**Landmark Supreme Court Cases**

***Scott v. Sandford (1857)***

***Holding:*** Slaves were property, not citizens, and not protected by the Constitution

Dred Scott was born a slave. His owner took him to a free state, where slavery was illegal. Scott sued for his freedom. The Supreme Court ruled against him.

***Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)***

**Holding:** “Separate but equal” was constitutional.

Mr. Plessy was born a free man but, under Louisiana law, he still had to travel in a “blacks only” rail car. After purchasing a first class ticket and taking a seat in the “whites only” rail car, he was arrested. The Supreme Court would eventually rule that it was constitutional to segregate (or separate) the races as long as facilities for both races were equal.

***Tinker vs. Des Moines (1969)***  
**Holding: Students have the right to freely express themselves as long as they are not distracting or harming others.**  
Three students in Iowa wore black arm bands to school in protest of the Vietnam War. They were suspended by school officials. The students’ families sued the school district, claiming that this form of protest was constitutional since it was not infringing upon other people’s rights.

***Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)**  
**Holding:** *Separate schools are not equal.*  
In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court sanctioned segregation by upholding the doctrine of "separate but equal." The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People disagreed with this ruling, challenging the constitutionality of segregation in the Topeka, Kansas, school system. In 1954, the Court reversed its *Plessy* decision, declaring that "separate schools are inherently unequal."

***Cooper v. Aaron* (1958)**  
**Holding:** *States cannot nullify decisions of the federal courts.*  
Several government officials in southern states, including the governor and legislature of Alabama, refused to follow the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. They argued that the states could nullify federal court decisions if they felt that the federal courts were violating the Constitution. The Court unanimously rejected this argument and held that only the federal courts can decide when the Constitution is violated.

***Mapp v. Ohio* (1961)**  
**Holding:** *Illegally obtained material cannot be used in a criminal trial.*  
While searching Dollree Mapp's house, police officers discovered obscene materials and arrested her. Because the police officers never produced a search warrant, she argued that the materials should be suppressed as the fruits of an illegal search and seizure. The Supreme Court agreed and applied to the states the exclusionary rule from *Weeks v. United States* (1914).

***Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963)**  
**Holding:** *Indigent defendants must be provided representation without charge.*  
Gideon was accused of committing a felony. Being indigent, he petitioned the judge to provide him with an attorney free of charge. The judge denied his request. The Supreme Court ruled for Gideon, saying that the Sixth Amendment requires indigent criminal defendants to be provided an attorney free of charge.

***Miranda v. Arizona* (1966)**  
**Holding:** *Police must inform suspects of their rights before questioning.*  
After hours of police interrogations, Ernesto Miranda confessed to rape and kidnapping. At trial, he sought to suppress his confession, stating that he was not advised of his rights to counsel and to remain silent. The Supreme Court agreed, holding that police must inform suspects of their rights before questioning.

***Terry v. Ohio* (1968)**  
**Holding:** *Stop and frisks do not violate the Constitution under certain circumstances.*  
Observing Terry and others acting suspiciously in front of a store, a police officer concluded that they might rob it. The officer stopped and frisked the men. A weapon was found on Terry and he was convicted of carrying a concealed weapon. The Supreme Court ruled that this search was reasonable.

***U.S. v. Nixon* (1974)**  
**Holding:** *The President is not above the law.*  
The special prosecutor in the Watergate affair subpoenaed audio tapes of Oval Office conversations. President Nixon refused to turn over the tapes, asserting executive privilege. The Supreme Court ruled that the defendants' right to potentially exculpating evidence outweighed the President's right to executive privilege if national security was not compromised.

***Texas v. Johnson* (1989)**  
**Holding:** *Even offensive speech such as flag burning is protected by the First Amendment.*  
To protest the policies of the Reagan administration, Gregory Lee Johnson burned an American flag outside of the Dallas City Hall. He was arrested for this act, but argued that it was symbolic speech. The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that symbolic speech is constitutionally protected even when it is offensive.

***Roe v. Wade* (1973)**  
**Holding:** *States can not deny women the right to an abortion.*  
A pregnant Texas woman, identified only by Roe, sued the state because they would not allow to have an abortion. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the woman, thus lifting the ban on abortion nationwide.

***Bush v. Gore (2000)***

**Holding:** George W. Bush was to be the winner of the 2000 Presidential Election.

In the 2000 election, the votes for Bush and Gore were so close in Florida that state law called for a recount. After the recount, the margin was even closer. Florida allowed Gore the right to demand a manual recount in certain counties, which he did. In the meantime, the Supreme Court ruled that Florida’s state law allowing a recount was not quick enough to determine an outcome in time for an inauguration of the President. The Supreme Court halted the recount, giving Bus the win.