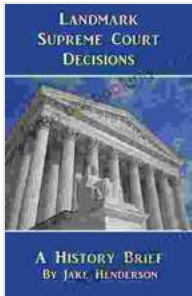


# Landmark Supreme Court Decisions: A Historical Brief



## Landmark Supreme Court Decisions (History Brief Book 12) by Random House

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## 12 Cases that Shaped America

The Supreme Court of the United States has played a pivotal role in shaping the course of American history. Through its landmark decisions, the Court has interpreted the Constitution, protected individual rights, and resolved major social and political controversies.

This article provides a comprehensive guide to 12 landmark Supreme Court decisions that have had a profound impact on American society. These cases have addressed a wide range of issues, from the limits of federal power to the rights of individuals.

We will explore the historical context, legal reasoning, and lasting impact of each decision. These cases are essential reading for anyone who wants to

understand the foundations of American law and government.

## 1. Marbury v. Madison (1803)



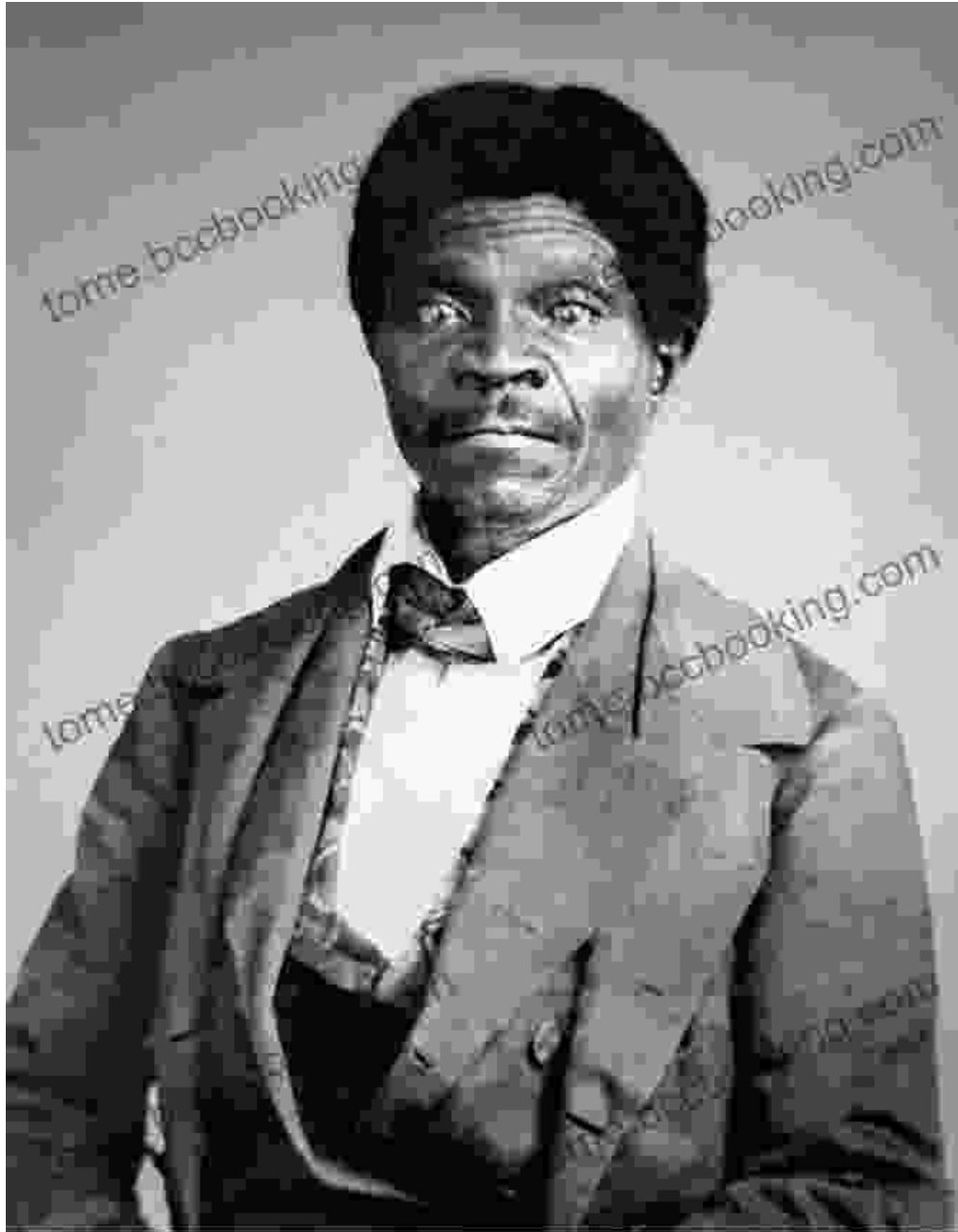
**Historical Context:** The Judiciary Act of 1789 authorized the President to appoint judges to the federal courts. In 1801, President John Adams appointed William Marbury to be a Justice of the Peace for the District of Columbia. However, Marbury's commission was not delivered before Adams left office. The new President, Thomas Jefferson, refused to deliver the commission.

