

## **“Second Founding,” celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution.**

When the fighting stopped in 1781, the work of establishing a government for the 13 newly independent United States of America remained unfinished. Indeed, within a decade of formally adopting the inaptly named, *Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union*, the newly independent states scrapped them and adopted the *Constitution of the United States of America*, which was drafted at a convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787. Yet even then the work of nation building remained unfinished. The drafters of the *Constitution* failed to reconcile the principles that animated the American Revolution (as set forth in the *Declaration of Independence*) with the continued existence of slavery. The document drafted in Philadelphia not only allowed the institution of slavery to continue, but several provisions in it actually politically strengthened those states in which slavery was an important component of the economy. The failure at Philadelphia to adequately address the issue of slavery would vex the newly independent United States for more than 75 years.

Following a five year bloody civil war, the people of the United States ultimately abolished the institution of slavery with the adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which guaranteed citizenship to the newly freed slaves and to anyone born in the United States, and which incorporated for the first time the concept of equality into the Constitution, followed in 1868. In 1870, the people adopted the third of what have come to be called the “Reconstruction Amendments.” The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment protects the right of citizens to vote regardless of race, color or previous condition of servitude. Together these three amendments have been called, “The Second Founding.” Some refer to these amendments as the constitutional embodiment of the, “new birth of freedom,” of which President Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg.

This year’s Open Doors to Federal Court project will focus on the as yet unfinished work of breathing life into these three transformational Constitutional Amendments. Within years of their adoption, in many states these amendments were stripped of any meaning by state laws that ignored their mandate, and by a national government that abandoned its commitment to enforce them. Mitchell Hamline Law School constitutional scholar Mehmet Konar-Steenberg is preparing a brief slide presentation about these Amendments to use in connection with this year’s classroom visits. Our focus on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these Reconstruction Amendments is part of a larger nationwide initiative to celebrate this “Second Founding.” More information on this nationwide celebration can be found at:

<http://secondfounding.org/>

If you wish to volunteer to participate in our Open Doors to Federal Courts project, contact Magistrate Judge Franklin Noel by clicking on the link, [Opendoors@mnd.uscourts.gov](mailto:Opendoors@mnd.uscourts.gov)

If you are a St. Paul public school teacher who would like more information about the Open Doors to Federal Courts project, contact Rebecca Biel at [REBECCA.BIEL@SPPS.org](mailto:REBECCA.BIEL@SPPS.org)

If you are a Minneapolis public school teacher who would like more information about the Open Doors to Federal Courts project, contact Kleber Ortiz-Sinchi at [Kleber.Ortiz-Sinchi@mpls.k12.mn.us](mailto:Kleber.Ortiz-Sinchi@mpls.k12.mn.us)