PLESSY v. FERGUSON (1896)

Core Background

Although the Declaration of Independence affirmed that “all men are created equal,” and had inalienable rights including liberty, African Americans were systematically denied their liberty with the institution of slavery. Even after the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, segregation was a fact of life in the United States. Throughout the country, the races remained separated by both custom and law.

With the end of Reconstruction, every southern state, as well as some northern ones, passed what came to be termed Jim Crow laws. These policies required segregation in public places. African Americans were denied equal access to public facilities like transportation, education, and the voting booth. In 1878, the Supreme Court held that states could not require integration on interstate common carriers. In 1890, the Court held that Mississippi could require segregation on modes of interstate transportation.

Five years later, Homer Plessy, a resident of Louisiana, decided to challenge a Louisiana law requiring segregation on railcars by purchasing a train ticket and sitting in a “whites only” car. Because Plessy was an “octoroon” (1/8th black), he was subject to the black codes of Louisiana. When he was questioned as to his status, he admitted to being an octoroon, and was arrested when he refused to leave the car. He appealed his case to the Supreme Court of Louisiana and eventually the United States Supreme Court, claiming that the Louisiana law violated the Fourteenth Amendment.
KEY QUESTION

Evaluate the degree to which each of the following informed the ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*: custom, precedent, and understanding of federalism.

Documents you will examine:

A The Declaration of Independence, 1776
B Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1787
C The Constitution of the United States, 1789
D The Tenth Amendment, 1791
E Thomas Jefferson to Henri Gregoire, 1809
F Argument of John Quincy Adams, *Amistad Case*, 1841
G “The American Declaration of Independence Illustrated,” 1861
H Section of The Fourteenth Amendment, 1868
I *Civil Rights Cases*, 1883
K Majority Opinion (6-1), *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896
M “At the Bus Station,” 1940
That “all men are created equal” was a truth so obvious, it needed no defense, according to the Declaration of Independence. Indeed, equality itself appeared to need no defense, as the Declaration next claimed that the function of government was not to guarantee natural equality, but to protect natural rights, and in particular, the right to liberty. Thus, the purpose of government was the prevention of tyranny, and not the promotion of equality.

That focus shifted following the Civil War. The Reconstruction Congress found the oppression of an entire race abhorrent and drafted the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to correct the situation. These amendments, which Southern states were required to ratify before readmission to the Union, were intended to end this unequal treatment by correcting those portions of the Constitution which could be used to support slavery or discrimination. And two Supreme Court Cases in particular, Prigg v. Pennsylvania (1842) and Barron v. Baltimore (1833) appear to have been especially targeted.

According to the Declaration of Independence, the function of government was not to guarantee natural equality, but to protect natural rights. That focus shifted following the Civil War.

Prigg involved the Fugitive Slave Act and Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution. Edward Prigg, who captured and returned a fugitive slave to her owner, was arrested and charged with kidnapping. The Court ruled that Article IV, Section 2, the “service or labour” clause, required states to assist in returning fugitive slaves to their owners. But several of the Justices went further, reading in the clause a positive affirmation of the property right of the slaveowner to the slave.

Of similar trouble to the Reconstruction Congress was Barron v. Baltimore, which involved not issues of equality, but property (as arguably did Prigg). In Barron, Mr. Barron lost his property and his livelihood because of the actions of the City of Baltimore. He claimed that this constituted a “taking” in violation of his rights guaranteed in the 5th Amendment. The Court agreed that Baltimore’s act amounted to a “taking” but argued that the guarantees contained in the Bill of Rights applied only to national action, not action by the states.

These two cases find their ultimate expression in Dred Scott (1856), the case that affirmed the property rights of slave owners, denied the claims to citizenship and equality of the Negro race, and voided the Missouri Compromise. Although it is grounded in some measure by a most curious understanding of race relations at the Founding, following on the heels of Prigg and Barron, and to some degree bound by stare decisis, the Court...
defends slavery and denies that the civil liberties enshrined in the Bill of Rights extend to the citizens of the states. That is, following Prigg, slaves are property, not persons, and following Barron, the states are free to deny constitutionally-guaranteed civil rights and civil liberties. It is this which the Civil War Amendments in general and the 14th Amendment in particular, attempted to change. The result is the requirement that the states extend to all citizens of the United States, the “equal protection of the laws.”

But this is perhaps easier said than done. The Founders either took human equality for granted, or believed that government need not enforce equality. But with the adoption of the 14th Amendment which requires the equal protection of the laws, it was the task of government, especially the Court, to determine just what “equal protection of the laws” required. Unsurprisingly, the Court interpreted the Equal Protection Clause as a group of lawyers might; what was protected, they said, was legal and political equality, not social or economic equality.

In Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the Court determined that separate accommodations for the races are constitutionally permissible. The Equal Protection Clause does not require the intermingling of the races, merely their equal treatment under the law. Indeed, the Court suggested that legislation requiring integration was likely to fail, and that racism could only be eradicated by the slow and informal process of voluntary social interaction. The Court found the claim that segregation imposes a stigma on the excluded race without merit, as such a stigma is the result of that race’s assumptions regarding the purpose of the segregation.

Although the Court defended the notion of “separate but equal” regarding social or economic conditions, it protected the legal and political equality of the races. In 1880, the Court defended the rights of blacks to serve on juries (Strader v. West Virginia, 1880). Six years later, the Court ruled that the Equal Protection Clause applied with equal force to Asians (Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 1886). And in 1927, the Court defended the rights of minorities to participate in political primaries (Nixon v. Herndon, 1927).