**Legal Reasoning:** Marbury sued James Madison, the Secretary of State, to compel him to deliver the commission. The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Marshall, held that Marbury had a right to the commission and that Madison had a duty to deliver it. However, the Court also held that it

did not have jurisdiction to enforce Marbury's right because the Judiciary Act of 1789 was unconstitutional.

**Lasting Impact:** Marbury v. Madison established the principle of judicial review, which gives the Supreme Court the power to declare laws unconstitutional. This principle is a cornerstone of American constitutional law and has been used to invalidate numerous laws over the years.

## **2. Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)**



**Historical Context:** Dred Scott was a slave who sued for his freedom in federal court. Scott argued that he was a free man because he had lived in free territory for several years. However, the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Roger Taney, ruled against Scott.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Court held that slaves were not citizens of the United States and therefore could not sue in federal court. The Court also

held that the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited slavery in the northern territories, was unconstitutional.

**Lasting Impact:** Dred Scott v. Sandford was a major factor in the outbreak of the Civil War. The decision inflamed tensions between the North and the South and led to a new wave of abolitionism.

### 3. Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

**LANDMARK DECISIONS OF THE SUPREME COURT**

# Plessy v. Ferguson

**1896** *Plessy v. Ferguson* affirmed a "separate but equal" policy that allowed widespread segregation to thrive in the South.

**What caused the case?**  
In 1892, Homer Plessy, a mixed-race man, was arrested for sitting in a "whites-only" train car in New Orleans. He was charged with violating Louisiana's Separate Car Act, which required African Americans to sit in separate train cars. Plessy argued that the law violated the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law.

**What did the Court do?**  
The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the state of Louisiana. The majority opinion, written by Justice Henry Billingshop, held that the "separate but equal" doctrine was constitutional. The Court argued that the 14th Amendment only required that the facilities for African Americans be equal in quality, not that they be integrated with those for white people.

**What was the impact?**  
The decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* legitimized racial segregation across the South. It allowed states to create laws that enforced separate facilities for African Americans, leading to the widespread implementation of Jim Crow laws. The decision was later overturned by the Supreme Court in 1954 in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

**JIM CROW LAW.**  
ENACTED BY THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT.  
EXISTS WITHIN THE COMPTON OF THE CONFEDERATE LEGISLATURE AND VARIOUS STATE LEGISLATURES NEARLY EVERYWHERE FOR WHITES AND BLACKS.  
Washington, May 1896. The Supreme Court today in its decision, Plessy vs. Ferguson, sustained the constitutionality of the law in Louisiana requiring the separation of the races in the public accommodations. The white and colored passengers there was no other state separate matter in the case. The Court held that the 14th Amendment does not require the states to provide equal facilities for the two races. The Court held that the 14th Amendment does not require the states to provide equal facilities for the two races. The Court held that the 14th Amendment does not require the states to provide equal facilities for the two races.

