

Supreme Court Case Assignment

Here are several web sites that will help:

[Landmark Cases – Supreme Court Historical Society](#) Most, but not all, cases described here.

[Twenty-Five Landmark Cases in Supreme Court History](#)

[Supreme Court Cases](#) Cornell University Law School search site

RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED

Gideon v. Wainwright 1963

Clarence Gideon was arrested for theft and larceny in Panama City, Florida. When he requested a public lawyer to represent him because he could not afford one the state of Florida denied his plea. He did a poor job in the trial and was put in jail as a result. In jail he studied law and wrote a handwritten letter to the supreme court arguing Florida ignored the 6th amendment that requires states to provide attorneys for defendants who can't afford one themselves. This case is significant because the supreme court amended the court process of a state.

-David Fisher

Miranda v. Arizona (1966)

- o The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that evidence or confessions obtained by police are not admissible in court if the accused had not been informed of their rights at the time of arrest. The main reasoning of the majority is that the 5th Amendment (and its protection against self-incrimination) is necessary for all and it is easy to read an individual their constitutional rights.

- o While this case has undoubtedly protected citizens who either might have accidentally incriminated themselves in a crime or would have been coerced into a confession, that number isn't measurable tangibly because we don't know what might have been. Since this decision, however, there have been many cases where key evidence was thrown out and actual criminals went free because the Miranda Rights were not read in a timely manner. This also demonstrates an overlap between state and federal power because the majority of those being read their federal rights are in violation of state law.

In re Gault (1967)

In 1967 Gerald Gault, a 15 year-old boy "was taken into custody as the result of a complaint that he had made lewd telephone calls". The landmark United States Supreme Court case, *in re Gault*, determined that juveniles in a delinquency proceeding must receive the same due process rights as adults. An 8-1 decision, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Gault's commitment to the State Industrial School until he reached majority age was a violation of the 14th amendment since he was denied the right to an attorney and he chance to

confront his accusers; also, he as not formally notified of his charge and was not informed of his right against self-incrimination.

Furman vs. Georgia (1972)

Civil rights. This case was brought to the supreme court because 5 justices argued that the death penalty was no longer an acceptable form of punishment. This case combined Jackson vs. Georgia and Branch vs. Texas with the Furman vs. Georgia decision. All three cases involved death sentences. The case ultimately called for consistency in the death penalty, as the previous death penalty was somewhat broad. This case was such a large part of our history because following the case, 37 states enacted new laws regarding, and overcoming the supreme court decision.

New Jersey v. T.L.O. (1985)

- o The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that a warrant is not required in searches and seizures done by school officials in a school setting. The majority believed that because the majority of such searches are to determine a breach in school rules that would not come to a court of law, a warrant is not necessary so long as there is a “reasonable suspicion” that a violation of school rules has occurred.
- o The main controversy comes from the minority opinion, which states that the 4th Amendment right of protection against “unreasonable searches and seizures” should be applied to all situations and students are no exception, so school searches without a warrant or probable cause violate the Constitution. This case gives power to state (school) officials over the highest power in the federal government and limits the rights of the juvenile accused. However, this case allows greater freedom in internally protecting schools from crimes committed by their students.

Hamdi v. Rumsfeld (2004)

Hamdi, an American, was arrested by the military in Afghanistan and accused of fighting for the Taliban. He was declared an “enemy combatant” and transferred to a military prison in the US. Claimed in court that Hamdi’s 5th amendment right to due process was violated by federal government holding him indefinitely and not giving him access to an attorney or trial.

Significance: Court sided with Hamdi 6-3. Court decided that any American citizen being detained by government, even if declared an enemy combatant, has a right to contest his or her detainment before a judge. The case also determined that the separation of powers doctrine does not require federal courts to defer to the Executive Branch determinations regarding “enemy combatants.”

[Andreas Freund](#)

CIVIL RIGHTS

Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)

Dred Scott was a slave that had been freed when his master died. He had moved to the north but he was captured again and going to be brought back into slavery. Scott, believing that as a free man he had rights, decided to fight for his freedom in court. His case went all the way to the Supreme Court where the verdict was that since blacks are property and not men, they cannot bring cases to trial. So Scott was once again put into slavery. This case enraged many throughout the U.S at the time and happened close to the Civil War. However, the main takeaway is that the U.S' opinion of blacks at the time was that they weren't even humans, just property.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Homer Plessy, arrested for violating a law segregating train cars in Louisiana, charged that the law violated the 13th (outlawing slavery) and 14th (equal protection under the law) amendments. The case went to the supreme court, which ruled 7-1 that the law did not imply racial hierarchy, and was therefore permissible under the law. This ruling set the foundation for the "separate but equal" doctrine, which increased the acceptance of segregation in the southern US. The ruling was overturned in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

