still have been impossible for an African-American man like Barack Obama to be elected president.
3. During this long period, the African-American population struggled to rise up and insist on the protection of their rights. This struggle is known as the “civil rights movement.”
4. The two main problems were *segregation* and *discrimination*. “Segregation” means keeping people separate, such as having separate drinking fountains and bathrooms for people of different races. “Discrimination” means treating people unfairly because of their race.
5. An important example of these problems was the case of a black woman named Rosa Parks. Where she lived, public buses were segregated. When Parks refused to give up her seat in the separate “colored” section of a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama to a white man, she was arrested. This led to a legal case where the court ruled that *segregated* public buses are “unconstitutional,” since all citizens are supposed to be treated equally by the government according to the law.
6. Public schools were also supposed to be *desegregated*, but Southerners in Louisiana did not want a little black girl named Ruby Bridges to attend a public school in New Orleans. When she was allowed, white families pulled their kids out, and some even threatened the little girl, who had to be escorted by federal marshals to and from school.
7. The greatest champion of civil rights was Martin Luther King Jr., who gave his famous “I have a dream” speech in Washington, at the Lincoln Memorial. The most famous lines from the speech are: “*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal’ ...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*”



Ruby Bridges is escorted from her public school by Federal marshals. Famous American artist Norman Rockwell created a painting called “*The Problem We All Live With*” in honor of Ruby Bridges.

8. Because of the civil rights movement, the Federal government passed two laws to strengthen the 14th and 15th amendments: the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** and the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**. The Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate against anyone because of race. The Voting Rights Act made it illegal to make different voting laws based on race.
9. Because of these changes, it became possible for African-Americans to become full citizens, and even for an African-American man to become president of the United States.