**Plessy v. Ferguson**  
Justified the Jim Crow laws that helped to create segregation in the South.

**GATE X COLORED ENTRANCE**

**IMPERIAL LAUNDRY CO.**  
WE WASH FOR WHITE PEOPLE ONLY

**Historical Context:** Homer Plessy, a black man, was arrested for sitting in a whites-only railroad car in Louisiana. Plessy argued that the law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Henry Billings Brown, upheld the law.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Court held that the law was constitutional because it did not discriminate against blacks as a race. The Court also held that the law was necessary to promote social harmony.

**Lasting Impact:** Plessy v. Ferguson established the principle of "separate but equal." This principle allowed states to segregate blacks and whites in public facilities. Plessy v. Ferguson was not overturned until the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

#### **4. Brown v. Board of Education (1954)**

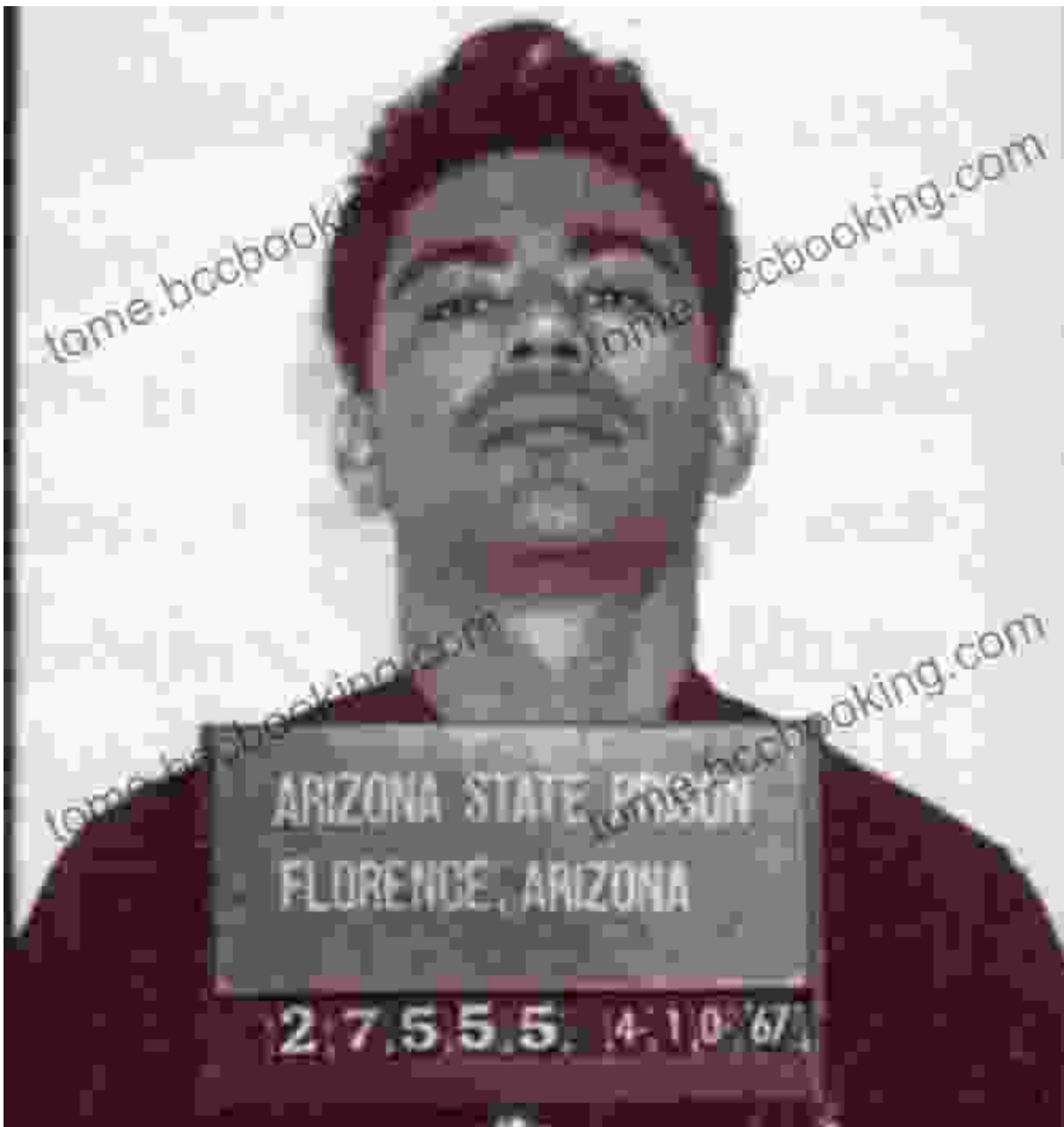


**Historical Context:** In 1951, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a lawsuit on behalf of 13 black children who were denied admission to all-white schools in Topeka, Kansas. The NAACP argued that the segregation of schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, ruled unanimously in favor of the plaintiffs. The Court held that the segregation of schools was unconstitutional because it deprived black children of equal educational opportunities.

**Lasting Impact:** Brown v. Board of Education was a landmark decision that overturned the principle of "separate but equal." The decision led to the desegregation of schools across the country and was a major victory for the civil rights movement.

## 5. Miranda v. Arizona (1966)





**Historical Context:** Ernesto Miranda was arrested for kidnapping and rape in Arizona. Miranda was interrogated by the police for two hours without being informed of his rights. Miranda was convicted, but the Supreme Court later overturned his conviction.