

# CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

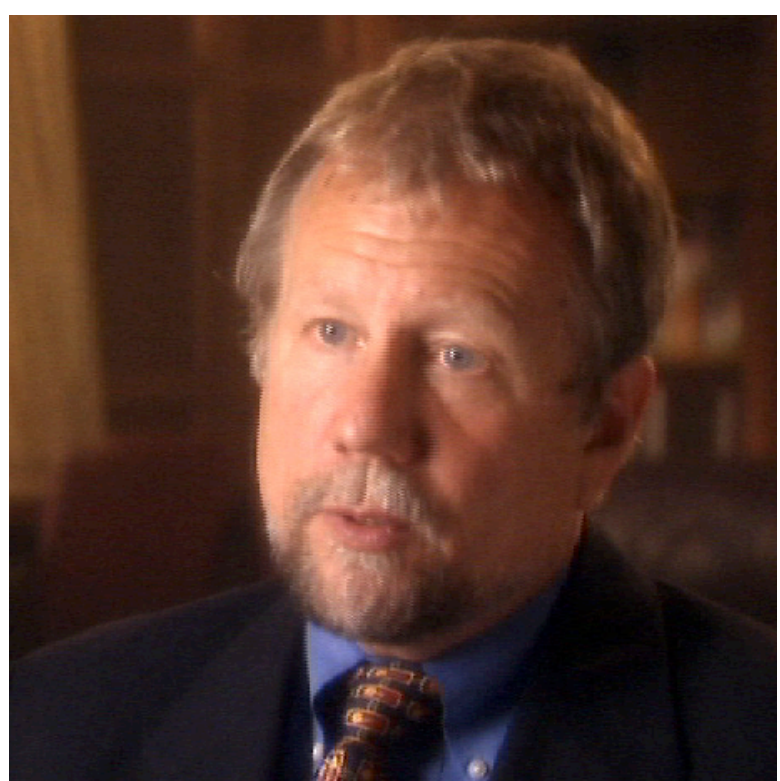
Where are rights secured? In the courts, or in the streets?

The Bill of Rights contains many guarantees of civil liberty. Individuals are guaranteed protections against self-incrimination, cruel and unusual punishment, excessive bail, and many other infringements of personal liberty.

The development of constitutional rights in America did not cease with the adoption of the Bill of Rights, but continued to evolve over time. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments put an end to the era of slavery that denied rights to generations of Americans.

The 13th amendment abolished the legal basis for slavery, while the 15th amendment granted voting rights to those who had formerly been held in servitude. The 14th amendment promised the equal protection of the laws to all people - regardless of race, and regardless of their state of residence. Although the text of the 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, it took more than one hundred years for those promises to begin to be enforced in a serious way.

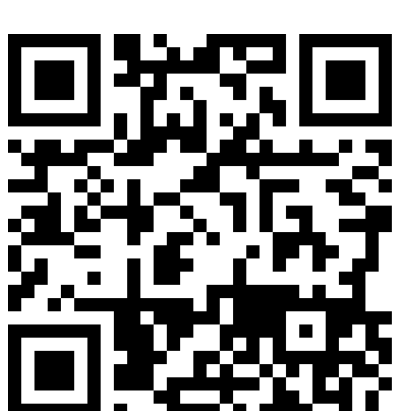
Struggles to dismantle segregation laws and unequal racial treatment took place in the courts, but they also took place in the streets. Throughout the years of the 1960s, sit-ins and protests called attention to the “Jim Crow” legal regime that discriminated against African-Americans in southern states. The mass involvement of individual citizens emboldened slow-moving political processes, and led to the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act in 1964.



**“We know that at periods when the government has overstepped its bounds, there have been citizen actions. During the period after the Civil War, due process and equal protection were imposed on the states through the 14th Amendment. But it was a popular rejection of the misuse of government power in the South that caused that to come about.” – Peter Erlinder, William Mitchell College of Law**

Other popular movements drove changes to the U.S. Constitution that expanded individual rights. The movement to grant voting rights to women was driven by traditional political activity, but also by a widespread suffrage movement that advocated for change in the broader public arena.

Legislatures and courts play a critical function in the articulation of constitutional rights. However, the expansion of individual rights is also inextricably bound up with individual citizen actions that occur far from either.



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