

# Important Supreme Court Decisions Under Each Chief Justice

## ***Trevett v. Weeden, 1786-1787***

Occurred under the Articles of Confederation, when each state had a different type of currency. Acts passed by the Rhode Island Legislature imposed heavy fines on those who refused to accept the state's depreciated currency at face value. Weeden was acquitted on the grounds that the acts were unconstitutional.

## ***Bayard v. Singleton, 1787***

First court decision in which a law was found unconstitutional based on a written constitution.

## **John Jay Court (1789-1795)**

### ***Rutgers v. Waddington, 1784***

In 1783, the New York State Legislature passed the Trespass Act, which allowed land owners whose property had been occupied by the British during the Revolution to sue for damages. Rutgers sued in the Mayor's Court over the seizure of her brewery, and the Mayor, James Duane, declared the Act void because it conflicted with a provision of the Treaty of Paris. It was the first time a U.S. court had declared a law unconstitutional, and was an important precedent for the later U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Marbury v. Madison*.

### ***Ware v. Hylton, 1796***

A treaty between the U.S. and Great Britain required that all debts owed by the U.S. to Britain had to be paid in full. However, a Virginia statute said that American debts to Britain could be paid in depreciated currency. The Supreme Court upheld the treaty, proving that federal laws take precedence over state laws.

### ***Chisholm v. Georgia, 1793***

The heirs of Alexander Chisholm (a citizen of South Carolina) sued the state of Georgia. The Supreme Court upheld the right of citizens of one state to sue another state, and decided against Georgia.

## **John Rutledge Court (1795)**

No major cases; only Supreme Court Justice to be forcibly removed from office

## **Oliver Ellsworth Court (1796-1800)**

No major cases

## **John Marshall Court (1801-1835)**

### ***Marbury v. Madison***

1803 - The case arose out of Jefferson's refusal to deliver the commissions to the judges appointed by Adams' Midnight Appointments. One of the appointees, Marbury, sued the Sect. of State, Madison, to obtain his commission. The Supreme Court held that Madison need not deliver the commissions because the Congressional act that had created the new judgeships violated the judiciary provisions of the Constitution, and was therefore unconstitutional and void. This case established the Supreme Court's right to judicial review. Chief Justice John Marshall presided.

### ***Fletcher v. Peck***

1810 - A state had tried to revoke a land grant on the grounds that it had been obtained by corruption. The Court ruled that a state cannot arbitrarily interfere with a person's property rights. Since the land grant was a legal contract, it could not be repealed, even if corruption was involved.

### ***Martin v. Hunters Lessee***

1816 - This case upheld the right of the Supreme Court to review the decisions of state courts.

### ***Dartmouth College v. Woodward***

1819 - This decision declared private corporation charters to be contracts and immune from impairment by states' legislative action. It freed corporations from the states which created them.

### ***McCulloch v. Maryland***

1819 - This decision upheld the power of Congress to charter a bank as a government agency, and denied the state the power to tax that agency.

### ***Cohens v. Virginia***

1821 - This case upheld the Supreme Court's jurisdiction to review a state court's decision where the case involved breaking federal laws.

### ***Gibbons v. Ogden***

1824 - This case ruled that only the federal government has authority over interstate commerce.

### ***Cherokee Nation v. Georgia***

1831 - Supreme Court refused to hear a suit filed by the Cherokee Nation against a Georgia law abolishing tribal legislature. Court said Indians were not foreign nations, and U.S. had broad powers over tribes but a responsibility for their welfare.

### ***Worcester v. Georgia; Cherokee Nation v. Georgia***

1832 - The Supreme Court decided Georgia had no jurisdiction over Cherokee reservations. Georgia refused to enforce decision and President Jackson didn't support the Court. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*: 1831 - The Supreme Court ruled that Indians weren't independent nations but dependent domestic nations which could be regulated by the federal government. From then until 1871, treaties were formalities with the terms dictated by the federal government.

## **Roger Taney Court (1836-1864)**

### ***River Bridge v. Warren Bridge***

1837 - Supreme Court ruled that a charter granted by a state to a company cannot work to the disadvantage of the public. The Charles River Bridge Company protested when the Warren Bridge Company was authorized in 1828 to build a free bridge where it had been chartered to operate a toll bridge in 1785. The court ruled that the Charles River Company was not granted a monopoly right in their charter, and the Warren Company could build its bridge.

### ***Commonwealth v. Hunt***

1842 - Case heard by the Massachusetts supreme court. The case was the first judgment in the U.S. that recognized that the conspiracy law is inapplicable to unions and that strikes for a closed shop are legal. Also decided that unions are not responsible for the illegal acts of their members.

### ***Prigg v. Pennsylvania***

1842 - A slave had escaped from Maryland to Pennsylvania, where a federal agent captured him and returned him to his owner. Pennsylvania indicted the agent for kidnapping under the fugitive slave laws. The Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional for bounty hunters or anyone but the owner of an escaped slave to apprehend that slave, thus weakening the fugitive slave laws.

