

# American ideals of freedom and liberty



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In 1776, our country was founded on American ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality however, during this time in history; these principals were often bias to upper class white men. When the Declaration of Independence was first written, many Americans understood the notion of “ all men are created equal” to truly mean that all white males were created equal. This was true with other civil rights guarantees also. The framers of our country’s Constitution were also considered to be the elite of their time. They were all white, wealthy, well educated land owners and did not adequately represent the diversity in our nation.

Civil rights are defined as; a class of rights and freedoms that protect individuals from unwarranted government action and ensure one’s ability to participate in the civil and political life of the state without discrimination or repression. Freedoms of speech, of the press, of religion, and of fair and equal treatment are the basic civil rights granted to each of us. The Bill of Rights that was added to our Constitution outlines the basic freedoms and liberties guaranteed to every citizen of the United States of America. The Bill of Rights, in black and white is the first ten amendments to the constitution; however sadly, women and African Americans were not granted the civil rights entitled to them. Civil rights issues began at our countries founding, and continues throughout history and today.

Wars in general happen as a result of people or nations defending a territory, protecting their interests and/or trying to achieve a moral purpose. The Civil War combined all of this rational, and ended up being the single bloodiest conflict in American history. The Civil War claimed the lives of over 600, 000 Americans, all on American soil; which is more than in all other American

wars combined with the exception of Vietnam. The Civil War began in 1838 as a result of disputes between the northern and southern states over slavery and taxation of cotton exports. The south wanted to keep slavery and felt it was necessary, so they started the war by seceding from the union. The North refused to let the Southern states break up the Union, thus the dispute led to the Civil War.

The end result of the Civil War did free the slaves, however, the blacks did not gain any ground of status or respect among the states in either the north or south. White men continued to treat the African American population as property rather than people. Following the Civil War, slavery may have been abolished however not much changed for blacks. Blacks fought hard for freedoms; men still could not own property, vote, or go anywhere in public the white men were allowed. They suffered through hate, beatings, and small rations of food. They were treated no differently when they were supposed to be free. If a black man or woman did get the opportunity to work for pay at a white man's factory, he nor she would never get the same pay as a white man. They were working for the same company and doing the same job however, it wasn't considered to be "right" for a black man or woman to be earning the same amount as a white man or woman.

Women were making small strides toward equality in the early 1800's; Oberlin College in 1833 was the first to accept women students and make their university a coed facility, the first National Female Anti-Slavery Society convention was held in 1837 with 81 female delegates, and in 1844 Female textile workers in Massachusetts organized the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA) and demand a 10 hour work day. The push for women's

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right to vote began in the mid 1800's when the proposed 15th amendment came to fruition. Some suffragists refused to endorse the amendment because women were not included; however, argued that once the black man was enfranchised, women too would achieve their goal, and gain voting rights. The National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was formed in 1890; the group organized marches and protests, and pressed the federal government for institutional changes, such as allowing married women to have property rights.

The 15th amendment to the Constitution granted African American men the right to vote. This was a big step in the direction of equality. This amendment states that 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." Voting rights for African Americans was huge in the civil rights movement; however it proved not to be an easy task or necessarily wise choice for most blacks to do so. Discriminatory legal barriers were enacted to prevent them from actually having a say, once again forcing the African Americans to fight for what was suppose to be a freedom. Literary tests, poll taxes, the grandfather clause and white primaries were put in place as ways to discourage the black voters from exercising their civic duty.

Literary tests were exams given to individuals to determine if they were intelligent enough to vote. The vast majority of African Americans were not educated; therefore it was very difficult to prove they were literate enough to vote. The exams were administered by whites and bias toward whites. A test administer may ask a white person to spell a simple word such as God or <https://assignbuster.com/american-ideals-of-freedom-and-liberty/>

boy, where a black person would be asked to spell a word like chrysanthemum or interpretation. When an African American got the word wrong, they were deemed illiterate and lost their privilege to vote. For those who did pass the literary tests, the government put in place poll taxes. Essentially this was a law forcing voters to pay a steep tax/fee in order to vote. If you were not able to pay the tax, your right to vote was revoked. Taxes were also cumulative; if you could not afford the tax at a particular election, the next time you tried to vote, you were required to pay that elections tax as well as all previous unpaid taxes. African Americans were poor and most lost their voting privilege because of this.

The Grandfather Clause was a law that waived electoral literacy requirements and poll taxes for those whose ancestors voted before the Civil War. This provided a loop hole for illiterate whites that could not pass the literary tests to be able to vote. It also prevented the blacks from voting as the majority of their ancestors were slaves and had no rights.

The Democratic Party was the dominant party in the United States during this time and in most all elections their candidates were in office. To avoid allowing black voters to vote in the primary's, the democrats promoted their political party as a private organization. By doing this, they could control who voted in the primary and they could exclude anyone they wished. In most cases, who ever won the primary, and made it to the general election ticket would be voted into office; therefore the African American votes really didn't matter since the primary was determined by the whites.

The Reconstruction period following the Civil War saw the beginnings of the Ku Klux Klan. This group was a white activist group and the first charter was founded in 1865. Their original purpose was to deny African Americans the same rights and opportunities as white people in the south. Klan members used violence, threats, and even murder of those blacks who attempted to become educated, to vote, to befriend whites or sought out better paying jobs. It was during this time the Klan began to wear white robes in an attempt of further intimidating blacks and to conceal their identity. In 1870 and 1871 the federal government was forced to step in and passed a series of acts, known as Enforcement Acts. They were put in place to protect the voting rights of blacks and to try and suppress the Ku Klux Klan. The Acts; outlawed actions intended to prevent blacks from voting, established rules to eliminate fraudulent registration practices, prevented intimidation of blacks by any illegal action, and gave the president the right to have the military step in when public safety was threatened.

Civil rights have been a struggle America has faced since the founding of our country, and has been a violent and deadly battle for equality of our laws. All people are created equal, and all people bleed red. I believe that every citizen in America should have the same rights and privileges regardless of ethnic background or religion. A prerequisite of being a white, land owning well off male contradicts the very principals our nations was founded on.

Reconstruction in the south was America's first attempt at an interracial democracy. It completely reshaped life as was once known. Blacks were freed from slavery and for the first time looked upon as a person, not property. The United States government finally assumed responsibility for

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defining and protecting civil rights. Freedmen in the south were given an opportunity to vote; although it did not come without risk and challenges. Black men were also granted the right to hold political office. The African American community was huge in the south, and with the help of white allies was able to temporarily bring the Republican Party to power.

Cumming, GA is considered to be a rural country town with little racial diversity or tolerance. Cumming benefited from the traffic of the gold rush in Dahlonega; however when gold was discovered in CA, and the tourists left, Cummings economy suffered. Even during the Civil War, Cumming was bypassed by Sherman's Army and was basically a sleepy little town. There is a case from 1912 when a white woman was raped by 3 black men in town. This outraged the citizens so much that Georgia's governor was forced to send troops into the city to prevent a riot. The Ku Klux Klan's Knight Riders campaigned for well over a month in an effort to force all African Americans out of not only Cumming, but all of Forsyth County. They were fairly successful and for many years the black population in the county was basically non-existent. More recently in 1987, a small group of blacks marched through town in Cumming to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday. This infuriated the Klan and in protest, they threw glass bottles and rocks at the group. This attack drew national attention and turned into the largest civil rights demonstrations since the 1960's. The results of this demonstration were positive as it was a turning point and marked favorable change. Today, the city is becoming more and more diverse and is growing rapidly.