

# 15th Amendment

The 15th amendment protects the rights of Americans to vote in elections to elect their leaders. Specifically, it confirms the right to vote and lists conditions that are illegal to deny another person the right to vote. Any American cannot be denied the right to vote, based on race, color or being a former slave.

The 15th amendment was important in that it not only finally gave African Americans the right to vote, but also allowed the most African Americans in history to be elected into public office. Once in office, they pursued laws that provided schools for all children and allowed people of different races to be married.

After the US Army was pulled out of the South, white Southerners reasserted their power and passed laws that prevented those whose grandfathers had not been citizens from voting as well as making people pay to vote. This prevented African Americans from voting meaningfully in the South until much later in the 20th century. Therefore, even though the 15th amendment protected the voting rights of African Americans and other minorities, it was not until much later that the federal government stepped in to enforce it.

## Before the 15th amendment

Before the 15th amendment and the Civil War, African Americans, even those who were not slaves, could not vote. The right to vote would imply that these men were citizens, which was not acceptable to Americans at the time. The Supreme Court case of Dred Scott v. Sanford set the rule for African Americans not voting and this rule was in place until the 15th amendment.

## Section 1

**The right of citizens of the United States...**

*(The 14th amendment grants citizenship to all born in the United States and this amendment grants them the right to...)*

**...to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State...**

*(the federal or any state government may never take away this right)*

**...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.**

*(all persons, regardless of their ethnicity, race or status as a former slave has the right to vote)*

## Section 2

**The Congress shall have power to enforce this article...**

*(The legislative branch, congress must enforce the 15th amendment)*

**...by appropriate legislation.**

*(by passing laws to protect the right to vote for the people mentioned in this amendment)*

## **Problems with the 15th amendment**

Many states were wary of the 15th amendment, mostly because they did not want Chinese and Irish immigrants voting. In fact, California and Oregon would not ratify the amendment due to the large amount of Chinese immigrants that lived there. It was not until almost 90 years later that these states would ratify the 15th amendment. The 15th amendment passed, without the support of these states, in 1870 and these protections largely helped African Americans, as long as there were federal troops to protect them.