### ***Dred Scott v. Sandford, 1857***

A Missouri slave sued for his freedom, claiming that his four year stay in the northern portion of the Louisiana Territory made free land by the Missouri Compromise had made him a free man. The U.S. Supreme Court decided he couldn't sue in federal court because he was property, not a citizen.

### ***Ablemann v. Booth, 1859***

Sherman Booth was sentenced to prison in a federal court for assisting in a fugitive slave's rescue in Milwaukee. He was released by the Wisconsin Supreme Court on the grounds that the Fugitive Slave Act was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court overturned this ruling. It upheld both the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act and the supremacy of federal government over state government.

## **Salmon Chase Court (1864-1873)**

### ***Mississippi v. Johnson, 1866***

Mississippi wanted the president to stop enforcing the Reconstruction Acts because they were unconstitutional. The Supreme Court decided that the Acts were constitutional and the states must obey them.

### ***Texas v. White, 1869***

Argued that Texas had never seceded because there is no provision in the Constitution for a state to secede, thus Texas should still be a state and not have to undergo reconstruction.

## **Morrison Waite Court (1874-1888)**

### ***Minor v. Happersett, 1875***

Limited the right to vote to men.

***Munn v. Illinois, 1877***

- The Supreme Court ruled that an Illinois law that put a ceiling on warehousing rates for grain was a constitutional exercise of the state's power to regulate business. It said that the Interstate Commerce Commission could regulate prices.

***Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific Railroad Company v. Illinois, 1886***

Stated that individual states could control trade in their states, but could not regulate railroads coming through them. Congress had exclusive jurisdiction over interstate commerce. States cannot regulate or place restrictions on businesses which only pass through them, such as interstate transportation.

**Melville Fuller Court, (1888-1910)**

***E. C. Knight Company case, 1895***

The Supreme Court ruled that since the Knight Company's monopoly over the production of sugar had no direct effect on commerce, the company couldn't be controlled by the government. It also ruled that mining and manufacturing weren't affected by interstate commerce laws and were beyond the regulatory power of Congress. It gave E. C. Knight a legal monopoly because it did not affect trade.

***Pollock v. Farmer's Loan and Trust Company, 1895***

The court ruled the income could not be taxed. In response, Congress passed the 16th Amendment which specifically allows taxation of income (ratified 1913).

***Plessey v. Ferguson, 1896, "Separate but equal clause"***

Plessey was a black man who had been instructed by the NAACP to refuse to ride in the train car reserved for blacks. The NAACP hoped to force a court decision on segregation. However, the Supreme Court ruled against Plessey and the NAACP, saying that segregated facilities for whites and blacks were legal as long as the facilities were of equal quality.

**26. Disenfranchisement, *Williams v. Mississippi*, 1898**

The Mississippi supreme court ruled that poll taxes and literacy tests, which took away blacks' right to vote (a practice known as "disenfranchisement"), were legal.

**Edward White Court (1910-1921)**

No major cases

**William Taft Court (former President Taft) (1921-1930)**

***Adkins v. Children's Hospital, 1923***

The hospital fired employees because it didn't want to pay them what was required by the minimum wage law for women and children.

***Gitlow v. New York, 1925***

Benjamin Gitlow was arrested for being a member of the Communist party. The New York court upheld the conviction.

**Charles Hughes Court (1930-1941)*****Schechter Poultry Corp. v. U.S., 1935***

The U.S. Supreme Court declared the National Industrial Recovery Act unconstitutional. It held that Congress had improperly delegated legislative authority to the National Industrial Recovery Administration and that the federal government had exceeded its jurisdiction because Schechter was not engaged in interstate commerce.

***Butler case, 1936***

Declared AAA unconstitutional because it involved Congress levying a tax against the general welfare.

***NLRB v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Corp. 1937***

Supreme Court upheld the Wagner Act, ensuring the right to unionize, in a 5 to 4 decision. This decision signaled a change in the Court's attitude towards support of the New Deal and lead FDR to abandon his court-packing plan.

***West Coast Hotel v. Parrish, 1937***

Supreme Court upheld the Washington state minimum wage statute.

***Darby Lumber Co. case, 1941***

Overruled the *Hamme* case of 1918 by upholding the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

***Curtis-Wright Export Corp. case, 1936***

Upheld embargo imposed on arms destined for nations at war in the "Chaco War" that had broken out in 1932 between Bolivia and Paraguay.

**Harlan Stone Court (1941-1946)*****West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, 1942***

Decided that a state can require student to salute the flag in school.

***Korematsu v. U.S., 1944***

Upheld the U.S. government's decision to put Japanese-Americans in internment camps during World War II.

***Smith v. Allwright, 1944***

Outlawed White primaries held by the Democratic Party, in violation of the 15th Amendment.

**Fredrick Moore Vinson (1946-1953)*****Dennis v. U.S., 1951***

In 1948, the Attorney General indicted two key Communist leaders for violation of the Smith

Act of 1940 which prohibited conspiring to teach violent overthrow of the government. They were convicted in a 6-2 decision and their appeal was rejected.

***Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company v. Sawyer, 1952***

Supreme Court decision which restricted the powers of the president and the executive branch.

***Sweatt v. Painter, 1950***

Segregated law school in Texas was held to be an illegal violation of civil rights, leading to open enrollment.

**Earl Warren Court (1953-1969)**

***Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 1954***

The Supreme Court overruled *Plessy v. Ferguson*, declared that racially segregated facilities are inherently unequal and ordered all public schools desegregated.

***Mapp v. Ohio, 1961***

Ms. Mapp was affirmed convicted having pornography "on her person" even though Ohio police obtained the material without a warrant. The Supreme Court ruled that there must be a warrant to search.

***Baker v. Carr, 1962***

The Supreme Court declared that the principle of "one person, one vote" must be following at both state and national levels. The decision required that districts be redrawn so the each representative represented the same number of people.

***Engel v. Vitale, 1962***

Local and state laws requiring prayer in public schools were banned on the grounds that such laws violated the First Amendment.

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***School District of Abington Township v. Schempp, 1963***

Held that it should not be necessary to require prayer be said in school. School district was said to be violating the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

***Gideon v. Wainwright, 1963***

Court decided that state and local courts must provide counsel for defendants in felony cases at the state's expense in any serious felony prosecution. Before, counsel was only appointed if the death penalty was involved.

***Wesberry v. Sanders, 1964***

Supreme Court required states to draw their congressional districts so that each represented the

same number of people. "As nearly as practical, one man's vote . . . is to be worth as much as another's".

***Reynolds v. Sims, 1964***

Supreme Court created the one person, one vote grounded in the Equal Protection Clause.

***Heart of Atlanta Motel v. U.S., 1964***

Supreme Court said that there would be penalties for those who deprived others of equal enjoyment of places of accommodation on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.

***Escobedo v. Illinois, 1964***

Court ruled that there was a right to counsel at the police station. This was needed to deter forced confessions given without the benefit of counsel.

***Miranda v. Arizona, 1966***

Court declared that police officers must inform persons they arrest of their rights: the right to remain silent and the right to counsel during interrogation.

**Warren Burger Court (1969-1986)**

***Swan v. Carlote-Mecklenberg Board of Education, 1971***

A unanimous decision that the busing of students may be ordered to achieve racial desegregation.

***Reed v. Reed, 1971***

Equal protection: the Supreme Court engaged in independent judicial review of a statute which discriminated between persons on the basis of sex, making it clear that the Supreme Court would no longer treat sex-based classifications with judicial deference.

***Doe v. Bolton, 1973***

Supreme Court found that physicians consulted by pregnant women had standing to contest the constitutionality of the state's abortion law.

***Roe v. Wade, 1973***

Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional most state statutes restricting abortion. It ruled that a state may not prevent a woman from having an abortion during the first 3 months of pregnancy, and could regulate, but not prohibit abortion during the second trimester. Decision in effect overturned anti-abortion laws in 46 states.

***Bakke v. Board of Regents, University of California at Davis, 1978***

Barred colleges from admitting students solely on the basis of race, but allowed them to include race along with other considerations when deciding which students to admit.

***Diamond v. Chakrabarty, 1980***

Ruled that a man-made life form (genetic engineering) could be patented.

## **William Rehnquist Court (1986-2005)**

### ***Martin v Wilks (1989)***

Court case challenging race based hiring practices. Qualified white firefighters were being passed over for promotion in favor of less qualified minority firefighters to promote racial diversity. The Supreme Court voted in favor of the white firefighters.

### ***Webster v Reproductive Health Services (1989)***

Missouri passed a law declaring that “life of each human begins at conception” and “unborn children have protectable interests in life, health and well being.” Furthermore the law placed restrictions on when abortions were allowed and the use of state funds for abortions. The Supreme Court upheld the law because *Roe v Wade* did not cover these specific areas.

### ***Planned Parenthood v Casey (1992)***

The first case that could have overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The State of Pennsylvania enacted abortion laws that required notification of parents, spouses, a 24 hour waiting period, an informed consent clause, and increased reporting procedures for abortion clinics. The laws were upheld and reduced the importance of *Roe v. Wade*.

### ***Hopwood v. Texas (1996)***

First successful challenge to a university’s affirmative action policy since *Regents of the University of California v Bakke*.

## **John Roberts Jr. Court (2005-Present)**

### ***National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius (2012):***

This case upheld the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but significantly weakened the individual mandate.

### ***Burwell v. Hobby Lobby (2014):***

This case allowed closely held businesses with religious objections to exclude contraception coverage from their health insurance plans, according to *Oyez*.

### ***Obergefell v. Hodges (2015):***

This case legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

### ***Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022):***

This case overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending the constitutional right to abortion, allowing individual states to regulate or ban abortion

### ***Trump v. United States (2024):***

This case ruled on the former President's attempts to overturn the 2020 election results, finding his claims insufficient.