

Case brief

Parties: Homer Adolph Plessy v. The State Louisiana

Fact: On June 7, 1892, Mr. Plessy boarded to the part of train of East Louisiana Railroad which was determined for „white“. However, under Louisiana law (Louisiana’s separate law), he was classified as „black“ although he was one-eighth African Americans and therefore required to sit in the part for „colored“. When Plessy refused to leave this wagon he was arrested and imprisoned.

Legal issue: The state law which required East Louisiana Railroad to segregate trains had denied Plessy’s rights of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution.

Procedural history: In the first instance, the judge presiding this case, John Howard Ferguson, ruled that state has the right to regulate railroad companies as far as they worked in the range of state boundaries. Plessy was convicted and sentenced to pay a penalty \$25. Plessy invoked and the case went to Supreme Court of Louisiana which Ferguson’s decision supported. Then he appealed to the Supreme Court of United States. The court confirmed constitutionality of the Louisiana law.

Reasoning of the court: The court refused an opinion that the Louisiana law applied any inferiority of African Americans as breaking of Fourteenth Amendment. By the court the segregation was only the matter of social politics. The court upheld the constitutionality of state laws requiring racial segregation in public facilities under the doctrine of separate but equal. He stated that the 13th Amendment applied only to slavery, and the 14th amendment was not intended to give African Americans social equality but only political and civil equality with white people.