


Plessy V Ferguson 1896 Answer Key

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 Answer Key is a pivotal aspect of American legal history that delves deep into the issues of racial segregation and civil rights. The Supreme Court's decision in this case not only shaped the legal landscape of the United States but also laid the groundwork for the Jim Crow laws that enforced racial discrimination for decades. This article will explore the background of the case, the Supreme Court's ruling, its implications, and its eventual overturning in later years.

Background of Plessy v. Ferguson

In order to understand the significance of Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 answer key, it is essential to look at the context in which the case arose.

Historical Context

- Post-Reconstruction Era: Following the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, Southern states began to implement laws that limited the rights of African Americans. These laws, known as Black Codes, aimed to maintain white supremacy and control over the African American population.
- Jim Crow Laws: By the late 19th century, these laws evolved into more systematic racial segregation known as Jim Crow laws. These laws mandated the separation of races in public places, schools, transportation, and more.

The Incident Leading to the Case

- Homer Plessy: In 1892, Homer Plessy, a man of mixed race (one-eighth Black), took a seat in a

"whites-only" car of a Louisiana train. He was aware of the law requiring segregation and intended to test its constitutionality.

- Arrest and Charges: Plessy was arrested for violating the Louisiana segregation law and charged in court, which led to the eventual appeal to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court Ruling

The Supreme Court case was heard in 1896, and the ruling would have profound implications for civil rights in America.

The Arguments

- Plessy's Argument: Plessy's legal team argued that the Louisiana law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, asserting that segregation created a badge of inferiority among African Americans.

- Louisiana's Defense: The state argued that the law was a reasonable exercise of its police powers and that separate facilities for different races did not imply the inferiority of either race.

The Supreme Court Decision

- Majority Opinion: The Supreme Court, in a 7-1 decision, upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation laws. Justice Henry Billings Brown authored the majority opinion, stating that "separate but equal" facilities did not violate the 14th Amendment.

- Dissenting Opinion: Justice John Marshall Harlan was the lone dissenter, famously arguing that the Constitution is "color-blind" and that the law should apply equally to all individuals, regardless of race.

Implications of the Ruling

The Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 answer key reflects the long-term consequences of the ruling for American society and law.

Legitimization of Segregation

- "Separate but Equal" Doctrine: The ruling established the "separate but equal" doctrine, which provided a legal justification for racial segregation. This principle would be used to uphold Jim Crow laws across the South for decades.

- Impact on African Americans: The ruling effectively sanctioned discrimination and inequality, leading to widespread disenfranchisement, economic disadvantage, and social segregation for African Americans.

Legal Precedents Established

- Enduring Legacy: The decision set a precedent for numerous subsequent cases that upheld segregation and discrimination. This included cases involving schools, public facilities, and transportation.
- Codification of Racial Discrimination: Various states enacted laws that codified the principles established in Plessy, ensuring that segregation was not only legal but also socially accepted.

Challenges to Plessy v. Ferguson

Despite its initial acceptance, the Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 answer key faced challenges that would eventually lead to its dismantling.

Emergence of Civil Rights Movements

- NAACP Formation: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909, advocating for civil rights and challenging segregation laws through legal means.
- Legal Challenges: Several significant cases were brought to challenge the "separate but equal" doctrine, culminating in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

- Overturning Plessy: In 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The Court stated that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal, thus overturning the precedent set by Plessy.
- Cultural Shift: The ruling in Brown marked a significant cultural shift in the United States, igniting the Civil Rights Movement and leading to further challenges against segregation and discrimination.

Conclusion

The Plessy v. Ferguson 1896 answer key serves as a critical reminder of the ongoing struggle for civil rights and equality in America. The decision to uphold segregation laws had lasting repercussions, creating legal and social frameworks that sustained racial discrimination for generations. However, the eventual legal challenges and societal changes that arose in response to

this ruling illustrate the resilience of the fight for justice and equality.

Today, Plessy v. Ferguson is often cited in discussions about race, equality, and justice. It serves as a pivotal case study in understanding how legal doctrines can both reflect and shape societal norms, and it underscores the importance of vigilance in protecting civil rights for all individuals, regardless of race. The journey from Plessy to Brown represents a significant chapter in the American narrative, one that continues to inform contemporary debates about race and justice.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the central issue in Plessy v. Ferguson?

The central issue was whether 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 were equal, establishing the 'separate but equal' doctrine.

What year was the Plessy v. Ferguson decision made?

The decision was made in 1896.

Who was Homer Plessy?

Homer Plessy was a mixed-race man who challenged Louisiana's segregation laws by refusing to give up his seat in a 'whites-only' railway car.

What impact did Plessy v. Ferguson have on American society?

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

Which Amendment was at the center of the Plessy v. Ferguson case?

The Fourteenth Amendment, specifically its Equal Protection Clause, was at the center of the case.

How did Plessy v. Ferguson influence future civil rights cases?

It set a precedent for legal segregation that was not overturned until Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, which declared that separate but equal was inherently unequal.

What were the dissenting opinions in Plessy v. Ferguson?

Justice Harlan dissented, arguing that the Constitution is colorblind and that segregation violated the principle of equality.

How long did the 'separate but equal' doctrine last after Plessy v. Ferguson?

The 'separate but equal' doctrine lasted until the Civil Rights Movement and was effectively overturned by the Supreme Court in 1954.

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