

Notable Supreme Court Cases

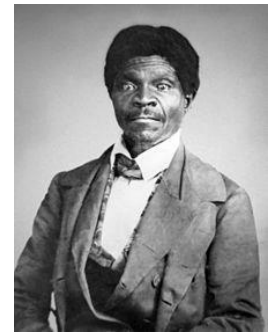
In names of cases, the plaintiff is listed first and the defendant listed second.

Marbury v. Madison (1803)

William Marbury has been appointed as a justice of the peace by outgoing president John Adams, but did not receive the commission before Thomas Jefferson took office. Marbury sued Secretary of State James Madison asking the Supreme Court to issue a writ of mandamus to force Madison to deliver his commission. Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that Marbury did have a legal right to the commission, but that the Court did not have the authority to issue the writ, arguing that the Judiciary Act of 1789 had given the Supreme Court this power, but that the Act itself was unconstitutional. This created the principle of judicial review, giving the Supreme Court the authority to review and invalidate laws found to be unconstitutional.

Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)

Dred Scott was an enslaved Black man who had been taken by his owner, John Emerson, from Missouri, a slave state, to Illinois (a free state) and Wisconsin (a free territory), where they lived for four years before returning to Missouri. Scott argued that his time spent in the free states and territories should have made him legally free. The Court ruled (7-2) that since Scott was an enslaved person, he was not considered a citizen of the U.S. and therefore could not bring suit to the federal court. Secondly, the Court decided that Congress lacked the authority to prohibit slavery in the territories, which invalidated the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in certain territories. And finally, the Court declared that African Americans, whether enslaved or free, could never be considered citizens of the U.S. and were not entitled to the rights of citizenship. Overturned by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution following the Civil War.



Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Homer Plessy, an African American man, challenged a Louisiana law requiring segregated railroad cars. The Court upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation, arguing that segregation did not violate the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause as long as the separate facilities for different races were equal in quality. This established the "separate but equal" doctrine. Overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Lochner v. New York (1905)

New York state law known as the Bakeshop Act (1895) limited the number of hours bakery employees could work to no more than 60 hours per week. *Lochner* was charged with violating this law by allowing employees to work longer hours, arguing that the act interfered with the freedom of contract between employers and workers. The Court sided (5-4) with *Lochner* and struck down the New York law, arguing that there was no sufficient justification for the state to regulate the working hours in this manner.

Weeks v. United States (1914)

Fremont Weeks had been charged with using the mail to transport fraudulent lottery tickets. Federal agents had entered Weeks' home without a search warrant, found and seized evidence that was used in trial. Weeks argued that the evidence should be excluded because it had been obtained through an illegal search and seizure.

In a unanimous decision, the Court ruled in favor of Weeks and created the "exclusionary rule" whereby evidence obtained through an unlawful search and seizure by federal agents must be excluded from federal criminal trials. The decision was based on the 4th Amendment's protection from unreasonable searches and seizures.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

Oliver Brown, an African American parent in Topeka, Kansas, filed a lawsuit after his daughter was denied admission to a nearby public school that was designated for whites only. He argued that segregated schools for black and white students were inherently unequal and violated the Equal Protection Clause. The Court (9-0) ruled that racial segregation in public school was unconstitutional, overturning Plessy v. Ferguson.

Mapp v. Ohio (1961)

Police officers in Cleveland, Ohio, had searched the home of Dollree Mapp without a valid search warrant. They were searching for a fugitive, but instead found obscene material, which was illegal under Ohio law. Mapp was arrested and convicted based on this search. The central issue for the Court was whether evidence obtained through an illegal search and seizure (a violation of the 4th Amendment) could be used in the state criminal case. The Court decided (6-3) in favor of Mapp, stating that the exclusionary rule applied to state criminal proceedings.

Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)

Clarence Gideon had been charged with breaking and entering in Florida. He requested a court-appointed attorney because he could not afford to hire one. Under Florida law, court-appointed counsel was only provided in capital cases and his case did not qualify. As a result, Gideon was forced to represent himself.

