

TEXT SUMMARY

Government needs the power to discriminate, or treat groups differently. For example, it may treat minors differently than it does adults. However, this power must be limited so that there is equal protection under the law for all Americans.

Segregation is the separation of one group from another. In 1868 the 14th Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the law to all Americans. However, States quickly passed **Jim Crow laws** that segregated African Americans, meaning they could not share facilities with whites. In 1896 the Supreme Court gave these laws constitutional support with the **separate-but-equal doctrine**. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it ruled that separate facilities

of supposed equal quality for whites and African Americans were constitutional.

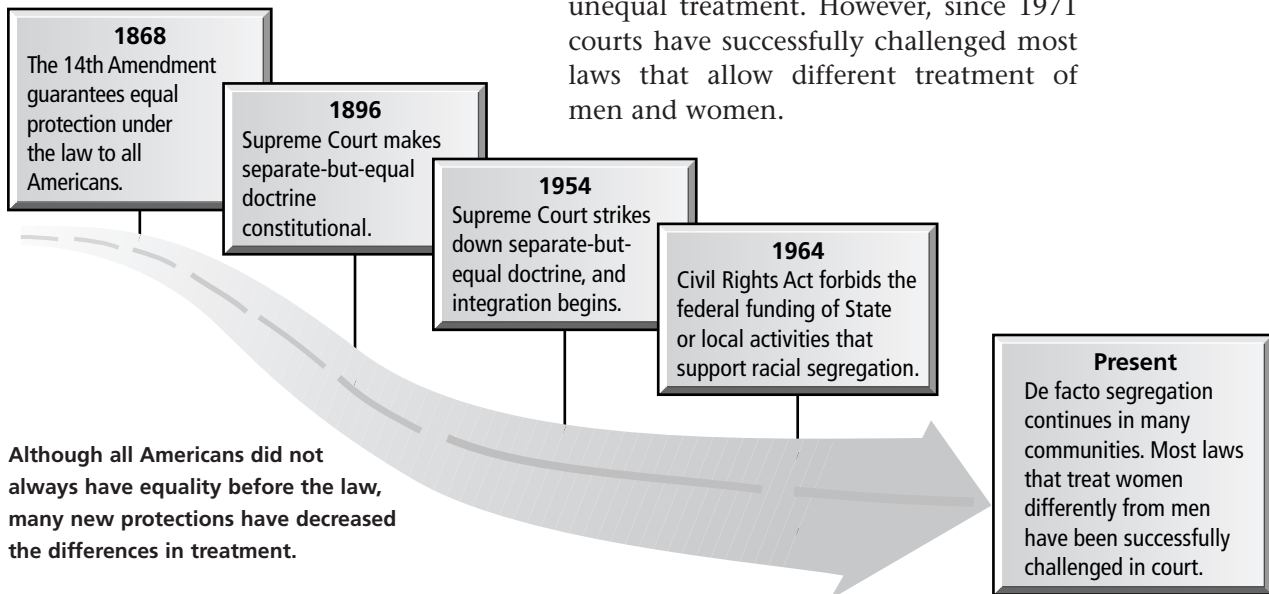
However, the Supreme Court has since overturned many of the Jim Crow laws. In 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* struck down the separate-but-equal ruling. Then the country made a start toward **integration**—the process of bringing a group into equal membership in society. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade the federal funding of State or local activities that support racial segregation. Finally, in 1970 **de jure segregation**—legally sanctioned segregation—in schools was abolished. However, many communities still have **de facto segregation**—segregation in fact, even if no law requires it—which is often caused by housing patterns.

Gender has long been another basis for unequal treatment. However, since 1971 courts have successfully challenged most laws that allow different treatment of men and women.

THE BIG IDEA

Federal law now includes safeguards to protect Americans from discrimination on the basis of race or sex.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: The Path to Equality Before the Law



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is integration?
2. **Diagram Skills** What constitutional amendment guarantees equal treatment under the law?