But it was not until 1954 that the Equal Protection Clause was extended beyond the legal and political realms to social and economic activity. In Brown v. Board of Education, the Court found persuasive the claim raised in Plessy that segregation necessarily stigmatized the excluded race, and that therefore, separate conditions could never be equal. A unanimous Court ordered the end of de jure segregation in education, finding, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has
no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”

In its interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause, the Court developed a doctrine of “suspect classifications” which, if involved in the policy at issue, would trigger “strict scrutiny.” In University of California Regents v. Bakke, Justice Powell, writing for a divided Court, employed the doctrine of suspect classifications to find a policy setting aside seats for minority students violated the Equal Protection Clause. He noted that suspect classifications had not been reserved only for those in minority positions. “Nor has this Court held that discreteness and insularity constitute necessary preconditions to a holding that a particular classification is invidious. ... These characteristics may be relevant in deciding whether or not to add new types of classifications to the list of “suspect” categories or whether a particular classification survives close examination. Racial and ethnic classifications, however, are subject to stringent examination without regard to these additional characteristics.” Thus, the Equal Protection Clause protects against reverse discrimination as well as discrimination against minorities. Nevertheless, Justice Powell also concluded that although racial quotas could not be established, race could be considered as a factor in admissions since a diverse student body was a compelling interest.

The Court’s reasoning in Bakke was recently confirmed in Gratz v. Bollinger and Grutter v. Bollinger, two cases testing admissions policies at the University of Michigan and the University of Michigan Law School respectively. In both cases, the admission of traditionally under-represented minorities constituted a compelling state interest, but the law school considered the applicants as individuals, thus meeting the requirement that the procedure be “narrowly tailored.” On the other hand, the University of Michigan treated all minorities equally, automatically awarding them twenty percent of the score needed for admission, and was thus not sufficiently narrowly-tailored to survive strict scrutiny.

Dr. Warner Winborne is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, where his particular areas of interest include Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Thomas Hobbes. The Executive Director for the Center for the Study of the Constitution, he specializes in the Fourth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments. He has presented papers at the Midwest Political Science Association’s annual conferences, chaired a roundtable discussion of Lani Guinier’s and Gerald Torres’ The Miner’s Canary at the American Political Science Association conference, and is the author of Modernization and Modernity: Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith and Political Development.
**DOCUMENT A**

The Declaration of Independence, 1776
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness....

- In what manner does the Declaration of Independence understand all people to be equal?

**DOCUMENT B**

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 1787
Comparing [Negros] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous.... This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.

- Contrast Jefferson’s views on racial equality with the assertion of the Declaration of Independence (Document A).

**DOCUMENT C**

The Constitution of the United States, 1789
Article I, Section 2, Paragraph 3: Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.

- Who are the “all other Persons” referred to in this document?
- How were these “all other persons” counted for the purpose of apportioning a state’s representatives and direct taxes?
DOCUMENT D
The Tenth Amendment, 1791
The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

- Restate the Tenth Amendment in your own words.

DOCUMENT E
Thomas Jefferson to Henri Gregoire, 1809
Be assured that no person living wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a complete refutation of the doubts I have myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted to them [Negroes] by nature, and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves. My doubts were the result of personal observation on the limited sphere of my own State, where the opportunities for the development of their genius were not favorable, and those of exercising it still less so. I expressed them therefore with great hesitation; but whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others. On this subject they are gaining daily in the opinions of nations, and hopeful advances are making towards their re-establishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family.

- How does Jefferson clarify his beliefs on the racial inferiority of blacks (Document B)?
Argument of John Quincy Adams, Amistad Case, 1841

Note: In 1839, Africans aboard the schooner Amistad revolted and demanded to be returned home. The captain instead brought them to New York, and the captives were to be sold as slaves. A legal battle followed over the question of the status of the captive Africans.

The Constitution of the United States recognizes the slaves, held within some of the States of the Union, only in their capacity of persons. ...The Constitution nowhere recognizes them as property. The words slave and slavery are studiously excluded from the Constitution. Circumlocutions are the fig-leaves under which these parts of the body politic are decently concealed. Slaves, therefore, in the Constitution of the United States are recognized only as persons, enjoying rights and held to the performance of duties.

That Declaration [of Independence] says that every man is “endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights,” and that “among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” ...The moment you come, to the Declaration of Independence, that every man has a right to life and liberty, an inalienable right, this case is decided. I ask nothing more in behalf of these unfortunate men, than this Declaration.

- What does Adams argue about the Constitution’s recognition of slaves?
- Why does Adams reference the Declaration of Independence?
What does the artist believe is the promise of the Declaration of Independence?
DOCUMENT H

Section of The Fourteenth Amendment, 1868

Section. 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws....

Section. 5. The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

- What does the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee to residents of every state?
- Does Section 5 of this document change the meaning of the Tenth Amendment (Document D)?

DOCUMENT I

Civil Rights Cases, 1883

[Federal civil rights] legislation cannot properly cover the whole domain of rights appertaining to life, liberty, and property, defining them and providing for their vindication. That would ... make congress take the place of the state legislatures and to supersede them.

It is absurd to affirm that, because the rights of life, liberty, and property ... are by the [Fourteenth] Amendment sought to be protected against invasion on the part of the state without due process of law, Congress may, therefore, provide due process of law for their vindication in every case; and that, because the denial by a state to any persons of the equal protection of the laws is prohibited by the amendment, therefore congress may establish laws for their equal protection.

- Which level of government does this opinion imply has the power to correct state violations of rights to life, liberty and property?

What was Ferguson’s title?

Did the United States Supreme Court affirm or overturn the decision of the Louisiana court?
Majority Opinion (6-1), *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896

The object of the [Fourteenth] Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but, in the nature of things, it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation, in places where they are liable to be brought into contact, do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures in the exercise of their police power.

We consider the underlying fallacy of [Plessy’s] argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.

The argument also assumes that social prejudices may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured to the negro except by an enforced commingling of the two races. We cannot accept this proposition. If the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other’s merits, and a voluntary consent of individuals.

Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts, or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.

- What kinds of laws does the Court say that state legislatures have the rightful power to pass?
- What does the Court say is the basic flaw in Plessy’s argument?
- What does the Court argue about laws that try to abolish racial prejudices?
- Why is this decision said to have affirmed the doctrine of “separate but equal”?

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage, and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in view of the constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful....

Sixty millions of whites are in no danger from the presence here of eight millions of blacks. The destinies of the two races, in this country, are indissolubly linked together, and the interests of both require that the common government of all shall not permit the seeds of race hate to be planted under the sanction of law. What can more certainly arouse race hate, what more certainly create and perpetuate a feeling of distrust between these races, than state enactments which, in fact, proceed on the ground that colored citizens are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coaches occupied by white citizens? That, as all will admit, is the real meaning of such legislation as was enacted in Louisiana.

