

Important Laws in American History

Northwest Ordinance (1787) established a government for the Northwest Territory and described rules that a territory would follow in order to become a state

Alien and Sedition Act (1798) restricted rights of immigrants and freedoms of speech and the press

Missouri Compromise (1820) preserved balance in Congress between slave and free states by admitting Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state; prohibited slavery north of Missouri

Tariff of Abominations (1828) protected American industry, mostly in the North, from competing with inexpensive British goods; prompted Calhoun's nullification theory

Indian Removal Act (1830) Indians east of the Mississippi River were to be moved to new lands in the West

Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) repealed Missouri Compromise and allowed Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether they would allow slavery—used the new idea of popular sovereignty

Fugitive Slave Act (1850) fugitive slaves had to be returned to their owners; they could not testify in court or have a trial by jury; heavy penalties for anyone who helped an escaped slave

Homestead Act (1862) offered 100 acres of land free to anyone who would farm it for five years

Civil Rights Act of 1866 declared everyone born in the U.S. to be a citizen and entitled to equal rights regardless of race

Reconstruction Acts (1867) known as Radical Reconstruction; imposed military control of southern states and said that they had to ratify the 14th Amendment and allow former slaves to vote

Pendleton Act (1883) government service based on merit rather than on patronage

Interstate Commerce Act (1887) established Interstate Commerce Commission, designed to regulate rates charged by railroads

Sherman Antitrust Act (1890) first attempt by federal government to regulate corporations and break up monopolies; hard to enforce; sometimes used to limit labor union activity

Federal Reserve Act (1913) established a partnership of government and private banking interests to insure a stable banking system and currency

Clayton Antitrust Act (1914) clearly defined limits on rights of corporations; strengthened Sherman Antitrust Act

Emergency Quota Act (1921, amended 1924) limited numbers of immigrants, discriminated against eastern and southern Europeans; outlawed Japanese immigration

Glass-Steagall Banking Act (1933) created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)

Social Security Act (1935) social welfare program; retirement and unemployment insurance

National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) (1935) established National Labor Relations Board; defined unfair labor practices

Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) standardized minimum wage and maximum workweek; outlawed factory work for children under 16 years old

GI Bill of Rights (1944) education benefits, unemployment insurance, low-interest loans

Labor Management Relations Act (Taft-Hartley Act) (1947) limited labor union rights and emphasized workers' right to *not* join a union or participate in union activities

Civil Rights Act of 1957 first since Reconstruction, empowered federal government to enforce school desegregation and voting rights

Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, or gender; equal access to public facilities

Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended literacy tests, allowed federal officials to register voters

Immigration Act (1965) eliminated quotas established in 1924; opened Asian immigration

Civil Rights Act of 1968 prevented discrimination in housing; stronger antilynching laws

Environmental Protection Agency (1970) oversees all aspects of pollution control, e.g. enforcement of clean air and water standards

Equal Rights Amendment (1972) intended to strengthen equality for women; three states short of ratification

Indian Education Act (1972) and Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975) greater power given to tribes for self-government and education

War Powers Act (1973) limits presidential autonomy in committing U.S. troops abroad

Welfare reform legislation (1996) limited welfare benefits and required most recipients to get jobs

Telecommunications Act (1996) intended to increase competition by allowing communications companies to be in multiple businesses and to own multiple TV and radio stations