Gideon appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that the denial of legal representation violated his constitutional rights. In a unanimous decision, the Court ruled in favor of Gideon, holding that the 6th Amendment's right to counsel applies to state criminal trials through the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment. The Court established the principle that indigent defendants have a constitutional right to counsel in all criminal cases, not just capital cases.

New York Times Co. v. Sullivan (1964)

The New York Times newspaper published a full-page ad criticizing the actions taken by the police in Montgomery, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement. The ad contained some inaccuracies and alleged misconduct by public officials. A city commissioner named L. B. Sullivan sued the New York Times for libel, claiming the inaccuracies had damaged his reputation.

The Court rules in favor of the New York Times, holding that public officials must prove not only that a statement is false, but also that it is made with "actual malice." That is, the publishers must know the statement is false or otherwise act with reckless disregard for the truth. The higher standard of proof for public officials in libel cases was established to protect freedom of the press and encourage robust debate and criticism of public figures.

Miranda v. Arizona (1966)

Ernesto Miranda had been arrested by Arizona police. During his interrogation, Miranda confessed to the crimes without being informed of his 5th Amendment right against self-incrimination or his 6th Amendment right to an attorney. Miranda was convicted based on his confession.

The Court ruled (5-4) that before police interrogations, suspects must be informed of their rights, including the right to remain silent, the right to an attorney, and warned that anything they do say may be used against them in court. These are now called "Miranda warnings" and we say that suspects are "Mirandized."

Legal Terms

libel to publish in writing untruths about a person which will do harm to that person's reputation

pro se *from Latin for "for himself"* when a person acts as their own attorney for a court proceeding

search warrant a legal document authorizing a police officer or other official to enter and search a premises

slander to orally make false and damaging statements about a person

writ of mandamus an order from a court to an inferior government official ordering that official to properly fulfill their official duties or correct an abuse of discretion

writ of habeas corpus *from Latin for "that you have the body"* an order to bring a prisoner or other detainee before the court to determine if the person's imprisonment is lawful

Dictionary Skills – Research Questions – Notable Supreme Court Cases

31. What legal principle was created as a result of the decision in *Weeks v. United States*?
 - A. Miranda warnings
 - B. exclusionary rule
 - C. separate but equal
 - D. due process
32. *Brown v. Board of Education* was a case involving the Board of Education of what city's school system?
 - A. Topeka
 - B. Montgomery
 - C. New York
 - D. Cleveland
33. How many hours per week did the Bakeshop Act limit bakery workers to?
 - A. 10
 - B. 40
 - C. 60
 - D. 80
34. William Marbury sued James Madison in his official capacity of what position?
 - A. President
 - B. Justice of the Peace
 - C. Secretary of State
 - D. Vice President
35. Which two areas did Dred Scott reside in which gave him cause to sue for his freedom?
 - A. Ohio and Arizona
 - B. Illinois and Wisconsin
 - C. New York and Missouri
 - D. Louisiana and Kansas
36. What term is used when a person acts as their own lawyer during court?
 - A. pro se
 - B. writ of habeas corpus
 - C. slander
 - D. mirandized
37. On which of the following decisions did the Supreme Court vote unanimously in favor of the plaintiff?
 - A. *Miranda v. Arizona*
 - B. *Mapp v. Ohio*
 - C. *Lochner v. New York*
 - D. *Weeks v. United States*
38. Which Supreme Court case was overturned by another one of their decisions in 1954?
 - A. *Plessy v. Ferguson*
 - B. *Lochner v. New York*
 - C. *Brown v. Board of Education*
 - D. *Dred Scott v. Sandford*
39. Which amendments did the Court rule had been violated in the case involving Clarence Gideon?
 - A. 6th and 14th
 - B. 5th and 6th
 - C. 1st and 5th
 - D. 4th and 14th
40. Which type of order requires a prisoner to be brought before the court to determine if the person's imprisonment is lawful?
 - A. writ of certiorari
 - B. writ of mandamus
 - C. writ of habeas corpus
 - D. writ of execution

Dictionary Skills – Research Questions – Notable Supreme Court Cases

Answers:

31. B
32. A
33. C
34. C
35. B
36. A
37. D
38. A
39. A
40. C