


# Plessy V Ferguson 1896 Worksheet Answers

**Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)** Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Breaking the Rules**

You may have heard the saying, "Some rules are meant to be broken." In 1890, a man named Homer Plessy broke the rules. The state of Louisiana had passed the Separate Car Act, which required railway companies to have "separate but equal" train cars for black people and white people. A person who sat in the wrong car had to pay a \$25 fine or go to jail for 30 days.

You can probably guess that the cars for blacks weren't as nice as the cars for whites. Not only that, it seemed unfair to make black people sit separately. A group of citizens called the "Five People of Color in New Orleans" formed a committee dedicated to opposing this law. They convinced Homer Plessy, who was 7/8 white and 1/8 black, to test the law by sitting in a white-only train car. When Plessy was asked to move, he refused and was arrested.




Homer Plessy

**The Argument**

Plessy argued that Louisiana's Separate Car Act violated the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It says that states may not "deny to any person within their jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." He argued that requiring black people to sit separately from white people implied that blacks were inferior to whites, and therefore unequal.

**The Decision**


The Supreme Court disagreed. It saw separate train cars as an issue of social equality, not political or legal equality. It said separating the races did not take away civil or political rights. Justice Brown wrote for the Court, saying that "if one race be inferior to the other society, the constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane." Justice Brown said there had been separate schools for black and white students for a very long time, and many court cases had decided that states were allowed to have these segregated schools. Out of the nine justices, Justice Harlan was the only one to dissent, or disagree. He wrote that "our constitution is color-blind" and does not tolerate "separate but equal." He said the Court's decision would lead to racial hatred and increased attacks against black people's rights.



U.S. Supreme Court, 1896

**So What?**

The Court's decision set the stage for many more years of discrimination against people of color. Plessy's case gave rise to a new doctrine: "separate but equal." States were free to pass laws that kept races separate, and although the facilities were supposed to be equal, they rarely were. The "separate but equal" doctrine would not be abolished until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



Illustration

**Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 Worksheet Answers** is a significant subject in American legal history, reflecting the complexities of race relations and civil rights in the United States. This landmark Supreme Court case established the constitutionality of racial segregation under the "separate but equal" doctrine. The context of the case, the arguments presented, and its lasting repercussions are critical to understanding the evolution of civil rights in America. This article aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the case, its background, legal implications, and the answers typically found in educational worksheets related to this pivotal event.

## Background of Plessy v. Ferguson

The case of Plessy v. Ferguson arose in the late 19th century, during a time when racial segregation was deeply entrenched in American society, especially in Southern states.

## Historical Context

- After the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era, Southern states implemented Jim Crow laws to maintain white supremacy and control over the African American population.
- These laws mandated racial segregation in public facilities, schools, transportation, and more.
- The 1890 Louisiana law required separate railway cars for whites and blacks, leading to a legal challenge by Homer Plessy, a mixed-race man who identified as white.

## Key Players

- Homer Plessy: The plaintiff, who deliberately violated the segregation law in a test case.

- Judge John Howard Ferguson: The presiding judge in the original case, who ruled in favor of the state law.
- The Supreme Court: The body that ultimately decided the case, with Justice Henry Billings Brown writing the majority opinion.

## **The Case and Legal Arguments**

Plessy's arrest for sitting in a "whites only" train car led to a legal battle that questioned the legality of segregation laws.

## **Legal Proceedings**

1. Initial Arrest: Plessy was arrested in June 1892 for refusing to leave the whites-only car, leading to a trial in which he was fined.
2. Appeal to the Supreme Court: Plessy's legal team, including civil rights activists, argued that the Louisiana law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

## **Arguments Presented**

- For Plessy:
  - Segregation laws violated the principle of equality established in the Fourteenth Amendment.
  - The law perpetuated racial discrimination and was inherently unjust.
- For Ferguson:
  - The state had the right to regulate railways within its borders.
  - Segregated facilities were acceptable as long as they were equal, thus upholding the "separate but equal" doctrine.

## **The Supreme Court Decision**

On May 18, 1896, the Supreme Court delivered its ruling in a 7-1 decision.