- What does the dissenting opinion mean by “Our constitution is color-blind”?
- What does the dissenting opinion claim is the “real meaning” of the Louisiana segregation law?
“At the Bus Station,” 1940

How does this photograph from 1940 reveal the legacy of the Plessy decision?

DIRECTIONS

Answer the Key Question in a well-organized essay that incorporates your interpretations of Documents A-M, as well as your own knowledge of history.

KEY QUESTION

Evaluate the degree to which each of the following informed the ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson: custom, precedent, and understanding of federalism.
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

The doctrine of “separate but equal” did not make its appearance in this Court until 1896 in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson....

Negro and white schools involved have been equalized, or are being equalized, with respect to buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers, and other “tangible” factors. Our decision, therefore, cannot turn on merely a comparison of these tangible factors in the Negro and white schools involved in each of the cases. We must look instead to the effect of segregation itself on public education. ...Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprives these plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws.

- The Court acknowledges the growing “equality” of schools for blacks and whites. Why, then, will the Court overturn Plessy?
Identifying and Teaching against Misconceptions: Six Common Mistakes about the Supreme Court

By Diana E. Hess

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My colleagues in science and math tell me that discussing students’ preconceptions and misconceptions is a typical part of the discourse about teaching in their fields. By contrast, I rarely hear social studies teachers talk about this—perhaps because so much of the content in social studies is or could be contested and we therefore shy away from labeling students’ ideas as “pre” or “mis” conceptions.

As a general rule, in my social studies courses I tend to focus on topics and issues that are controversial or—as I often argue—are taught as “settled” and really need some unsettling. But I do not think that everything that should be taught in social studies is controversial. In fact, much of what I think students should learn is not controversial—just hard. Consequently, I have come to believe that it is important for teachers to think deeply about the kinds of understandings that students come in with, identify their conceptions, and then organize teaching purposely to develop the “pre” and correct “the mis.”

An institution that is commonly taught about in middle and high schools is the U.S. Supreme Court. Many people—adults and young people alike—hold misconceptions about how it works. Interestingly, however, this lack of knowledge does not stop people from having a generally positive opinion of the Court—or the other branches of the federal government. Every so often, polling is done that asks people to name Supreme Court justices as well as other groups (e.g., the Three Stooges and the Seven Dwarfs). The findings are always embarrassing and a bit bizarre. Notably, an astonishingly large percentage of people in the United States know all three of the stooges’ names (74 percent to be exact), and about 80 percent can name two of Snow White’s dwarfs.

By comparison, 63 percent of Americans cannot name two Supreme Court justices. Clearly, we should not over-generalize—it may be that some people who cannot name justices actually know a lot about the Supreme Court. Conversely, knowing the name of a justice does not indicate that a person understands anything substantive about the Court. Yet it is my sense that most people are not informed about what the Supreme Court does—in part because the media typically pays little attention to the Court, except when a Supreme Court position falls vacant and a new justice has to be nominated and approved.
For many teachers, then, it is likely that while most of their students may have vague ideas and feelings about the Court, they are not coming into the classroom with robust content knowledge. However, this does not mean that they do not have any conceptions about the Court and what it does, or should do. In my experience teaching high school students in a variety of venues, and listening to hundreds of middle and high school teachers talk about their understandings about the Court—and what their students tend to know and not know—I have encountered six key misconceptions that many people hold about the Court (and the Constitution) that need to be corrected, or at least contested.

1. **THE CONSTITUTION APPLIES TO EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING**

When I was teaching high school government, history, and law courses, it was not unusual for students to believe that virtually every person and organization with which they interacted had to “follow” the Constitution. Because many students thought the Supreme Court only heard cases that dealt with the Constitution, this mistaken belief often worked to corrupt their understanding of what the Court did. It was not unusual for me to hear students say that their parents had violated their Fourth Amendment rights when they searched their bedrooms; complain that a private organization limited their free expression rights when it enforced strict behavior rules for activities; or argue that employers were violating their rights under the Constitution when they told them what to wear to work.

This mistaken belief about the Constitution’s reach is a sign that the core concept of “state action” had not been formed. That is, in virtually all circumstances, the Constitution only applies to actions taken by a federal, state, or local government actor. But my students believed that any person or organization that “governed” them by exerting authority in their lives was analogous to the “state” and therefore had to follow the Constitution. For example, one of my students believed that his employers were violating workers’ Fourth Amendment rights when they searched employee lockers.

This was a clear signal that he held a misconception about the reach of the Constitution. If he had understood the concept of state action, he would have realized that because his employer was a private entity, not the government, it was under no obligation to adhere to the procedures required by the Fourth Amendment. I realized that for a variety of reasons, my students seemed to have one large concept labeled “rights” under which they thought everything fit—as opposed to a more variegated understanding of the multiple sources of rules and rights. I have since come to believe that many people, not just young people, do not know what state action is. Thus, a fundamental misconception needs to be corrected by explicitly teaching students about the limits of the Constitution’s reach, and particularly about the difference between state and non-state actions. This is a perfect topic for a concept formation lesson where students are provided with examples of constitutional cases that clearly illustrate state action (as well as non-examples) and asked to identify who is being accused of violating the Constitution (e.g., a prison warden, a public school board, or a city council).

