

Background A: Slavery & the 13th Amendment

Slavery has existed all over the world, including in the United States. A slave was a person who was owned by another person who controlled much of what the slave did. Slaves were often separated from family members and some were treated very badly, including being beaten.

Slavery existed in all the U.S. colonies but as time went on, some states banned it. Most of the slaves worked on plantations in the southern states.

By 1860 the United States had nearly four million slaves, which was about 1/8th of the total population. That same year Abraham Lincoln was elected president of the United States. Shortly after, 11 southern states seceded (or withdrew) from the Union, in part, to protect the right to own slaves.

The U.S. Civil War lasted for 4 years and cost more than 500,000 lives. The Union won, ensuring that the United States remained a united country, and slavery was abolished with the ratification, or formal passage, of the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution on December 18, 1865.

Background B: School Segregation & *Brown v. Board of Education*

As late as the 1950s, there were places in the United States where black children could not go to school with white children. There were separate schools for black children and separate schools for white children. The schools for the white children had better teachers, better books, and better rooms. No black student could attend a white school.

A group of black parents did not think this was fair. They went to court. One of the parents' names was Brown. So the name of the court case was *Brown v. Board of Education*. It's one of the most famous court cases in history.

The case went to the most important court in the United States—the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court decided the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The judges agreed with the black parents. They said separate schools were not fair. They made it against the law to have separate schools for whites and blacks.

Background C: Woman Suffrage & the 19th Amendment

About 80 years ago, women could not vote. Only men could vote. Women paid taxes and obeyed laws. But they could not vote in elections.

Many women believed this was not fair. They wanted woman suffrage, or the right to vote. So they worked hard to change, or amend, the U.S. Constitution. This is the most important set of laws in the United States. Women wanted it written in the Constitution that they had the right to vote.

So women formed groups. They marched in parades. They wrote letters. They spoke to lawmakers.

Some men laughed at them. But many men agreed with the women.

Women went to the Congress of the United States. The people in Congress agreed that women should have the right to vote. They wrote the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This amendment gave women the right to vote. Almost all the states approved the amendment. In 1920, the 19th Amendment became part of the U.S. Constitution.