PLESSY V. FERGUSON

*Plessy v. Ferguson* is a legal decision made by the United States Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of “separate but equal” laws popular in the post-Civil War South. In June 1892 Homer Plessy, a man with one-eighth African blood, was arrested for violating Louisiana’s “equal but separate” clause when he sat in a railway car designated for white passengers. Louisiana district court judge, Justice John Howard Ferguson upheld the arrest, claiming a state had the legal power to regulate railroads operating within its borders. Plessy’s lawyer, Albion Winegar Tourgée, claimed that such separate but equal laws violated the 13th and 14th amendments. On May 18, 1896 the Supreme Court decided that enforced segregation laws were constitutional and subject to the discretion of the state.

*Plessy v. Ferguson* created precedent for a set of enforced segregation laws that regulated the lives of blacks and whites in the South throughout the first half of the 20th century. The ruling played a role in the formation of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), which focused on overturning legally mandated segregation in the United States. In 1954 the Supreme Court overturned the results of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Bibliography: Thomas, Brook, ed. *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997.

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