

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Sweatt v. Painter

339 U.S. 629 (1950) · No. No. 44 · Decided June 5, 1950

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court held that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires the University of Texas Law School to admit a Negro student, as the separate law school offered by the state did not provide substantially equal educational opportunities. The Court found that the University of Texas Law School had a superior faculty, library, and reputation, and that the separate law school for Negroes lacked these qualities. The decision was a significant step towards ending segregation in education.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the United States
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Chief Justice Vinson
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	June 5, 1950
DOCKET	No. 44
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought mandamus compelling his admission to the University of Texas Law School after his application was rejected solely because he was Black. The Supreme Court granted certiorari to review the Texas courts' determination that a separate law school for Black students supplied substantially equivalent educational facilities.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court independently reviewed whether the state-supported separate legal education provided substantially equal educational opportunities under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published United States Supreme Court precedent
PARTIES	Sweatt v. Painter et al.

TOPICS

- equal protection
- fourteenth amendment
- constitutional law
- civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

constitutional law

civil rights

education law

equal protection

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Texas violated the Equal Protection Clause by denying Sweatt admission to the University of Texas Law School solely because of his race.
2. Whether Texas could satisfy the Equal Protection Clause by providing Black students with a separate law school that lacked educational opportunities and institutional qualities substantially equivalent to those of the University of Texas Law School.
3. Whether *Plessy v. Ferguson* required affirmance of the Texas judgment.

HOLDINGS

1. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment required Texas to provide Sweatt with legal education substantially equal to that offered to white students, and the separate law school offered by Texas was not substantially equal.
2. *Plessy v. Ferguson* did not require affirmance because the separate law school did not provide substantially equal educational opportunities.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Equal protection of the laws is not achieved through indiscriminate imposition of inequalities." (339 U.S. at 635)

"We hold that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires that petitioner be admitted to the University of Texas Law School." (339 U.S. at 636)

"With such a substantial and significant segment of society excluded, we cannot conclude that the education offered petitioner is substantially equal to that which he would receive if admitted to the University of Texas Law School." (339 U.S. at 634)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Sweatt applied for admission to the University of Texas Law School for the February 1946 term and was rejected solely because he was Black. Texas then created a separate law school for Black students, but that school had substantially fewer faculty members, courses, library resources, students, accreditation, extracurricular opportunities, and institutional advantages than the University of Texas Law School. The Court also emphasized intangible characteristics such as faculty reputation, alumni standing, prestige, traditions, and interaction with the broader legal community.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Texas trial court initially recognized an equal-protection violation but continued the case to allow Texas to provide substantially equal facilities. After Texas established a separate law school for Black students, the trial

court denied mandamus, and the Texas Court of Civil Appeals affirmed. The Texas Supreme Court denied review, and the United States Supreme Court granted certiorari, reversed, and remanded.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The cause was remanded for proceedings not inconsistent with the opinion, including admission of petitioner to the University of Texas Law School as required by the Equal Protection Clause.

CASES CITED

- McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents, 339 U.S. 637 (1950)
- Rescue Army v. Municipal Court, 331 U.S. 549 (1947)
- Shelley v. Kraemer, 334 U.S. 1, 22 (1948)
- Sipuel v. Board of Regents, 332 U.S. 631, 633 (1948)
- Fisher v. Hurst, 333 U.S. 147, 150 (1948)
- Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada, 305 U.S. 337, 351 (1938)
- Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)

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