This case falls under civil rights. In Topeka, Kansas in the 1950s, Linda Brown attended a segregated school for black children. Every day, Linda and her sister had to walk through a dangerous railroad switch yard to reach their bus stop. Linda was unable to attend a school close to her home because it was only for white students. Linda and her family believed that the segregated school system was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and they took their case to a federal district court. This district court decided that, although segregation in public education was harmful to black children, the education and facilities at all-black and all-white were equal, and thus that the segregation was legal. The Browns appealed their case to the Supreme Court on the grounds that, even if facilities were similar, segregated schools could never be equal. The Supreme Court ruled that the state laws requiring separate but equal schools violated the

Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

- Melina

Heart of Atlanta Motel vs US (1964)

Due to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Appellant, Heart Atlanta Motel, which did not accommodate blacks, sued the federal Government because they believed requirements of the Civil Rights Act exceeded the authority granted to Congress over interstate commerce. Announced a couple months after the Civil Rights Act, the court ruled that Congress acted within its jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce clause in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Regents of the Univ of Calif. v Bakke (1978)

Allan Bakke, 32-year-old resident of Florida, was denied admission at the UC Davis medical school despite being more qualified than many accepted students. Believing that he had been excluded from the "special admissions" category because the university was reserving seats for minority students, he sued the school for admission. The Supreme court, though dissenting in their reasoning, stated that to explicitly judge applications based on race was unacceptable (although they differed on whether it was acceptable to use race as an influencing factor). Since the decision, California Proposition 209 was enacted to outlaw all discrimination in admissions decisions.

Shaw v. Reno (1993)

Voting Districts must not give a racial bias or preference to any group in an area by drawing lines that favor certain people. This means that re-districtors who are drawing the district lines of a certain area must take into account racial layout, and be careful to allocate equality to the voters of minority races. This was a 5-4 decision that was ultimately put into action after the results of the 2010 census, so it has only just started to affect us.

-Isaac Scott

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Fletcher vs. Peck (1810)

This was a decision that is a land dispute, and therefore falls into the civil liberties

category. This was brought to the supreme court because it was seen as a violation of the 14th amendment. This case stated that land grants could not be negotiated without fair compensation for the landowner. Land surrounding the Yazoo river was sold to four land contractors, who essentially sold the land to themselves. 35 million acres was sold for \$500,000 about 1.4 cents /acre.

Schenck v. United States (1919)

Schenck was a member of the socialist party of america who distributed pamphlets encouraging men to dodge the draft through the federal mail system. This was ruled illegal as it incited illegal action amongst the populace, AND it used the federal mail system for its devious purposes. This established the policy of "clear and present Danger" as a structure for when the government could limit citizens first amendment rights to free speech. It was a unanimous ruling, that was later modified by new legislation which made infringement upon the first amendment harder

-Isaac Scott

Gitlow v. NY 1925

Gitlow published a communist manifesto that the state of New York thought was a plot to overthrow the US government. The conflict in this case was whether Gitlow had the right to speak his mind based on the 1st amendment which claims free speech. The Bill of Rights was originally just amendments for the National Government and the states were not forced to follow it. This case is significant because the supreme court declared that the bill of rights applies to the national and state governments.

-David Fisher

Mapp v. Ohio (1961)

1. A woman named Dollree Mapp was convicted of possessing illegal materials, after police searched her home for a fugitive.

KEY QUESTION: Did police violate the Fourth Amendment, which requires that its "searches and seizures" be based on probable cause?

- The Police's seizure of Mapp's illegal paraphernalia was *not* caused by reasonable suspicion. The police discovered the illegal materials through performing a search that had an ulterior motive...

- Mapp's case describes an **illegal, unconstitutional** search by police.

The Justices confirmed that the violation of the fourth amendment excuses Mapp from being charged with possessing illegal substances; *the substances were obtained illegally*

Justices rule 6-3 in favor of Mapp

-Albert Kakkis

Engel vs. Vitale (1962)

This case falls under the Civil Rights category. This case was brought to court because the New York school system was requiring students and teachers to recite a prayer acknowledging dependence upon God. The prayer was seen as a religious establishment from the government, and the supreme court agreed. They agreed that they could not sponsor these kinds of religious activities. I believe that this is an important instance of separating church and state, as the prayer would require students who do not necessarily practice Christianity, to recite Christian beliefs.

