**Landmark Supreme Court Cases**

Every Supreme Court case deals with important constitutional principles. Some cases have had such an enduring impact on United States history and government that they require greater examination. The lasting significance and central constitutional principles of 32 landmark Supreme Court cases are outlined briefly in this section.

**Name of Case**: Marbury v. Madison

**Year**: 1803

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Separation of powers

- The judiciary.

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Established the Supreme Court’s right of judicial review.

- Strengthened the judiciary in relation to other branches of government.

**Name of Case**: McCulloch v. Maryland

**Year**: 1819

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Federalism

- National power

- The judiciary

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Supported the use of the elastic clause to expand federal power.

- Established the principle of national supremacy- that the Constitution and federal laws overrule state laws when the two conflict.

**Name of Case**: Gibbons v. Ogden

**Year**: 1824

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Federalism

- Property rights and economic policy.

- The judiciary

**Why Decision is Important:**

- Established the basis of congressional regulation of interstate commerce.

- Reinforced the supremacy of national law over state law when the two conflict.

**Name of Case**: Worcester v. Georgia

**Year**: 1832

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Federalism

- National power.

- Separation of powers.

- Equality.

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Stated that treaties between the United States government and Indian nations are the supreme law of the land.

- Declared that the federal government, not the state, had exclusive jurisdiction over

- Cherokee nation’s territory; therefore, Georgia laws taking jurisdiction of Cherokee people and land were void.

- President Jackson supported Georgia in defying this ruling, and Native American removal followed.

**Name of Case**: Scott v. Sanford

**Year**: 1857

**Constitutional Principle**:

- The judiciary

- Equality

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Declared that slaves were property and that slaveholders could take them anywhere. Without risk of the slaves being freed.

- Ruled that African American were not citizens.

- Declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional; this decision was overturned by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment.

**Name of Case**: Civil Rights Cases

**Year**: 1883

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Equality

- National power.

**Why decision is Important**:

- Judged that racial discrimination by private persons did not place the “badge of slavery” of African Americans nor keep them in servitude.

- Ruled that neither Congress nor the Court has the powers to deal with private acts of acts of discrimination.

**Name of Case**: Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific RR v. Illinois

**Year**: 1886

**Constitutional Principle**:

- National power

- Federalism

**Why Decision is Important**:

- The supreme Court forbade any state to set rates, even within its own borders, on railroad traffic entering from or bound for another state. This paved the way for the creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887.

**Name of Case**: United States v. E.C. Knight Co.

**Year**: 1895

**Constitutional Principle**:

- National power

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that Congress has the right to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies.

**Name of Case**: In Re Debs

**Year**: 1895

**Constitutional Principles**:

- National power

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Reinforced that the right of Congress to regulate interstate commerce extends to the commerce that is conducted by railroad and highway.

- Ruled that the federal government has the right to intervene forcibly to eliminate monopolies in transportation of people, property, and mail.

**Name of Case**: Plessy v. Ferguson

**Year**: 1896

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Equality

- Rights of minority groups

**Why decision is Important**:

- Gave legal justification for racial segregation for different races were legal as long as those facilities were equal to one another.

- Overturned in 1954 by Brown v. Board of Education.

**Name of Case**: Northern Securities Co. v. United States

**Year**: 1904

**Constitutional Principle**:

- National power

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Property rights and economic policy.

- Federal suit brought as part of Theodore Roosevelt’s trust-busting using Sherman Anti-trust Act.

- Court in 5-4 decision ruled that the Northern securities Company was formed only to eliminate competition and ordered it to be dissolved.

**Name of Case**: Locher v. New York

**Year**: 1905

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Property rights and economic policy

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Established that the Supreme Court has the power to oversee state regulations.

- Ruled hat a New York law limiting baker’s hours was unconstitutional because it interfered with workers’ Fourteenth Amendment right to sell their labor to their employers.

**Name of Case**: Muller v. Oregon

**Year**: 1908

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

- Federalism

- Rights of women

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Let stand an Oregon law that limited women to a 10-hour work day in laundries or factories in order to protect women’s health.

