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A Mental Expedition

The Reconstruction Amendments, otherwise known as the Civil War Amendments, were established to create a world in which both black people and white people could live with equal rights. To fully understand the significance of these events, we need to look back at the conditions that slaves lived in. Imagine, you're a nineteen year old black male in the 1860's. You work on a plantation six days a week, sunup to sundown. You were separated from your family at a very young age, and don't remember them at all. The next five years are going to completely change your life. In order to comprehend the true weight of the Reconstruction Amendments, we need to put ourselves in the shoes of the people it affected the most. As the Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

When the idea for the 13th Amendment was first proposed in 1862, many slave owners across the U.S. produced a large majority of their income from involuntary labor. As you can imagine, the idea of making slavery illegal was concerning for many business owners, and many financial experts also worried that the abolition of slavery would be detrimental to the economy. However, the proposition to make slavery completely illegal had been floating around for a while, and in the early 1860's, people finally started taking big steps towards making this a reality. Now go back to the mindset of a 19 year old black male. You get word that there's people fighting to make slavery illegal. There's people fighting to make sure that you are given the same

freedom that white people have. It seems almost too good to be true. You can hardly believe it when you're legally freed from lifelong servitude.

Of course, just as every story with a fight for justice, nothing is ever that easy. After passing the 13th amendment, making involuntary servitude illegal, except in cases of criminal punishment, people started trying to work around these laws, and created slave-like conditions for "free" African Americans. Not only this, but creating these conditions legally was even easier if the victim was a black citizen who hadn't been officially granted citizenship, which was unfortunately, the case for a lot of people. To combat this discrimination, the 14th amendment was passed, helping many people secure their citizenship, and helping to protect their rights as citizens. Going back to the perspective of this young black male, now in his early twenties. You hadn't been expecting to be completely welcomed into society, but you hadn't expected to remain in almost exactly the same conditions as before. However, you quickly learn that there are many others in your situation, and that the government is working to help secure your rights as a citizen. Maybe things would turn out okay after all.

While African Americans now were legally considered US citizens, and treated the same as white citizens under the law, they were not ensured the same voting rights as white citizens. The government decided to change this. There were a few problems with this though. Since white people had lived for hundreds of years believing that they were superior to black people, they obviously weren't able to completely get rid of this false belief in a matter of a few years. This pride was carried on with them, and when added to their desire to have as large of an influence in the American government as possible, the idea of giving the right to vote to thousands of black males didn't seem too appealing. However, despite the contradictions, black

males, 21 years of age, and who owned land or could pay the taxes were given the right to vote. Now go back to this now mid-twenties black male. You had been freed, granted citizenship, and been given the right to vote if you met the requirements, all in the last five years. This was something that a few years ago would have seemed impossible. It would have been a dream.

Apart from the fact that The Reconstruction Amendments helped thousands of people in the years that they were passed, they have continued to help shape society to this day. While these amendments mainly focussed on the lives of black Americans, we eventually let these basic human rights expand to people of every race. We continue to open our views to examine new thoughts and ideas, allowing everyone to have a voice in the world. And while racism is still a constantly appearing issue in our modern society, the hope that we can eventually come to some sort of peace with equality stirs from the proof that steps have been successfully made in the past towards the goals.