

Educator Resource

The 14th Amendment and Birthright Citizenship

Dates & Eras Pre-War,
The Civil War,
Reconstruction

Themes Slavery,
Emancipation,
African
Americans

Grades 6-9
9-12

Standards VS.8
USI.1
USI.9
USII.4
CE.3
CE.10
VUS.6
VUS.7
VUS.13
GOVT.11
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7”

History Overview

The three “Reconstruction Amendments” were passed in the wake of the American Civil War and serve as an expansion of the rights due to all Americans. The second of these is the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and was ratified in 1868. It grants citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof” and provides all citizens with equal protection under the law.

This video is from the ACWM’s Foundry Series and it explores a topic that serves as the root of several modern issues. One that has been debated time and time again, is the issue of citizenship and the different paths to becoming a citizen of the United States. Professor Martha Jones delves into the debates over slavery, emancipation, and citizenship, especially among the formerly enslaved and African-American people in the early 19th century.

Resources

[ACWM Foundry Series: The 14th Amendment and Birthright Citizenship \(Youtube\)](#)

Suggested Questions

1. In what ways did African American people define citizenship for themselves, and how do people do that today?
2. What arguments did people have against birthright citizenship in the 19th century that they don't have today, and vice versa?
3. Professor Jones says that the ideas behind statutes and amendments often become law after "sustained activism" on the part of the people who have the most stake. What are a few other examples of constitutional amendments that came about through activism?

Suggested Activities

1. Before watching the video, ask your students what it means to be a citizen in general and what it means specifically to be an American. Do they feel that "American-ness" is fixed, or does it change over time? Have them jot down answers down on a sticky note and ask the same question after viewing the video. How do their answers compare? Has their idea of citizenship changed?
2. Watch the video with your students, then have them break into groups to come up with questions that they have after viewing. As a whole class, discuss different questions they have and see if any students can answer another's question. Give them time to research possible answers to their questions and have them share their answers with the class.
3. Have your students compare the discussion in the video with modern discussions around citizenship. Think about how politicians, government, media, and others portray citizens compared to non-citizens.