

Important Supreme Court Decisions

- Marbury v. Madison (1803)** Established the principle of judicial review—the Supreme Court could review all laws made by Congress
- Fletcher v. Peck (1810)** Overturned Georgia law that violated an individual's right to enter into a contract
- Dartmouth College v. Woodward (1819)** State of New Hampshire couldn't revoke the college's colonial charter because it was a contract
- Worcester v. Georgia (1832)** Recognized the Cherokee tribe as a political entity; Georgia couldn't regulate them nor invade their land
- Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)** Ruled that African Americans were not citizens of the U.S.; declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional
- McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)** A state could not tax a national bank
- Gibbons v. Ogden (1824)** Federal government (not the state governments) had the power to regulate trade between the states
- U.S. v. Cruikshank (1876)** The national government could not punish someone for violating the civil rights of individuals—only the states had that power
- U.S. v. Reese (1876)** Declared that the 15th Amendment did not automatically protect the right of African Americans to vote (only listed the ways that states were not allowed to prevent them from voting)
- Munn v. Illinois (1877)** Said that states and federal government could regulate railroads because they were businesses that served the public interest
- Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)** Established the principle of “separate but equal,” said segregated facilities per se did not violate the 14th Amendment
- Muller v. Oregon (1908)** A state could legally limit working hours for women (Oregon law had established a ten-hour workday)
- Bunting v. Oregon (1917)** A ten-hour workday for men was upheld
- Morgan v. Virginia (1946)** Segregation on interstate buses was unconstitutional
- Sweatt v. Painter (1950)** State law schools had to admit black students, even if separate law schools for blacks existed
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)** Unanimously overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, ruled that segregated schools are inherently unequal; mandated desegregation
- Mapp v. Ohio (1961)** Evidence obtained illegally could not be used in court
- Baker v. Carr (1962)** Electoral district lines that are arbitrarily drawn violate voters' constitutional rights and may be challenged
- Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)** Poor people are entitled to free legal counsel
- Escobedo v. Illinois (1964)** People have a right to have an attorney present during questioning
- Reynolds v. Simms (1964)** “One person, one vote” principle mandated redistricting in all 50 states based on population; shifted balance of power from rural to urban districts
- Miranda v. Arizona (1966)** Police required to inform all criminal suspects of their constitutional rights—“Miranda rights”—before questioning: the right to remain silent, warning that anything suspects say may be used against them, and the right to an attorney before and during questioning
- Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971)** Busing may be used to achieve racial balance in schools where segregation had been an official policy and no alternative plan was provided
- Roe v. Wade (1973)** Gave women the right to seek abortion in the first three months of pregnancy, under their right to privacy
- Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)** Allan Bakke, a white student, had to be admitted to UC Medical School, a victim of “reverse discrimination”
- Richmond v. J.A. Croson Company (1989)** City of Richmond's mandating 30 percent of public works funds for minority contractors declared illegal
- Webster v. Reproductive Health Care Services (1989)** States allowed to impose restrictions on abortion
- Rust v. Sullivan (1991)** Doctors working in government-sponsored clinics were prevented from providing women with information about abortion, even if the life of the mother were in danger