


KEY SUPREME COURT CASES AND FAMOUS TRIALS






The Marshall Court, 1801-1835

- John Marshall believed that the United States would be best served by concentrating power in a strong central government
 - Decisions tended to promote business enterprise
 - Upheld the supremacy of federal legislation over state legislation
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Marbury v. Madison, 1803

- Established the principle of judicial review
 - Judicial review gave the Supreme Court the authority to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional
 - One of a series of landmark decisions by Chief Justice John Marshall that strengthened the federal government
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Dartmouth College v. Woodward, 1819


- Ruled that the Constitution protected contracts from state encroachments
 - Ruling safeguarded business enterprise from interference by state governments
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Worcester v. Georgia, 1831

- Upheld the rights of the Cherokee tribe
- President Jackson refused to recognize the Court's decision

*“John Marshall has made his decision,
now let him enforce it!”*

- Because of Jackson's refusal to enforce the Court's decision, the case was followed by the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia.
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- African Americans were not citizens and therefore could not petition the court
 - Slaves could not be taken from their masters, regardless of a territory's "free" or "slave" status
 - The case was a major issue during the Lincoln-Douglas debates



Dred Scott v. Sanford, 1857

- Invalidated the Northwest Ordinance and the 36 30' line in the Missouri Compromise
- The Fourteenth Amendment invalidated the Dred Scott decision.

“... the descendants of Africans who were imported into this country, and sold as slaves . . . are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States.”




The 1873 Slaughterhouse Cases and the 1883 Civil Rights Cases

- Both cases narrowed the meaning and effectiveness of the Fourteenth Amendment
- Both cases weakened the protection given to African Americans under the Fourteenth Amendment



Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896

- Involved a dispute over the legality of segregated railroad cars in Louisiana
 - Upheld segregation by approving “separate but equal” accommodations for African Americans
 - Sanctioned “separate but equal” public facilities for African Americans
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Supreme Court decisions strengthened the position of
big business

Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Cases





Sacco and Vanzetti Trial

- 1920s
- Illustrated widespread fear of radicals and recent immigrants



The John T. Scopes Trial, 1925

- Immediate issue was the legality of a Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of the theory of evolution in the state's public schools
- Tennessee biology teacher, indicted for teaching evolution
- Illustrates the cultural conflict in the 1920s between fundamentalism and modernism








Korematsu v. United States, 1944

- In early 1942, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast of the United States were forced from their homes into detention camps on the ground that they were a potential threat to the security of the United States
- Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the relocation as a wartime necessity
 - Constitutional scholars now view the relocation as a flagrant violation of civil liberties



The Warren Court, 1953-1969

- During a period of intense judicial activism, the Court used its power to promote social programs
 - Reached notable and controversial decisions that established rights for those accused of crimes
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- Ruling reversed the principle of “separate but equal” established in Plessy v. Ferguson
 - Declared racially segregated public schools inherently unequal
 - Declared that public school segregation is a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment
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Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954

- Fourteenth Amendment guarantees citizens “equal protection of the laws”
 - Key tool used by civil rights groups to overturn segregation
- Most important Supreme Court decision in decade following WWII.
 - Widespread consequences for the rights of minority groups



Baker v. Carr, 1962

- Established the principle of “one man, one vote”
- Supreme Court required the reapportionment of districts for some state legislatures



Griswold v. Connecticut, 1965

- Struck down a state law prohibiting the use of contraceptives
- Court proclaimed a “right to privacy” that soon provided the basis for decisions protecting women’s abortion rights



Miranda v. Arizona, 1966

- Controversial Warren Court decision establishing a defendant's "Miranda Rights"
- Court ruled that no confession could be admissible unless a suspect had been made aware of his or her rights and the suspect had then waived them



Roe v. Wade, 1973

- Upheld abortion rights for women
- Decision was based, in part, on the right to privacy established in *Griswold v. Connecticut*