

The Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court Case: A Turning Point in American History

The Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court case, decided in 1896, was a landmark decision that upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation in the United States. The case had a profound impact on American society, shaping the course of civil rights for decades to come.



Study Guide for United States Supreme Court's Plessy v. Ferguson (Course Hero Study Guides) by Course Hero

★★★★☆ 4.9 out of 5

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Historical Context

The Plessy v. Ferguson case emerged out of the post-Reconstruction era in the United States. After the Civil War and the passage of the 14th Amendment, which granted equal protection under the law to all citizens, many states began to enact laws that segregated African Americans from whites. These laws, known as Jim Crow laws, covered a wide range of areas, including education, transportation, and public accommodations.

In 1890, Louisiana passed a law requiring railroads to provide separate but equal accommodations for white and black passengers. Homer Plessy, a

light-skinned African American man, challenged the law by purchasing a first-class ticket on a train and refusing to move to the car designated for black passengers. He was arrested and convicted of violating the law. Plessy appealed his conviction, arguing that the law violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Legal Arguments

The case was argued before the Supreme Court in 1896. The attorneys for Plessy argued that the Louisiana law violated the Equal Protection Clause because it created separate but unequal accommodations for black and white passengers. They argued that the law was based on the assumption that black people were inferior to white people, and that it perpetuated a system of racial discrimination.

The attorneys for the state of Louisiana argued that the law was constitutional because it provided separate but equal accommodations for both black and white passengers. They argued that the law was necessary to prevent racial conflict and to preserve the social order.

Supreme Court Decision

In May 1896, the Supreme Court ruled 7-1 in favor of the state of Louisiana. The Court held that the Louisiana law was constitutional because it did not create separate but unequal accommodations. The Court reasoned that the law merely required railroads to provide separate accommodations for black and white passengers, and that it did not prevent either group from using the same accommodations.

The Court's decision was based on the doctrine of "separate but equal." This doctrine held that as long as the facilities provided for black and white

people were equal, segregation was not unconstitutional. The doctrine of "separate but equal" would be used to justify racial segregation in many areas of American life for decades to come.

Impact of the Decision

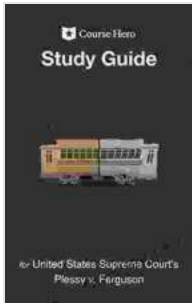
The Plessy v. Ferguson decision had a profound impact on American society. The decision legalized racial segregation in the United States and provided a constitutional basis for the Jim Crow system. The decision also set a precedent for the Supreme Court to uphold laws that discriminated against African Americans.

The Plessy v. Ferguson decision was a major setback for the civil rights movement. The decision made it difficult for African Americans to challenge racial segregation and discrimination. It would take another half-century for the Supreme Court to overturn the Plessy v. Ferguson decision in the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education.

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The Plessy v. Ferguson case is a reminder of the long and difficult struggle for racial equality in the United States. The case is a testament to the power of the law to both protect and perpetuate discrimination. It is also a reminder of the importance of challenging injustice, even when the odds seem insurmountable.



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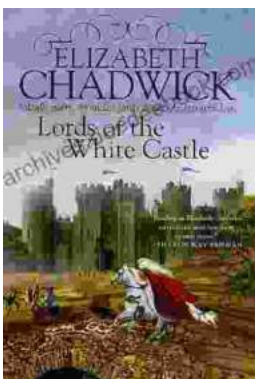
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