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District (1969):

In protest of the Vietnam War, two siblings wore black armbands to school. When the school asked them to take them off, the Tinker sisters refused, and were then suspended. The Supreme Court ruled 7-2 in favor of the sisters. They said that it was a silent and passive protest that did not cause and disruption to the school. The court claimed that students and teachers should not have to shed their constitutional rights when they come to school. This case is similar to Texas v. Johnson because it claims freedom of speech for a protest/action that was not disruptive. It set the law for how much power a school has over its students, and what kind of dress code the school can enforce.

New York Times Co. v. United States (1971)

The US government under Richard Nixon asserted that the *Times* (along with a concurrent suit against the *Washington Post*) should be prevented from publishing the classified Pentagon Papers, documents describing US involvement in Vietnam. The central question of the case was whether the First Amendment right to freedom of the press was superseded by the government's wish for the information to remain classified. Ultimately, the Supreme Court ruled that the *Times* and *Post* could not be prevented from printing the information. This decision, while not seen as strong enough to be an absolute defense of the First Amendment, has been used in many subsequent cases to prove its superiority.

Hazelwood School Dist. V. Kuhlmeier (1988)

School deemed two articles in a student-run newspaper inappropriate and prevented their publication. Students brought case to court. Court decided, in a 5-3 vote, that the school did not violate students' first amendment rights. Argued that schools do not have to promote speech that is not consistent with schools' shared values. Said that schools could edit speech as long as editing was based purely on pedagogical concerns.

[Andreas Freund](#)

Texas v. Johnson (1989):

Gregory Lee Johnson burned an American flag at the Republican National Convention in Texas. He was protesting against president Reagan's policies. Nobody was injured, yet people watching claimed to be seriously offended by the action. Johnson was convicted with desecration of a venerated object. This ruling was overturned in the Supreme Court, which claimed the burning to be a symbolic gesture of speech. "Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable." - Justice Brennan. This case was a landmark case because it set a new definition of freedom of speech. The first amendment applies to actions as violent as burning lighting a flag on fire in public with kerosene.

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Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971)

A challenge of a Pennsylvania State Law, which is contained in its Non-Public Elementary and Secondary Education:

*It permits the State to fund religious schools for their use of "secular education services" [teachers' salaries, textbooks, and **educational aids**]*

Note: Parochial schools CANNOT use these funds for any religious function or service

KEY QUESTION:

Does this particular requirement uphold the separation between Church and State?

Does it violate the Establishment Clause (*prohibits government from making laws that respect an institute of religion*)?

In other words, does the nature of the Penn. Gov.'s funding imply that parochial schools are in the network of government institutions?

According to the justices, Pennsylvania's funding of parochial schools represented an entanglement of government's interests (represented by the funding) and parochial school's interests (represented by the request for funding). The majority opinion expressed that the requirement of "secular education services" still violates the Establishment clause, because no "minimum threshold" for government involvement should exist in the first place. The Church and State must be **completely segregated**. The justices unanimously decided that the Pennsylvania law was unconstitutional.

KEY RESULT: Government instituted the Lemon test, which analyzes laws regarding the relationship between religious and state institutions.

-Albert Kakkis

Roe v. Wade (1973)

This famous landmark decision established the US federal policy on Abortion but it still left room for conflicts. It was decided by a close call (5-4) that women had the right to an abortion before the fetus was viable (able to live on its own, roughly 7 months). This negated any other federal or state laws on the matter, and established a private avenue for women to legally obtain potentially life saving abortions.

-Isaac Scott

Webster v. Reproductive Health Services (1989)

In this case, Missouri prevented state funds from being used for abortions and prevented state facilities from being used to assist abortions. The reproductive health services sued, saying it violated Roe v. Wade. The Supreme Court sided with Minnesota and although they did not overturn Roe v. Wade (which establishes a woman's right to choose abortion,) they did say state funds or facilities for abortion were not protected by Roe v. Wade and that limiting abortions after a woman is 20 weeks pregnant is constitutional.

-Alec White

Korematsu v. United States (1994)

Korematsu v. United States was landmark United States Supreme Court case in 1994, which questioned the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. This order

forced Japanese Americans into internment camps during WWII after the Pearl Harbor attack. In the end, the Court sided with the Government, a 6-3 decision, determining the order was constitutional. This case is significant because it was the first to apply the *strict scrutiny* principle to racial discrimination.

Business regulation

Buckley v. Valeo (1976)

This was a case in which the Supreme Court upheld a federal law (Federal Election Campaign Act) that set limits on campaign contributions, claiming that these restrictions did not violate the First Amendment, but rather improved the "integrity of our system of representative democracy" by preventing unscrupulous practices. This case also ruled that candidates can give unlimited amounts of money to their own campaigns because these practices are not as corruptive as individual contributions.