2. **THE LIBERATION GENERALIZATION**

Another belief that many people hold is that the Court’s primary and most frequently enacted function is to liberate people from the heavy hand of a discriminatory majority.
Supreme Court scholar Michael Klarman traces this misconception to the Court’s landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Klarman explains,

*The conventional assessment of the Court’s countermajoritarian capacity has been distorted, I believe, by a single decision—Brown. Because that ruling rescued us from our racist past, the conventional storyline runs, the Court plainly can and does play the role of heroic defender of minority rights from majoritarian oppression.*

I learned about the relationship between Brown and the formation of the “liberation generalization” when a very skillful and experienced teacher told me how learning about the contemporary Supreme Court worked to diminish her interest in teaching a course in American government. She had attended a professional development program where she was taught that the primary function of the Supreme Court is to ensure uniformity in the federal judiciary. Consequently, most of the cases the Court chooses to decide revolve around legal issues for which there was disagreement among the lower federal courts. This information was profoundly disturbing to this teacher. She exclaimed, “I grew up at the time of *Brown*—we revered the Court.” Because she interpreted the ruling in Brown as a particularly potent representation of the Court liberating people from racist policies that the “majority” had enacted, she had come to believe that this was what the Court typically did. While there is a robust debate about whether the purpose of the Court should be to provide individuals with protection against the majority, there is less controversy among scholars about whether the Court sees that as its role, or has in fact, actually done that on a consistent basis. This is not to suggest that there are no examples of the Court performing this function, just that this particular role of the Court may be more the exception rather than the rule.

Most recently, the Court’s controversial decision in the 2003 gay rights case *Lawrence v. Texas* has been interpreted by some as a particularly powerful example of the Court’s majority acting to liberate or defend a group that was targeted by legislation (e.g., the “majority”). In this case, the Court ruled that a Texas state law that criminalized homosexual sodomy violated the due process clause of the 14th amendment. But it is important to note that many of the opponents of the Court’s decision in the case have challenged the very right of the Court to overturn majority decisions—especially if they are about topics that are not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. Teaching to correct students’ misconception that the Court’s primary role is to liberate people is challenging, because this is clearly one function of the Court—and when that function is performed, the cases are often very important, so they garner landmark status. Yet it is a misrepresentation to teach that this is the focus of the Court most of the time.

3. **THE BELIEF IN ERROR CORRECTION**

Another common misconception that many lay people hold is that the role of the Court—as the “highest court”—is to correct errors when lower courts have made mistakes. But in most cases, the fact that a federal or state court below made a decision that seems to
be erroneous is not, by itself, a major reason why the Court takes a case. Most students would be surprised to know that if the error is actually a dispute over the “true” facts, then the errors are solely in the domain of the trial courts and will be not corrected or even addressed by the appellate courts. This is not to suggest that the Court does not overturn lower court decisions on issues of law (in fact, about 75 percent of the cases the Court decides do overturn a decision from below), but that is not its primary function. The Supreme Court is not so much an error-correcting court as a uniformity-producing institution. To understand the significance of this distinction, it is important to understand how cases get to the Court in the first place. Virtually all the cases decided by the United States Supreme Court have been granted a writ of certiorari. *Certiorari* is a Latin word that means “to be informed of.” Black’s Law Dictionary defines a writ of certiorari as:

“An order by the appellate court to bring the case before them when the court has discretion on whether or not to hear an appeal.” The Court does not have to grant requests for writs of certiorari, and most of the petitions requesting one are denied. For example, in most years the Court receives about 7,500 petitions for certiorari, but they typically take only 75-85 cases.

The vast majority of cases the Court agrees to decide each year involve a question about which there is disagreement among the lower federal Courts of Appeals (this is called a “circuit conflict”). Supreme Court litigator Tom Goldstein analyzed the Court’s docket in one recent term and found that 80 percent of cases involved a circuit conflict. As a general rule of thumb, the conflict must be significant enough to deserve attention. There are many instances in which the Court does not hear a case even when there is a circuit conflict. But if a strong argument can be made that a case focuses on an important question for which there is currently a conflict among circuits, and there is a need for a uniform answer across the nation (such as what a part of the federal tax code means), then it is more likely that the Court will decide to hear the case than they would a case for which there was not a circuit conflict.

4. **THE GIDEON EFFECT**

In addition to addressing misconceptions about the kind of cases the Court typically decides, it is important to teach accurate information about who is more likely to get a case heard by the Court. Among the cases the Court has selected to hear, very few are *in forma pauperis*, or cases filed by people who cannot afford the filing fee. In recent terms, an average of only one-tenth of one percent of paupers’ petitions were granted review (8 cases out of 6,386 in 2002-2003), compared to an average of 4 percent of paid cases (83 cases out of 1,869 in 2002-2003), during the same terms. This is extremely important information because it illustrates how relatively rare it is for the Court to take a case filed by a person in prison, a common misperception sometimes referred to as the “Gideon effect,” after *Gideon v.*

While many standard government textbooks mention that individuals and groups can file amicus briefs, few explain how deeply and broadly engaged many groups are in the work of the Court on a variety of levels.
Wainwright, in which the petitioner, Clarence Earl Gideon, famously appealed to the Court with his handwritten petition. This case is commonly taught—as it should be—but if not put in the context of its rarity, the effect of the case will be to reinforce a misconception about what kinds of cases the Court typically considers, and why.

5. A RULING IS A “RIGHT” ANSWER

In addition to misconceptions about what kinds of cases the Court takes, and for what reasons, it appears that many people believe that when the Court decides a case, its members are identifying the “right” answer to a challenging question. As Justice Robert Jackson famously wrote, however, “We are not final because we are infallible, but we are infallible only because we are final.” In an unusual statement, Jackson’s remark acknowledges that the Court makes mistakes. By definition, then, it seems logical that the Court’s rulings are supposed to be “right” answers. If they were not, how could the Court make mistakes? The Court often goes to great lengths to communicate this belief when it overturns its own precedents. In these decisions, the majority will often say that the Court got it wrong in the past, and this wrong must now be righted. But if that were really the case, then how do we explain the tendency of the Court to split on many hot-button cases, such as those that involve affirmative action, abortion, gay rights, or presidential-vote counting? Although most of the Court’s decisions are not split, in the cases involving matters that are especially divisive to the public, the Court often splits as well.

