

reform of 1965 did Asians achieve the same status as other immigrants.

The 14th Amendment made the Constitution what it is today: a document that guarantees the equal rights of all Americans and to which individuals and groups who feel they are being denied equality can appeal. As the 19th century Republican editor George William Curtis wrote, it was part of a process that changed the government from one "for white men" to one "for mankind."

Adopted as part of the effort to purge the nation of the legacy of slavery, birthright citizenship remains an

eloquent statement about the nature of our society and a powerful force for immigrant assimilation. In a world where most countries limit access to citizenship via ethnicity, culture or religion, it sets our nation apart.

ERIC FONER is Dewitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University and the author of numerous books including *A Short History of Reconstruction* (Harper Perennial, 1990) and, most recently, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2011).



