

Equality and Inequality

What is equality? What is inequality? These are questions that Americans have asked themselves often over the centuries. Most Americans believe that equality for all people is an important value in our society. However, as a nation, we have struggled to achieve equality for everyone.

The three photos on the right represent some of the difficult times in America's fight for equality. In small groups, choose one photo to discuss together. List five things you notice about that photo. Discuss your ideas with classmates who studied the other photos.



1. Boys working in Bibb Mill 1, Macon, Georgia, January 1909. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-nclc-01581.

2. Water fountain at a streetcar terminal in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1939. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-fsa-8a26761a.

3. Women petitioning for the right to vote in New York State, ca. 1917. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-53202.

Fighting for Our Rights in America

Since winning independence from Great Britain, Americans have struggled for the freedom to decide their own future. After independence, some groups still did not have the same freedoms as other people. They had to fight for equality. Throughout our country's history, women, African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, and other minorities have all struggled to gain equal rights, such as voting, equal pay and education, and decent housing. These important civil rights should be available to all people.

In addition to freedom of religion, the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, press, and peaceful assembly, and the right to petition the government for change. Famous and ordinary people in America have exercised those freedoms in their fight for equality. We remember Susan B. Anthony and Martin Luther King, Jr. for their fight for civil rights.



Until 1920, women were not allowed to vote in political elections. This image shows women, known as suffragettes, petitioning for the right to vote in Washington, D.C., February 1917. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-31799.



The March on Washington in 1963. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsa-37229.

Reflect on the Reading



Throughout our country's history, women, African Americans, and other minorities have struggled to gain equal rights, such as voting, equal pay and education, and decent housing. These important civil rights should be available to all people.

What are other civil rights that Americans have fought for?

Answer this Civics Test question.

1. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment? _____

Susan B. Anthony and Her Contribution

Susan B. Anthony was born on February 15, 1820, and she became an influential leader for civil rights. She campaigned for the right of women to vote. She also advocated for the end of slavery and for equal treatment of women in the workplace. She gave speeches to support women's rights and she organized protests. She went to Washington, D.C., and asked Congress to change the voting laws. In 1872, she was arrested for trying to vote in an election.

She died in 1906, 14 years before the 19th Amendment was passed. The 19th Amendment



Susan B. Anthony
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ggbain-30125.

to the Constitution gave women the right to vote in 1920. In 1979, a one-dollar coin with her face was created to honor her contribution to civil rights and women's rights. It is called the Susan B. Anthony dollar.



Women at a polling place in 1957.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-08063.



Discussion Questions

Do women and men have the same rights in your native country?
How are they the same and how are they different?

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What did Susan B. Anthony do? _____
2. There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe one of them.

From Slavery to Freedom

During colonial times, millions of African people were taken to North America and sold as slaves. Most were owned by people in the South where there was an agricultural economy with many large plantations and small farms. Slaves were treated like personal property. They had no freedom or basic rights. They could not make decisions about their families or their lives. They were not paid for their work and most did not receive any formal education. The North and South of the United States disagreed about slavery, and this was one of the causes of the Civil War.

When the Civil War ended in 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed. This amendment freed all slaves in every state. In 1868, the 14th Amendment was passed and all black people became U.S. citizens. Later in 1870, the 15th Amendment gave voting rights to all black men. These changes were important in the fight for freedom for African Americans. However, this was only the beginning of many



*Slaves on a Southern plantation in May 1862.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-04324.*

more decades of struggle for civil rights for African Americans. In the 1900s, the civil rights movement began the fight for more rights for everyone.

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What group of people was taken to America and sold as slaves? _____
2. Name one problem that led to the Civil War. _____
3. There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe one of them.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a minister from Atlanta, Georgia, who believed in equality and freedom for all Americans. During the 1950s and 1960s, he became a leader in the civil rights movement which tried to end racial discrimination and segregation. Dr. King felt that nonviolent protest was more powerful than violence. In parts of the country, it was difficult for African Americans and others to find decent housing or jobs, or to vote in elections. Dr. King led thousands of people in nonviolent protests to fight for those rights. Because of this movement, the government passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. These laws protected voting rights for all citizens and ended segregation.

Dr. King believed that every citizen deserved America's promise of equality and justice. In 1963, he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. In the speech, he imagined an America in which people of all races exist together equally.

He was only 35 years old when he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his civil rights work. Dr. King was killed on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Each year in January, we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day to remember his contributions.



*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-116775.*

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What movement tried to end racial discrimination? _____
2. What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do? _____

For more information about the civil rights movement in the United States, please visit the Smithsonian National Museum of American History's web page, [Separate is Not Equal History](#).



Writing an Essay

Civil rights movements have occurred in many countries around the world. Susan B. Anthony and Martin Luther King, Jr. were two leaders who fought for civil rights in the United States. How did people fight for their rights in your native country? Who are the leaders who helped in those struggles?

Civics Test Questions—Equality and Freedom

Read the test questions and write the answers. Take turns practicing them with your partner.

1. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment? _____
2. There are four amendments to the Constitution about who can vote. Describe one of them.

3. What group of people was taken to America and sold as slaves? _____
4. Name one problem that led to the Civil War. _____
5. What did Susan B. Anthony do? _____
6. What movement tried to end racial discrimination? _____
7. What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do? _____