

Reconstruction Amendments & Civil Rights Act

Amendment XIII (1865)

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.

Amendment XIV (1868)

Section 1.

[Summary] All persons born or naturalized in the United States, i.e., former black slaves, are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they reside. No state can abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States. All citizens shall receive due process.

Section 2.

[Abridged] 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.

[Summary] Those who “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” against the U.S.—i.e., those who fought in for the South in the Civil War—may not hold elected office.

Section 4.

[Summary]. The U.S. government is not liable for war debts of the South or for claims of loss related to freed slaves.

Amendment XV (1870)

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.

Civil Rights Act of 1875

The Act guaranteed that everyone, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, was entitled to the same treatment in “public accommodations” (i.e. inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement).

In 1883 the Supreme Court declared the act unconstitutional on the basis that Congress had no power to regulate the conduct of individuals. (The Fourteenth Amendment prohibits discrimination by the state, not by individuals.)