

Case Brief: Brown V. Board of Education

Case Citation

The name of the case in question is Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka 347 U.S. 483 (1954) (Justia US Supreme Court, n.d). This case was brought before the United States Supreme Court as an appeal from the United States District Court's decision in the year 1952 when the parties presented their first arguments before the court. In 1953, it was heard for the second time and finally decided in 1954.

Statement of Facts

The plaintiff, in this case, was among other black children from various districts in the United States including Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware that applied State segregation laws (Leadership Conference, n.d). The out of court facts that made a difference to the outcome of the case was that these students were denied the opportunity to attend public schools that were meant for only white students according to the State segregation laws in the areas mentioned above. Therefore, they sort to declare that denial unconstitutional given that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourth Amendment provides for equal treatment of all individuals. It was the plaintiffs' argument that they would not receive the same quality of education in schools meant for black children because of the feeling of inferiority complex and the lack of enthusiasm because of the discrimination. The three judges of the district court ruled for the defendant in all the cases except one, by invoking the decision in Plessy V. Ferguson.

Brief Procedural History of the Case

At the beginning of this case, the parents of around 20 black children from various areas that allowed segregation in schools filed a suit at the US District Court of Kansas in 1951 on

behalf of their children (Bell, 2004). They intended to declare the practice of racial segregation in school facilities according to the 'separate but equal' treatment doctrine unconstitutional. Unfortunately, the three judges of the District Court entered a ruling in favor of the Board of Education after the hearing of the arguments. As mentioned above, the judges relied on the authority of the judicial decision in the case between Plessy V. Ferguson of 1896 even though they agreed with some of the arguments that the plaintiffs presented (United States Courts, n.d). The court's decision, in that case, stated that a law that allowed for the separation of amenities for black and white people was binding as long as these facilities offered equal quality of services. In its ruling, the court acknowledged that separation was damaging for children of the black race. However, it could not declare the 'separate but equal' doctrine null and void because both types of schools had the same quality of structure, transport facilities, education syllabus and teachers with the same professional qualifications.

The plaintiff's dissatisfaction with the court's decision is what led to the filing of an appeal in the United States Supreme Court in 1952 (United States Courts, n.d). The Supreme Court decided to merge the five cases because they all wanted a court declaration on the unconstitutionality of the separation laws since it contradicted the provisions of the Equal Protection Clause.

Surprisingly, the judges of the Supreme Court had dissenting opinions on whether it was appropriate to overturn the decision in the case of Plessy. Since it took the court a long time to reach a decision, the judges of the bench decided to have the case reheard by the court in 1953 (United States Courts, n.d). Following this second hearing, the judges finally reached a unanimous decision to declare the decision in Plessy's case contrary to the Constitutional provision on equal protection in their final opinion (United States Courts, n.d).

Summation of the Issue(s) Involved

One of the issues that the case is deciding relates to the question of whether the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment allows the implementation of laws that promote the doctrine of 'separate but equal treatment.' The court also had to make a decision on whether the education provided in the schools for white children and those of black people were equal in terms of the quality of services provided. More specifically the provision of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was of great importance to this case. As a general rule of law, every other law must not contradict the Constitution since it is the supreme law of the land. Thus, any law or policy that contravenes its provisions is null and invalid.

The provision of the Constitution on equality is what formed the basis of the plaintiff's argument. They argued that the doctrine of separation unconstitutional and hence the need to stop its implementation. The defendants, on the other hand, stated that it was not unconstitutional to have separate schools for blacks and whites so long as the quality of education that they received in these schools was equal in standards.

Court's Decision or Rulings

With respect to the first issue, the court declared that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' was unconstitutional (Moye, 2004). Thus, the provisions of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment did not protect any policy that required schools to have institutions for blacks and whites regardless of whether they offered equal educational services (Moye, 2004). The court also ordered the defendants to admit the plaintiffs to the schools where their application for admission was denied. It also stated that schools must submit a plan that will slowly lead to the progressive desegregation of academic institutions.

Overview of the Rationale Provided by the Court for its Decision

The reason for the court's decision was that no type of segregation of educational facilities would be made equal because the practice itself was naturally discriminatory (Kluger, 2011). Because of that reason, the attempts that they made to promote equality in both institutions did not meet the requirements of the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. The bench of judges further stated that the court's decision in Plessy V. Ferguson was overcome by the passage of time because things had changed drastically in the academic sector. In their opinion, it was necessary to overcome this decision because of the adverse emotional effects that discrimination has in children. They argued that the intention of the Fourteenth Amendment was to prohibit the occurrence of such distress that would create doubts about the state's willingness to protect its people in the minds of potential citizens.

Student's Analysis and Opinion

I agree with the decision of the court in this case. That is because the court has a duty to ensure that they uphold the supremacy of the Constitution in its ruling. Thus, when the court is called upon to interpret the constitutionality or otherwise of law, it must make such a decision by looking at the mischief that the provisions of the Constitution seek to eliminate. The court's decision to overturn the decision in Plessy V. Ferguson because it allowed many people to use it as a way of evading their obligation under the Equal Protection Clause. That because racial discrimination is a practice that had been slowly changing and hence there was a need to embrace the change. This review had taught me the importance of judicial precedents. I have learned that higher courts can overturn the decisions of lower courts that later become binding.