- Stated that the need of the state to protect women’s health outweighed the liberty to make a contract (a liberty that was upheld in Lochner).

**Name of Case**: Schenck v. United States

**Year**: 1919

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Established limits on free speech holding that this right is not absolute.

- Set the ‘clear and present danger’ standard for when free speech can be restricted.

**Name of Case**: Schechter Poultry Corporation v. United States

Year: 1935

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Separation of powers

- Property rights and economic policy

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Placed limits on the ability of Congress to delegate legislative powers to President.

- Narrowly defined interstate commerce.

- Declared the New Deal’s NRA unconstitutional.

**Name of Case**: Korematsu v. United States

**Year**: 1944

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Equality

- Rights of minority groups

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that the forcible relocation of Japanese Americans to Wartime Relocation Agency camps during World War II was legal.

**Name of Case**: Brown v. Board of Education

**Year**: 1954

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Equality

- Rights of minority groups

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that segregation in education creates inequality.

- Overturned Plessy v. Ferguson and nullified the concept of “Separate but equal.”

**Name of Case**: Watkins v. United States

**Year:** 1957

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) could not punish at will those witness who refused to cooperate.

**Name of Case**: Mapp v. Ohio

**Year:** 1961

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Avenues of representation

- Federalism

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Upheld the principle that population is the only acceptable basis for the apportionment of seats in a legislative body.

- Established that the Supreme Court has cases when that reapportionment threatens voters rights.

**Name of Case**: Engel v. Vitale

**Year**: 1962

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Reinforced the separation of church and state.

- Ruled that use of the public schools to encourage prayer or other religious practices is a direct violation of the establishment clause.

**Name of Case**: Gideon v. Wainwright

**Year:** 1963

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that to deny legal representation to defendants who can not afford to pay for it is a violation of those individual’s constitutional rights.

**Name of Case**: Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States

**Year**: 1964

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Equality

- National power

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Found racial segregation of private facilities engaged in interstate commerce unconstitutional.

**Name of Case**: Miranda v. Arizona

**Year**: 1966

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Criminal procedures

- Civil liberties

**Why decision is Important**:

- Established the requirement to inform people accused of crimes that they have the right to remain silent and receive legal representation before they say anything that can be held against them in court.

**Name of Case**: Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District

**Year**: 1969

**Constitutional Principle**:

-Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that certain kinds of nonverbal communication can be protected under the First Amendment.

**Name of Case**: New York Times Co. v. United States

**Year:** 1971

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Gave the media more power against governmental secrecy.

**Name of Case**: Roe v. Wade

**Year:** 1973

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

-Ruled that state laws that criminalize abortion are unconstitutional.

**Name of Case**: United States v. Nixon

**Year**: 1974

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Separation of powers

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Limited the President’s right to confidentiality.

- Gave federal courts the right to decide when and how that confidentiality should be limited.

**Name of Case**: New Jersey v. T.L.O.

**Year**: 1985

**Constitutional Principle**:

- civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Ruled that juveniles have the right to the same protection as adults against illegal search and seizure.

- More clearly defined what constituted a legal search and seizure.

**Name of Case**: Cruzan v. Director, Missouri Department of Health

**Year**: 1990

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

**Why Decision is Important**:

- ‘Clear and convincing’ evidence was presented to demonstrate that a Missouri woman (Cruzan) in a coma from 1983 car accident should have the right to die. Intravenous feeding was ended with court approval, and Cruzan subsequently died.

**Name of Case**: Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania et al. V. Casey

**Year**: 1992

**Constitutional Principle**:

- Civil liberties

- Rights of women

**Why Decision is Important**:

- Struck down the portions of a Pennsylvania law requiring (1) that a woman seeking an abortion must wait 24 hours between being informed about the procedure and having it performed and (2) that a married woman must inform her husband that she planned to have an abortion.

- Upheld the portion of the law requiring minors to inform their parents before having an abortion.