

## SHORT SUMMARY OF PLESSY V. FERGUSON

*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) began as a challenge to Louisiana's Separate Car Act of 1890, which required railroads to provide separate train cars for white and Black passengers. In 1892, a group of civil rights activists in New Orleans organized a test case and asked Homer Plessy, a man who was seven-eighths white and one-eighth Black, to sit in a whites-only train car. After Plessy refused to move to the "colored" car, he was arrested and charged with violating the segregation law.

Plessy argued that the law violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, but the case eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In an 8–1 decision, the Court ruled that racial segregation was constitutional as long as facilities were "separate but equal".

### REASONING

#### 1. **The role of law vs. social prejudice:**

- "The object of the [Separate Car Act] is not to destroy equality of rights, but to enforce a public regulation which is founded on the legal distinction of races.... If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."

#### 2. **Segregation is consistent with the Constitution and a matter of safety:**

- "Legislation which separates the two races... does not imply the inferiority of either race to the other, but is a reasonable exercise of state police power."

#### 3. **Public perception of inferiority is not prohibited by law:**

- "The enforced separation of the two races... stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. But in view of the Constitution, the enforced separation is within the scope of state authority and does not conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment."

#### 4. **The principle of "separate but equal":**

- Laws requiring racial separation were constitutional as long as facilities were "separate but equal."