

The Fifteenth Amendment, 1870

Introduction

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments gave constitutional status to emancipation's promise of freedom. The Fifteenth Amendment provided suffrage for black men, declaring 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."

In this lithograph, "The fifteenth amendment celebrated May 19th 1870," the legislation takes symbolic form. The artist depicts African Americans' hopes arising from the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment: scenes of education, family life, jobs, and the vote. Among the collage of images are portraits of abolitionist heroes Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln.

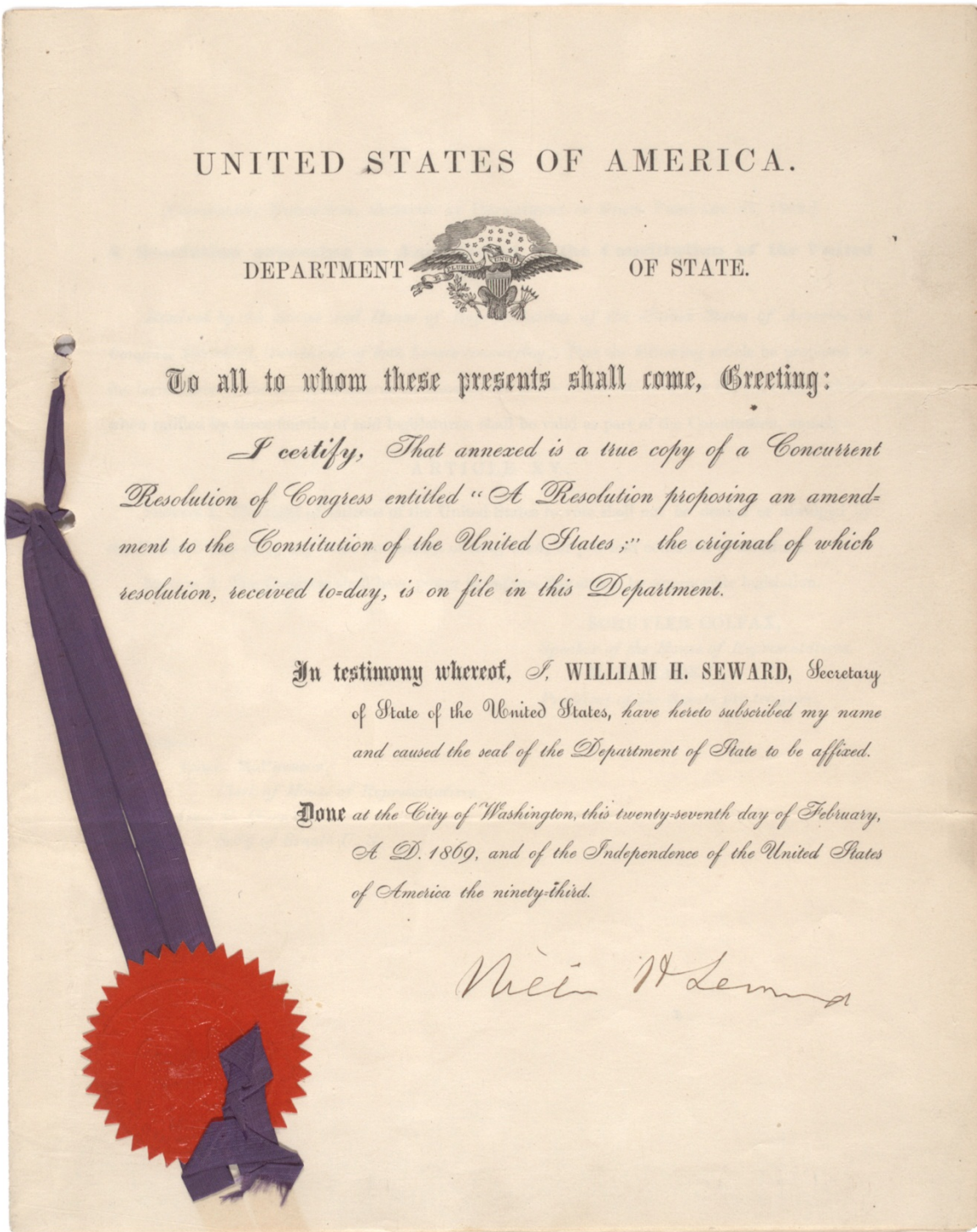
Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, view the image, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Portraits of General Ulysses Grant, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, and Schuyler Colfax appear on the lithograph, "The Fifteenth Amendment." Choose one of those individuals and explain why that person has been placed on this lithograph commemorating the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment.
2. The Fifteenth Amendment specifically addresses voting rights. How can you explain the various images surrounding the lithograph?
3. A small group activity for younger or ELL students could focus on a "treasure hunt" to locate the rights suggested in this image.

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Image



William Henry Seward, [Fifteenth Amendment resolution], February 27, 1869 (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00788.01)

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[CONCURRENT RESOLUTION, RECEIVED AT DEPARTMENT OF STATE FEBRUARY 27, 1869.]

A Resolution proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, (two-thirds of both houses concurring,) That the following article be proposed to the legislatures of the several States as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, when ratified by three-fourths of said legislatures, shall be valid as part of the Constitution, namely:

ARTICLE XV.

SECTION 1. 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.

SECTION 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

SCHUYLER COLFAX,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.
B. F. WADE,
President of the Senate pro tempore.

Attest:

EDWD. MCPHERSON,
Clerk of House of Representatives.

GEO. C. GORHAM,
Sec'y of Senate U. S.



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“The fifteenth amendment celebrated May 19th 1870,” print, 1870 (Private Collection)