What makes the Brown decision so unusual is that it was the exception to this general rule—a divisive issue that the Court decided unanimously. When the Court wades into matters that deeply divide people in the United States, it is usually a solid bet that they involve questions for which there is lively dispute about what the correct answer should be. That is, there is a lively intellectual contest going on that involves scholars and the public about what is the right answer to a constitutional or legal question. Rather than being viewed as final arbiters in this intellectual debate, justices are better seen as participants in the debate—and what they rule is not “right,” just what a majority of the Court agree on at a particular time. Finality, not being right, is what the system is designed to produce. Today, we would not say that the Court’s decision in the Dred Scott case was “right,” but it was final from a legal standpoint, even though the social and political issue was an open wound. This does not mean that the Court’s decisions can be ignored, but its decisions can certainly be criticized—and indeed, this is an important productive part of public discourse in a democratic society. Teachers who adopt this latter view are more likely to ask students to evaluate whether they think the Court made the correct decision in a particular case, a pedagogical move that would go a long way toward correcting the misconception that what the Court rules is right simply because it emanated from the Court. In other words, Justice Jackson may have overstated his case (perhaps intentionally so) when he said the Court was infallible because it was final. A more accurate read of the Court’s role in the knowledge-production process (which is one way to characterize the sector that the Supreme Court is in) is to say that the Court is neither infallible nor final. Either of those options would be, by definition, antithetical to democratic notions of how the meaning of what is “right” comes to be constructed and reconstructed.
6. INTEREST GROUPS AND THE COURT: DISROBING THE BLIND JUSTICE METAPHOR

Another significant misconception that many people hold about the Court is that Court decisions are made without influence from the public—or specifically, from groups the public forms to influence policy, such as Planned Parenthood and Liberty Forum. This misconception is probably linked to the mistaken belief that the Court’s primary function is to serve in an anti-majoritarian role; if the Court is supposed to constantly “check” the majority, then it must not be susceptible to its views. However, even a cursory understanding of how interest groups influence the work of the Court indicates that the notion that the Court makes decisions without input from the public is false. The important influence that individuals and interest groups have on the Court’s thinking is not something that the Court hides; indeed, it openly admits and even references such influences. For example, it is fairly common knowledge that individuals and groups interested in the outcome of a case file amicus (or friend of the court) briefs, in which they are expected to provide important ideas and information they want the Court to consider when ruling on the case. The Court relies on these briefs, and it is clear that some of them are quite influential. Although an unusually large number of such briefs were filed in the two University of Michigan affirmative action cases (over 100), many of the justices asked questions that referred to one in particular—a brief supporting affirmative action filed by a group of former military academy superintendents and retired military officers. This brief was also referenced in the majority decision written by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.

While many standard government textbooks mention that individuals and groups can file amicus briefs, few explain how deeply and broadly engaged many groups are in the work of the Court on a variety of levels. Interest groups routinely pay for or provide a party’s legal representation. In fact, they often “shop” for compelling cases that they think the Court will resolve in their favor. This has been a frequently used litigation tactic by groups of every persuasion. These same groups serve the reverse function—working to keep cases off the Court’s docket—by discouraging petitioners from going forward with an appeal (or in one recent example, encouraging a party to settle a case even after the Court had granted review). 9

Not only are many interest groups deeply involved in the work of the Court, but some are involved in an inordinate number of the Court’s cases. In the term that just ended, the National Chamber Litigation Center, Inc. (the public policy law firm affiliated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce) filed 18 briefs in support of certiorari, 15 briefs on the merits, for a total of more than 25 percent of the Court’s cases.

When one high school teacher learned this at a recent professional development institute about the Supreme Court, she exclaimed, “But isn’t that just like lobbying—and aren’t the courts supposed to be independent?” This exclamation sparked a very interesting conversation about what the role of interest groups in the Court should be. 10 What became clear to the teachers attending the event was that interest groups are much more involved with the Court than those teachers had previously believed—and they now needed to figure out how to communicate that to students.
THE EFFECT OF CORRECTING MISCONCEPTIONS

Teaching to correct students’ misconceptions about the Supreme Court may seem like a form of myth busting. Some people might think that this will diminish students’ respect for important government institutions. In fact, it is possible that teaching to correct students’ misconceptions may cause students to be less likely to revere the Court. However, we should not fear this result. I think we should be more nervous about teaching students to revere institutions. After all, awe is the enemy of inquiry. Conversely, it is more important that people know how institutions, such as the Supreme Court, really work if they are to truly understand what influence it has on U.S. society. Correcting many of the misconceptions I have described could serve an important role in disentangling the damaging connection that is often made between reverence and engaged citizenship. For example, someone who understands that the Court’s primary and most frequently enacted function is to create uniformity in the federal court system may be less likely to view the Court as a political savior. This can be a good thing if we want to encourage people to let their views be known in the policy-making process. I am not suggesting that the Supreme Court, as an institution, does not deserve respect—I think it does, even though, like most people, I disagree with some of its decisions. But true respect is much more powerful when it comes from a strong knowledge base that can only be built if we recognize misconceptions and teach in a very explicit way to correct or at least expose them.

I doubt that all students hold the misconceptions I have discussed, or that my list of misconceptions is complete. However, I have frequently encountered them in my experience teaching about the Court. In the past, I did not consistently and purposely plan instruction to target students’ misconceptions and work to change them. Now, I intend to work toward that goal, because eliminating misconceptions about critically important institutions in our society is a step to building deep knowledge about how such institutions actually work—surely a more important goal than simply fostering reverence.

Diana E. Hess is an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is grateful for the helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this article provided by Lee Arbetman, Keith Barton, Jeff Brown, Bebs Chorak, and Simone Schweber.

1 Thanks to Jeff Passe for this explanation of why there is a difference in the discourse about misconceptions in the science, math, and social studies teaching communities.

2 For example, I have written a number of articles about how Brown v. Board of Education is taught, in which I argue that we need to teach the controversies of Brown and its aftermath and that we rarely do. See Diana Hess, “Moving beyond Celebration: Challenging Curricular Orthodoxy in the Teaching of Brown and its Legacies,” Teachers College Record 107, no. 3 (2005): 2046-2067.

3 See PollingReport.com, [http://www.pollingreport.com/institute.htm](http://www.pollingreport.com/institute.htm), for recent opinion poll data about the views that people in the United States have about the Supreme Court, especially relative to their opinions about Congress and the presidency.

Of course, there are times when the Court receives quite a bit of attention; two recent notable examples are *Bush v. Gore*, and the decision in 2005 on eminent domain (*Kelo v. City of New London*).


Go to [http://www.uscourts.gov/courtlinks](http://www.uscourts.gov/courtlinks) for a map showing the federal circuits.

