

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**Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)** repealed Missouri Compromise and allowed Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether they would allow slavery—used the new idea of popular sovereignty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