THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 16 - The Fifteenth Amendment - The Vote and Race

The Vote and Race

Central question: What does this amendment forbid, and what did it not fix by itself?





The Fifteenth Amendment is the third of three amendments written in the five years after the Civil War. Volume 14 told how the Thirteenth ended slavery in law. Volume 15 told how the Fourteenth made citizens of all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to its jurisdiction. This volume tells how the Fifteenth guarded the ballot: no citizen's vote may be taken away because of his race.

Hold one guardrail from the first page to the last. This book will never tell you that everyone could freely vote starting in 1870. The words were promised in 1870. In much of the country, the practice took almost a hundred years to catch up, and the long gap between the promise and the practice is the real story of this amendment. You placed this amendment on the timeline in Civics No. 8. Here is its whole story.

For ages 7 to 11. Level Up boxes reach to age 13.

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is Voter Carl in this volume. He stands at a polling place of the 1870s, holding a blank ballot beside a wooden ballot box. His job is the job this amendment gives every election official: check the things the law allows you to check, and never let a citizen's race decide whether his ballot goes into the box.

The four strands, kept separate

Strand	What it is
THE WORDS	The amendment itself, in ORIGINAL WORDS, plus a PLAIN LANGUAGE EXPLANATION set apart from it.
THE HISTORY	Evidence from before and around 1870 about why the words were added, and the record of what happened next.
COURTS HAVE SAID	Named cases with years. This is interpretation by judges, labeled as interpretation.
STILL DEBATED	Real disputes that remain. Stated fairly, never as settled fact.

How to use this book

- Read the words aloud first. Then read the explanation.
- Write, draw, point, or dictate your answers. All of those count.
- Every voter and registrar in the activities is fictional. The real voters, officials, and judges are on the History and Courts Have Said pages, with their real names and years.
- Civics No. 3 owns how voting and elections work today: registering, ballots, and counting. This book owns the Fifteenth Amendment's own words, the Reconstruction story, and the court record. It cross-references No. 3 and Book 15 rather than repeating them.
- Family Talk is where the family viewpoint lives. It is never presented as a court holding.

THE GUARDRAIL: PROMISED AND PRACTICED

Carl keeps two columns in this book. **Promised:** what the words of 1870 say. **Practiced:** what actually happened at real polling places, year by year. A ratification date is the day a promise was written into the Constitution. It is not the day the promise was kept everywhere. Whenever this book gives you a date, ask which column it belongs in.

MEET CARL BOX

Carl's ballot is blank on purpose. A ballot does not belong to a race, a party, or an official. It belongs to the citizen who casts it, and its power is that no one may look at the voter instead of the vote. Carl holds his ballot up to the light the way he holds every document in this series: read what it says, all of what it says, and nothing it does not say.