Information received from Tom Goldstein via personal communications on September 5, 2006.

In 1997, the Court granted certiorari in an affirmative action case about whether race could be a factor in teacher lay-offs. Before the oral arguments, the school board agreed to a surprise out-of-court settlement that was funded by a consortium of civil rights groups who feared that the Court would rule against affirmative action.

This teacher was attending the Supreme Court Summer Institute sponsored by Street Law, Inc., and the Supreme Court Historical Society.
CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

Scaffolding questions are provided as an option. Teachers of AP or honors classes may choose not to have students write answers to these.

Context/Background information for some documents is provided as an option to brief students on historical/legal context and significance.

DBQ Strategies:

• Write the Key Question on the board and give each student a copy of one document. Ask this question: Does this document help you to answer this question? If so, how? If not, what additional information might you need? Allow students 3-4 minutes to answer these questions. Then, have students pair up, sharing their documents and answering the same questions. Have each pair join another and repeat the process. Finally, bring the entire class together and answer the Key Question as a group.

• Write the Key Question on the board and spend one class period having students analyze documents and answer the scaffolding questions, followed by one class period writing their answers to the key question.

• Divide students into pairs or trios and assign one or more documents per group. Then ask groups to report on their documents to the class, being sure that they explain how their specific documents can help to answer the Key Question.

• Go over DBQs as a large group, using scaffolding questions and key questions as discussion prompts.

• Give students the documents from a case and have them craft a key question.

• Have students complete a Case Briefing Sheet (see p. 231) to reinforce key concepts.

• Have students determine for each document which side would be more likely to use it in oral argument of the case. (See graphic organizers, p. 232.)

• Conduct a Moot Court presentation (see p. 235 for directions).

• Lightning Round Moot Court: This strategy might be especially helpful to provide a quick review of a number of cases. Assign two students to each case-one to present the petitioner’s position and one to present the respondent’s. Each student has two minutes to present his/her position to the entire class, which then must vote on this question: Is the law in question a valid exercise of government power under the relevant constitutional principles?

• Have students conduct research to discover more details about the people involved in a case, and then report to the class.

• Develop an illustrated timeline to depict changes and trends in interpretation of a given constitutional principle.

• Develop political cartoons to highlight the important issues in a case.
ONLINE RESOURCES

Consult any of the following websites for additional resources to learn more about the Supreme Court and landmark cases.

- http://billofrightsinstitute.org/resources/educator-resources/landmark-cases/
- www.oyez.org
- http://www.supremecourt.gov/
- http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/cases/name.htm
- http://www.scotusblog.com/
CASE BRIEFING SHEET

Case Name and Year: ______________________________________________________
Facts of the Case: ________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is the constitutional question that the Supreme Court must answer? (This is a yes/no question and spells out the specific part of the Constitution at issue.)
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What constitutional principles are indicated in the case? ________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Summary of one side’s arguments:                                    Summary of the other side’s arguments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How would you decide the case and why? _________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did the Supreme Court majority decide the case and why? ________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What were the main points raised in any dissenting opinions? _________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What other Supreme Court cases are related in important ways? _______________
________________________________________________________________________
### Constitutional Issue Evidence Form

- **Case Name and Year:**
- **Constitutional Issue:**

#### How would you use the documents provided to answer the constitutional question?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes (Source/Evidence)</th>
<th>No (Source/Evidence)</th>
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# DOCUMENTS SUMMARY

Use this form to develop an overview of the evidence available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document name &amp; date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Answer to scaffolding question</th>
<th>How each side might use this document to answer the Key Question —OR— What is the main idea of this document?</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petitioner</td>
<td>Both sides</td>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Additional notes:** How did majority/dissenting opinions align with each attorney's position?
MOOT COURT PROCEDURES

Preparation

• Encourage students to use the background knowledge they have developed. Attorneys and Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court apply a great deal of background and historical knowledge.

• Caution students that “gotcha” questions within the classroom context are not productive. “Justices” should not ask questions that, based on their background and class activities, would not be fair game.

• Decide whether students will be allowed to use online resources via their smartphones during the exercise—there are good arguments both for using and for not using them.

• Recommendation—do not allow “Justices” to interrupt the attorneys in the first time or two that you run moot courts. They can ask their questions at the end of each attorney’s oral arguments.

• Encourage teamwork among “attorneys” in their presentations. Each team should have a lead attorney, but others will help fill in as needed.

Divide class into 3 groups: 9 Justices, advocates for the petitioner, and advocates for the respondent (A fourth group could be journalists.)

• Give time for planning: Justices decide what questions they want answered in oral arguments; advocates for each side plan their oral arguments.

• Allow equal time for presentation of each side, including interruptions from Justices (or not—your choice). In the U.S. Supreme Court, each side has 30 minutes, and the Justices interrupt continuously.

• Justices deliberate and announce decision. Deliberation is actually done in strict privacy in the U.S. Supreme Court conference, but you decide for your class.

At the beginning of each session of the Supreme Court, the Marshal of the Court (Court Crier) announces:

“Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! All persons having business before the Honorable, the Supreme Court of the United States, are admonished to draw near and give their attention, for the Court is now sitting. God save the United States and this Honorable Court!”

The Chief Justice will begin the oral argument phase by saying, “Petitioner, you may begin.”

The petitioner’s attorney says, “Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the Court...”

Debrief: Discuss both the content of the case (Constitutional principle and its application) and the processes employed. Consider thinking and planning process, civil discourse process, and the application of these skills outside the classroom.
TIPS FOR THESIS STATEMENTS AND ESSAYS

Thesis Statement: The thesis statement condenses your arguments to a nutshell and appears in the opening paragraph, but it is not written until AFTER you have planned your overall response. (Planning process shown in table below.)

A good thesis statement—

- Fully addresses all parts of the prompt, while acknowledging the complexity of the issue.
- Clearly takes a side—makes a declarative statement that one thing was more important, more persuasive, etc. than another. Since the verb in the prompt is often something like “assess” or “evaluate,” the thesis statement should show which side the writer takes.
- Suggests a “table of contents” or road map for the essay—shows what elements enter into consideration.
- Begins an essay that is proven by abundant and persuasive facts and evidence.