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Court held that the police had violated Miranda's right to remain silent and his right to an attorney. The Court also held that the police must inform suspects of their rights before they can interrogate them.

**Lasting Impact:** Miranda v. Arizona is a landmark decision that has protected the rights of suspects in criminal cases. The decision has been cited in numerous cases and has been codified into law in many states.

## **6. Roe v. Wade (1973)**



**Historical Context:** Jane Roe was a pregnant woman who sued the State of Texas for preventing her from obtaining an abortion. The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Warren Burger, ruled in favor of Roe.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Court held that the right to privacy, which is implied by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, includes the right to obtain an abortion. The Court also held that the State's interest in protecting the unborn fetus only becomes compelling after the fetus is viable.

**Lasting Impact:** Roe v. Wade is a landmark decision that has protected the right to abortion in the United States. The decision has been upheld in

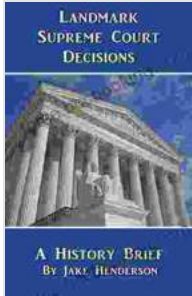
numerous subsequent cases and has been codified into law in many states.

## 7. Citizens United v. FEC (2010)



**Historical Context:** Citizens United was a conservative non-profit organization that wanted to run ads criticizing Hillary Clinton in the 2008 presidential election. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) prevented Citizens United from running the ads, arguing that they violated campaign finance laws.

**Legal Reasoning:** The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, ruled in favor of Citizens United. The Court held that the First Amendment protects the right of corporations to spend money on political campaigns. The Court also held that the FEC's restrictions on campaign spending were unconstitutional.

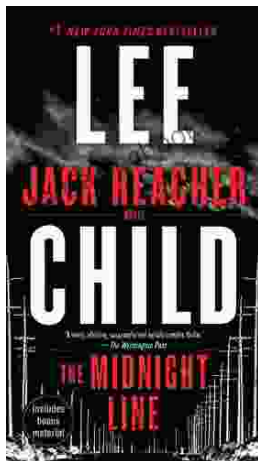


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