- Melina

Citizens United v. FEC (2008-2009)

Citizens United wanted to skirt around the restrictions of the BCRA for its film *Hilary: The Movie*. This case was a landmark decision because it opened up campaign finance to the now popular super PACs. The court ruled 5-4 in this case that the disclosure of donors and where funds go is constitutional but that the First Amendment cannot be limited due to corporate identity. This means that as long as someone operates "independently" of a candidate, then he or she may promote them with as much money as he or she wishes.

Federalism

McCullough v. Maryland (1819)

- o The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a national bank was constitutional and Maryland had no right to tax that bank. By the "necessary and proper" clause, although the power to create a national bank was not specifically given in the Constitution, because its creation was necessary to carry out powers that were (i.e. taxes, commerce

regulation, money borrowing, etc.), it is constitutional. Once that was established, because of the Supremacy clause, the state government of Maryland could not enact any law that would interfere with a constitutional federal law.

o This decision upheld the idea of implied powers of the government, given because the framers couldn't anticipate every need of future governments to enact their explicit powers. However, there is still tension between state and federal power because of the vague nature of the clause that theoretically could allow the federal government to almost unlimitedly push their power and justify it. This mainly runs on the fear of an overly strong central government. The Supremacy clause is more straightforward and doesn't have the same level of controversy.

Gibbons v. Ogden 1824

Aaron Ogden was granted permission by the state of New York to have a monopoly on the steamboat shipping industry between New York and New Jersey. However, the waters Ogden sailed on were not just New York's. Thomas Gibbons was granted rights to sail those same waters by the United States Congress. Ogden didn't like the competition and took his case to the New York courts. His appeal made it to the Supreme Court where his appeal was shut down. The significance of this supreme court case was that national government always has supremacy over states.

-David Fisher

Baker v. Carr (1962)

This case falls under federalism, as it raises the question of whether federal courts are justified in interfering with issues regarding voting districts, which are usually left to the states. Charles Baker was a resident of Tennessee, who filed suit against Joe Carr, the Secretary of State of Tennessee. Baker alleged that the Tennessee legislature had not redrawn its legislative districts since 1901 and was in violation of the Tennessee State Constitution, which required redistricting along with the federal census every 10 years. Baker asserted that the demographics of Tennessee had changed significantly over the years, with a greater proportion of people living in the cities, and that, because he lived in an urban part of the state, his vote was diluted and in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Baker wanted an injunction prohibiting further elections and sought reappointment, but the federal court denied relief on the grounds that it lacked jurisdiction on redistricting. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which eventually held that federal courts have the power to determine the constitutionality of a state's voting districts.

- Melina

United States v. Nixon, 1974:

In this case, the public wanted President Richard Nixon to turn over tapes that could possibly reveal his role in the Watergate scandal. Nixon argued that besides impeachment, the Judicial system was not allowed to have any power

over the President. The Supreme Court ruled 8-0 against Nixon, saying that “neither separation of powers, nor the need for confidentiality can sustain unqualified Presidential immunity from the judicial process.” -Alec White

Other

Marbury v. Madison (1803)

1. “ Madison, Secretary of State for President Jefferson, refused to accept judicial appointee William Marbury to the Court; Madison did not reveal any justification for his action. In response, Marbury petitions the court to reverse Madison’s decision.

KEY QUESTION: Does Marbury have the right to make such a petition, and could the Court take action in support of him?

-Presumably, when an act of Congress violates the Constitution, it is the Court’s responsibility to uphold the “supreme law”. Chief Justice Marshall claims that this so-called “judicial review” is essential to the function of the Supreme Court. Justice Marshall decided that the Senate’s approval of Marbury’s commission did not happen legally. Therefore, the Court could not accept Marbury’s petition, or “writ”.

-Albert Kakkis

Bush v. Gore: (2000)

The supreme court intervened in the 2000 presidential election because it was so close that there was a lot of dispute over who the true winner was. The court’s intervention is widely regarded as a misstep on the justices’ part because the election came down to one justice’s vote. Many people believed that this was an overstep of the Supreme Court’s power. A recount of the votes in Florida had been requested and the Florida Supreme Court was ready to oblige but the Justices voted 5-4 to stay the recount, therefore declaring Bush the winner. This case is one of the most controversial in our history due to a lack of understanding behind the SC’s decision. The court’s justification was the equal protection act in the 14th amendment.