**Modern History Initial Assignment**

Read the extract below and answer the questions at the end. You may either handwrite or type your answers. Hard copies should be handed to your teacher at the end of your first lesson OR electronic copies may be emailed to your teacher, not later than 6pm on the day of your first lesson.

American history has been marked by persistent and determined efforts to expand the scope and inclusiveness of civil rights. Although equal rights for all were affirmed in the founding documents of the United States, many of the new country’s inhabitants were denied essential rights. African slaves and indentured servants did not have the inalienable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” that British colonists asserted to justify their Declaration of Independence (1776). Nor were they included among the “People of the United States” who established the Constitution in order to “promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Instead, the Constitution protected slavery by allowing the importation of slaves until 1808 and providing for the return of slaves who had escaped to other states.

Individual states, which determined most of the rights of American citizens, generally limited voting rights to white property-owning males, and other rights—such as the right to own land or serve on juries—were often denied on the basis of racial or gender distinctions. A small proportion of African Americans lived outside the slave system, but those so-called ‘free blacks’ endured racial discrimination and enforced segregation. During the first half of the 19th century, movements to extend voting rights to non-property-owning white male labourers resulted in the elimination of most property qualifications for voting, but this expansion of suffrage was accompanied by increasing restrictions on free blacks. Slave owners in the South reacted to the 1831 Nat Turner slave revolt in Virginia by passing laws to discourage anti-slavery activism and prevent the teaching of slaves to read and write. Despite this repression, a growing number of African Americans freed themselves from slavery by escaping or negotiating agreements to purchase their freedom through wage labour. By the 1830s, free black communities in the Northern states had become sufficiently large and organized to hold regular national conventions, where black leaders gathered to discuss alternative strategies of racial advancement. In 1833 a small minority of whites joined with black anti-slavery activists to form the American Anti-Slavery Society under the leadership of [William Lloyd Garrison](http://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Lloyd-Garrison).

[Frederick Douglass](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Douglass) became the most famous of the ex-slaves who joined the [abolition movement](http://www.britannica.com/topic/abolitionism-European-and-American-social-movement). His autobiography—one of many [slave narratives](http://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative)—and his stirring orations heightened public awareness of the horrors of slavery. Although black leaders became increasingly militant in their attacks against slavery and other forms of racial oppression, their efforts to secure equal rights received a major setback in 1857, when the U.S. Supreme Court rejected African American citizenship claims. The Dred Scott decision stated that the country’s founders had viewed blacks as so inferior that they had “no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” This ruling—by declaring unconstitutional the Missouri Compromise (1820), through which Congress had limited the expansion of slavery into western territories—ironically strengthened the anti-slavery movement, because it angered many whites who did not own slaves. The inability of the country’s political leaders to resolve that dispute fuelled the successful presidential campaign of Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the anti-slavery Republican Party. Lincoln’s victory in turn prompted the Southern slave states to secede and form the Confederate States of America in 1860–61.

Although Lincoln did not initially seek to abolish slavery, his determination to punish the rebellious states and his increasing reliance on black soldiers in the Union army prompted him to issue the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) to deprive the Confederacy of its slave property. After the American Civil War ended, Republican leaders cemented the Union victory by gaining the ratification of constitutional amendments to abolish slavery (Thirteenth Amendment) and to protect the legal equality of ex-slaves (Fourteenth Amendment) and the voting rights of male ex-slaves (Fifteenth Amendment). Despite those constitutional guarantees of rights, almost a century of civil rights agitation and litigation would be required to bring about consistent federal enforcement of those rights in the former Confederate states. Moreover, after federal military forces were removed from the South at the end of Reconstruction, white leaders in the region enacted new laws to strengthen the “Jim Crow” system of racial segregation and discrimination. In its Plessy v. Ferguson decision (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that “separate but equal” facilities for African Americans did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment, ignoring evidence that the facilities for blacks were inferior to those intended for whites.

During the early decades of the 20th century, movements to resist such racial and gender discrimination gained strength in many countries. African Americans developed various strategies to challenge racial discrimination in the United States. Educator Booker T. Washington emphasised economic development without openly challenging the Jim Crow system. Harvard University-educated scholar W.E.B. Du Bois became a leading advocate for civil rights and Pan-African unity among African and African descendants elsewhere in the world. In 1909 Du Bois and other African American leaders joined with white proponents of racial equality to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which became the country’s most enduring civil rights organization. Under the leadership of Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Thurgood Marshall, and others, the NAACP publicized racial injustices and initiated lawsuits to secure equal treatment for African Americans in education, employment, housing, and public accommodations.

Steps towards equality were taken in the first half of the 20th century, not least through the inclusion and performance of African-American soldiers in the US military during the first and second world wars, but it was not until the 1950s-60s that the civil rights movement gained mass support. At this point legislative change to secure civil rights in practice became irresistible. The Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 secured voting rights, while the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is considered one of the crowning achievements of the era, as it ended segregation and outlawed employment discrimination.

**Questions**

1. With the help of internet research, find definitions for the following words:
   1. Segregation
   2. Suffrage
   3. Secession
   4. Emancipation
2. How did the constitution protect slavery?
3. With the help of the internet, what was Plessy Vs Ferguson? Why do you think this case was important?
4. What did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 do?
5. Use the internet to help you create a biography on Martin Luther King. Explaining in your own words his contribution to the Civil Rights Movement