In a DBQ essay, the student writes a well-organized response to target a specific prompt, analyzing pertinent documents in order to support his/her thesis. The steps described here will guide the process of handling the documents. (For Advanced Placement US History the response must include BOTH outside information AND information from the documents. On US History AP exams, one of the essays that must be written under timed conditions is the DBQ.)

DBQ Do and Don’t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Analyze the prompt and divide it into its components. A graphic organizer helps with this step.</td>
<td>Fully address the prompt. It is better to address all parts of the prompt, even if you must do some in a way that is less complete, than to spend all your time on just one of two parts or 3 of 4 parts.</td>
<td>Neglect part of the prompt because you spent too much time on the part you know more about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plan to prove your point. It is best to begin by planning the overall structure BEFORE even looking at the documents.</td>
<td>Organize your thoughts before writing the thesis statement. What are the logical points your essay needs to include?</td>
<td>Write a “laundry list” that simply summarizes each document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Don’t</td>
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<td>3. Check the documents to see how you can use them as tools.</td>
<td>Strive to use all the documents; but be sure you accurately understand their main ideas.</td>
<td>Take quotes or ideas out of context to use them in a manner other than the author intended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ask yourself when writing every paragraph: “How does this help to prove my thesis?”</td>
<td>Analyze to prove the position asserted in the thesis statement. Analysis is not the same thing as description or narrative. Merely making a series of true statements is not analysis. Key to analysis—is the essay answering the “So what?” question?</td>
<td>Use 1st-or 2nd-person pronouns “I think the Supreme Court has the authority to use judicial review because...” “Have you ever wondered how the Supreme Court got the authority to overturn federal laws?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Manage time wisely; writing long quotes will eat up thinking time.</td>
<td>Use relevant facts, evidence, proof. A well-chosen brief phrase in quotations and worked into your own sentence is powerful.</td>
<td>Use lengthy quotes. Pad the paper in an attempt to conceal a lack of analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Give credit to sources.</td>
<td>Cite sources using the author’s name and/or document title.</td>
<td>Write “According to Document B,...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Think as you write!</td>
<td>Let logic and analysis drive the essay.</td>
<td>Let documents drive the essay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Rubric for Evaluating a DBQ Essay on a 9-Point Scale

Adapted from AP US History Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
<th>Analysis (tends to be the most difficult component)</th>
<th>Entire Prompt</th>
<th>Outside Info (required for AP class)</th>
<th>Organization &amp; Writing Skill</th>
<th>Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Contains a well-developed thesis which clearly addresses all aspects of the prompt and shows an organized, effective roadmap.</td>
<td>Effective analysis which shows &amp; proves relationships; fully answers the &quot;so what?&quot; questions; more analytical than narrative.</td>
<td>The prompt develops a thesis or argument which is clear and relevant, with a comprehensive plan or roadmap.</td>
<td>Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information.</td>
<td>Clearly organized &amp; well-written—evident on first reading, but we'll read it again just for pleasure.</td>
<td>May contain minor errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6-7</td>
<td>Contains a thesis which addresses the prompt but may be limited, confused, or poorly developed.</td>
<td>Limited analysis; simplistic explanations that do not indicate mastery of the content; may list facts without analysis.</td>
<td>The prompt addresses part of the question but may be shallow, scattered, or unfocused.</td>
<td>Supports thesis with some outside information.</td>
<td>Acceptable organization; language errors do not interfere with comprehension and do not indicate misunderstanding of the topic.</td>
<td>May contain errors that do not seriously detract from quality of the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3-4</td>
<td>Presents a limited, confused and/or poorly developed thesis.</td>
<td>Simplistic explanations that do not indicate mastery of the content; may list facts without analysis.</td>
<td>The prompt covers one aspect of the prompt in a general way or with additional parts in a superficial way.</td>
<td>Quotes or briefly cites some documents, but does not use them as tools to support the thesis.</td>
<td>Contains little outside information.</td>
<td>May contain major errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Contains no thesis or a thesis which does not address the prompt.</td>
<td>Shows inadequate or inaccurate understanding of the prompt.</td>
<td>The prompt does not address or misapprehend the question.</td>
<td>Contains no outside information.</td>
<td>Demonstrates weak organizational and/or writing skills which interfere with comprehension.</td>
<td>Contains numerous errors, both major and minor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- "My former boyfriend is the world’s biggest jerk and here’s why..."
- "I didn’t have to pay for this exam and I’m not wasting my time on it. I know nothing about the prompt..."
- "The angels are starting to sing!"
- "Call the President; he needs to hear this essay!"
- "The angels are starting to sing!"
- "The angels are starting to sing!"
- "The angels are starting to sing!"
- "The angels are starting to sing!"
KEY QUESTION SCORING GUIDELINES FOR ALL ESSAYS

The Good-Excellent Essay

• Asserts a strong, clear, and well-developed thesis in response to the key question.
• Supports the thesis with outstanding analysis of Founding documents, custom, legal precedent and contemporary views.
• Intelligently applies and/or critiques the Court’s opinion(s).
• Effectively uses many documents and incorporates prior knowledge.
• Contains only minor errors; is clearly organized and exceptionally well-written.

The Average-Good Essay

• Asserts a thesis in response to the key question.
• Supports the thesis with some analysis of Founding documents, custom, legal precedent and/or contemporary views. Analysis of some aspects may be cursory or absent.
• Critiques and/or applies the Court’s opinion(s), but may demonstrate less command of nuance than the Good-Excellent Essay.
• Effectively uses many documents and incorporates prior knowledge.
• Contains few significant errors; is acceptably organized and written.

The Below Average-Average Essay

• Asserts a limited thesis or does not fully address the key question.
• Analysis is largely incomplete, superficial, or incorrect; may merely paraphrase or quote documents.
• Contains simplistic or incorrect application/critique of the Court’s opinion(s).
• Uses few documents and incorporates little prior knowledge.
• Contains some significant errors and is poorly organized and written.