## **Majority Opinion**

- Justice Brown declared that segregation did not in itself constitute discrimination.
- The Court ruled that the law was constitutional under the "separate but equal" doctrine, asserting that as long as the separate facilities were equal, segregation was permissible.

## **Dissenting Opinion**

- Justice John Marshall Harlan was the sole dissenter, arguing vehemently against the majority opinion.
- Harlan stated that "the Constitution is color-blind," emphasizing that the law should apply equally to all citizens regardless of race.

## **Implications of the Decision**

The Plessy v. Ferguson ruling had profound implications for American society and the legal landscape regarding civil rights.

## **Legal Implications**

- The decision legitimized state laws establishing racial segregation, leading to the widespread implementation of Jim Crow laws across the South.
- It set a legal precedent for future cases, reinforcing the idea that separate facilities for different races were acceptable.

## **Social and Cultural Impact**

- The ruling entrenched systemic racism and discrimination, leading to further marginalization of African Americans.
- It contributed to the establishment of a racially divided society, affecting all aspects of life, including education, transportation, and public services.

## **Long-Term Outcomes**

The "separate but equal" doctrine continued to govern American life until the mid-20th century when the civil rights movement gained momentum.

## **Challenges to Plessy v. Ferguson**

- The ruling faced challenges over the years, with activists and lawyers working tirelessly to dismantle segregation.
- Landmark cases such as Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 eventually overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine, declaring that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal.

# Legacy of Plessy v. Ferguson

- Plessy v. Ferguson remains a symbol of the legal and social struggles against racial discrimination.
- It serves as a reminder of the need for vigilance in protecting civil rights and the importance of equality before the law.

## Worksheet Answers and Educational Usage

In educational settings, worksheets on Plessy v. Ferguson often include questions designed to assess students' understanding of the case's historical context, legal arguments, and implications.

## Sample Questions and Answers

1. What was the main legal question in Plessy v. Ferguson?
  - The main legal question was whether the Louisiana segregation law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
2. What was the Supreme Court's ruling?
  - The Supreme Court ruled that the segregation law was constitutional under the "separate but equal" doctrine.
3. Who was the dissenting justice, and what was his argument?
  - Justice John Marshall Harlan was the dissenting justice, arguing that segregation was inherently unequal and violated the principle of a color-blind Constitution.
4. What were the long-term effects of the decision?
  - The decision legitimized racial segregation and led to the widespread implementation of Jim Crow laws, perpetuating systemic racism for decades.

## Conclusion

Plessy v. Ferguson was a landmark case that shaped the legal framework for racial segregation in the United States. Its establishment of the "separate but equal" doctrine allowed for the continuation of discriminatory practices that marginalized African Americans for generations. Understanding this case is crucial for comprehending the historical struggle for civil rights and the ongoing fight against racial inequality. As educators and students engage with worksheets on Plessy v. Ferguson, it is essential to reflect on the lessons learned and the importance of advocating for justice and equality in contemporary society.

## Frequently Asked Questions

## **What was the main legal issue in the Plessy v. Ferguson case?**

The main legal issue was whether state laws establishing racial segregation in public facilities violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

## **What was the Supreme Court's ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson?**

The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was constitutional as long as the separate facilities for the races were equal, establishing the 'separate but equal' doctrine.

## **How did Plessy v. Ferguson impact civil rights in the United States?**

The ruling legitimized state laws that enforced racial segregation and discrimination, leading to widespread implementation of Jim Crow laws in the South.

## **What was Homer Plessy's argument against segregation?**

Homer Plessy argued that the Louisiana law requiring separate railway cars for blacks and whites violated his rights under the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments.

## **What was the dissenting opinion in the Plessy v. Ferguson case?**

Justice John Marshall Harlan was the lone dissenter, arguing that the Constitution is color-blind and that the government should not sanction racial segregation.

## **When was the Plessy v. Ferguson decision eventually overturned?**

The Plessy v. Ferguson decision was effectively overturned by the Supreme Court's ruling in Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, which declared that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

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