



CELEBRATING Black History NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Supported by Multicultural Affairs, Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement, Division of Student Affairs

Ten Important Supreme Court Decisions in Black History

Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)

Decreed a slave was his master's property and African Americans were not citizens; struck down the Missouri Compromise as unconstitutional.

Civil Rights Cases (1883)

A number of cases are addressed under this Supreme court decision. Decided that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 (the last federal civil rights legislation until the Civil Rights Act of 1957) was unconstitutional. Allowed private sector segregation.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

The Court stated that segregation was legal and constitutional as long as "facilities were equal"—the famous "separate but equal" segregation policy.

Powell v. Alabama (1932)

The Supreme Court overturned the "Scottsboro Boys" convictions and guaranteed counsel in state and federal courts.

Shelley v. Kraemer (1948)

The justices ruled that a court may not constitutionally enforce a "restrictive covenant" which prevents people of certain race from owning or occupying property.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)

Reversed Plessy v. Ferguson "separate but equal" ruling. "Segregation [in public education] is a denial of the equal protection of the laws."

Heart of Atlanta Motel, Inc. v. United States (1964)

This case challenged the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The court ruled that the motel had no right "to select its guests as it sees fit, free from governmental regulation."

Loving v. Virginia (1967)

This decision ruled that the prohibition on interracial marriage was unconstitutional. Sixteen states that still banned interracial marriage at the time were forced to revise their laws.

Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)

The decision stated that affirmative action was unfair if it lead to reverse discrimination.

Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)

The decision upheld affirmative action's constitutionality in education, as long it employed a "highly individualized, holistic review of each applicant's file" and did not consider race as a factor in a "mechanical way."