The Poor-Below Average Essay

• Lacks a thesis.
• Exhibits inadequate understanding of the question and the documents.
• Offers no application/critique of the Court’s opinion(s).
• Uses very few documents and incorporates no prior knowledge.
• Contains numerous significant errors and is poorly organized and written.
The words and ideas of America’s Founders were reflections of certain widely accepted understandings about how people can govern themselves to best protect liberty. These understandings include the concepts listed here.

**Due process:** Government must interact with all citizens according to the duly-enacted laws, applying these rules equally among all citizens.

**Equal protection:** The laws apply equally to all people; government assures equal opportunity but not equal outcomes.

**Federalism:** A system of dual sovereignty in which the people delegate certain powers to the national government, while the states retain other powers; and the people, who authorize the states and national government, retain all freedoms not delegated to the governing bodies.

**Inalienable rights:** Rights with which all of us are born. Examples are the rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness.

**Liberty:** Except where authorized by citizens through the Constitution, government does not have the authority to limit freedom.

**Limited government:** Citizens are best able to pursue happiness when government is confined to those powers which protect their life, liberty, and property.

**Popular sovereignty:** The power of the government comes from the people.

**Private property:** The natural right of all individuals to create, obtain, and control their possessions, beliefs, faculties, and opinions, as well as the fruit of their labor.

**Representative/republican government:** Form of government in which the people are sovereign (ultimate source of power) and authorize representatives to make and carry out laws.

**Separation of powers/Checks and balances:** A system of distinct powers built into the Constitution, to prevent an accumulation of power in one branch.
focused on whether or not they were citizens.

Document K: All the provisions that guarantee liberty.

Document L: Lincoln viewed the document as an eternal statement of the human rights held by all people. Taney focused on the contemporary circumstances under which it was written.

Document M: These 1860 presidential candidates (Clockwise from top right: Lincoln, Bell, Douglas, Breckenridge/Buchanan) felt compelled to react, but in different ways and for different reasons.

**United States v. Nixon**

Document A: Powers are separated so that one branch does not become too powerful.

Document B: Giving it the power to govern, with enough limits so liberty is not lost.

Document C: 1. To protect from foreign attack, provide for a steady administration of laws, protect property and justice, and secure liberty from ambition, faction and anarchy. 2. Unlike the president, the king of England is not personally responsible for his actions and is unaccountable to the people. The king may exercise his powers alone, whereas the President’s power is subject to checks and balances.

Document D: Jackson is acting like a king, exercising his powers in ways that trample the Constitution.

Document E: The House asked why the police commissioners of Baltimore were arrested; Lincoln refused.

Document F: 1. Not to allow defense employees to testify to Congress. 2. The right to keep information and advice secret if it goes against the public interest or the nation’s safety.

Document G: 1. Nixon is portrayed as a king. The top of the Capitol dome is missing, indicating destruction of Congress’s power to check the actions of the executive. Nixon is exercising a monarch’s powers without regard to checks and balances, despite Hamilton’s assurances. 2. It uses similar imagery and makes a similar argument.

Document H: 1. The need to protect confidentiality in communications between “high government officials and those who advise and assist them” and the doctrine of separation of powers. The Court held that it was too broad of a claim and executive privilege could not possibly be absolute. 2. If there were a need to protect “military, diplomatic, or sensitive national security secrets.”

Document I: Nixon was deliberately leaving out incriminating evidence by hiding information he did not want others to hear and in fact, was a “crook.”


**UNIT TWO: Equal Protection and Affirmative Action**

**Plessy v. Ferguson**

Document A: All people are born with an equality of rights.

Document B: Blacks may be inferior to whites in their faculties. Jefferson does not say blacks do not have equal rights.

Document C: 1. Slaves. 2. Three-fifths of the total slave population was added to the total free population to determine the state population for purposes of representation and taxation.

Document D: Powers not given to the federal government remain with the states and the people.

Document E: Jefferson is open to being proved wrong. Nevertheless, even if
blacks are inferior in understanding, they still have equal rights.

Document F: 1. They are recognized as persons, not property. 2. Slaves are people and have inalienable rights.

Document G: It would lift slaves from the chains of slavery.

Document H: 1. National citizenship, along with the privileges and immunities thereunto, due process, and equal protection of the laws. 2. Yes, as the federal government now had a check on state power.

Document I: State governments.


Document K: 1. Laws permitting or requiring separation of races. 2. Separate does not mean inferior. 3. They will not work. 4. Because it asserted that separate accommodations were not necessarily unequal.

Document L: 1. It does not reference race or class; it applies to all. 2. To keep blacks inferior in both feeling and fact.

Document M: Segregation was institutionalized for decades to come.

Brown v. Board of Education
Document A: It was against the law in some states to educate African Americans.

Document B: 1. It was passed after the Civil War to protect the rights of newly-freed slaves. 2. The states cannot deny citizens the privileges and immunities of citizenship, due process of law, and equal protection of the laws.

Document C: Separate was not inherently unequal. Segregation, therefore, did not violate the Constitution.

Document D: Both the opinions agreed that the Fourteenth Amendment was designed to guarantee legal equality of the races. However, the majority asserted that segregation did not necessarily lead to inequality while the dissenter argued that it does.

Document E: Neat, orderly, full.

Document F: It looks very similar.

Document G: Crowded, cramped, full.

Document H: Many former slave states allowed or required segregation, which was declared to be constitutional in Plessy v. Ferguson.

Document I: 1. Segregation was declared unconstitutional. 2. Separation of the races was inherently unequal and violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Segregation creates a feeling of inferiority in black children that would impede their future success.

Document J: 1. To integrate schools with all deliberate speed. 2. The Court cannot write or enforce laws. It must rely on state and local executive and legislative bodies for enforcement of its decisions.

Document K: The white hands represent the Supreme Court. The black hands represent African Americans shackled by segregation. The Supreme Court, which in 1954 was comprised entirely of white justices, was the force demanding the shackles binding black Americans be broken. The Court was acting as the final force ending the social and legal bindings and effects of slavery on black Americans.

Regents of the University of California v. Bakke
Document A: To protect the rights of former slaves.

Document B: 1. Positive steps. 2. Paying no attention to.

Document C: Congress is being forced by the demands of African Americans to pass civil rights legislation.