

Standard 5-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of Reconstruction and its impact on racial relations in the United States.

5-1.2 Summarize the provisions of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, including how the amendments protected the rights of African Americans and sought to enhance their political, social, and economic opportunities. (P, E, H)

Taxonomy Level: B 2 Understand/ Conceptual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

In 4th grade, students explained how specific legislation and events affected the institution of slavery in the territories, including the *Dred Scott* decision (4-5.7).

In United States history, students will summarize the effects of Reconstruction on the southern states and the roles of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments in that era. (USHC-4.4).

It is essential for students to know:

These three Reconstruction amendments were designed to end slavery and protect the rights of the newly freed slaves.

The 13th Amendment freed the slaves everywhere in the United States. It is a common misconception that the Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves. The only slaves freed by President Lincoln's proclamation were slaves that were in territory still controlled by the Confederacy. The Confederate government did not recognize the right of the President of the United States to free its slaves. The Union army freed the slaves in the territories that it conquered. However, there were still slaves in the border states that had not left the Union and in parts of the South that the Union army did not control. This amendment recognized the rights of all Americans to "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as promised in the Declaration of Independence. Consequently, for a time during Reconstruction, the rights of African Americans were protected by the federal government.

The 14th Amendment overturned the *Dred Scott* decision (4-5.7) and recognized the citizenship of African Americans. The amendment also recognized the rights of all citizens to "due process of law" and "equal protection of the laws." The amendment affected African Americans in all parts of the United States, not just in the South. Southern states refused to ratify the amendment and so Congressional Reconstruction was imposed. The 14th amendment also included provisions for lessening the political power of states that did not recognize the rights of citizens to vote. However, this was not effective and led to the passage of the 15th amendment.

The 15th amendment declared that the rights of a male citizen to vote could not be infringed upon based on "race, creed or previous condition of servitude." The amendment affected African Americans in all parts of the United States, not just in the South. Southern states were required to write new constitutions that allowed African Americans to vote. Southern critics claimed that the only reason that Congress passed this amendment was to protect the power of the Republican Party. Certainly this motive played a part in the passage of the 15th amendment. However, as a result of the amendment, African Americans were able to vote and hold political office and were elected to state legislatures and congressional delegations during the Reconstruction period.

Although the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments were designed to protect the rights of African Americans, they were only effective so long as the Republicans had control of state governments or federal troops were able to protect African American's social and political rights. No provisions were passed to ensure that African Americans would be able to own land and most Southerners refused to sell land to African

Americans, even if the former slaves had the money to purchase it. Consequently the economic rights and independence of freedmen were limited, even during the Reconstruction period. Once Reconstruction ended there was no protection for any rights for African Americans.

It is not essential for students to know:

Although students do not need to know the specific dates of the ratification of these amendments, they should understand the circumstances of their ratification (5-1.1) and the order in which they were ratified. Students do not need to know the names of any African American officeholders elected as a result of the 15th amendment. Students do not need to know the entire process of amending the constitution, only that 2/3 of the states must ratify amendments in order for them to become law.

Assessment guidelines:

Appropriate assessments require that students be able to **summarize** the provisions of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. Students should be able to **explain** how these amendments affected African Americans.