

# **Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896**



**Homer Plessy**

**Jim Crow Laws:** statutes enacted to enforce segregation

**One Drop Rule:** if a person had any African American heritage (one drop of Black blood), then that person was considered Black.

**Mulatto:** a term given to describe a person who had one parent who was identified as African American.

**Quadroon:** a term given to a person with one grandparent who was identified as African American.

**Octoroon:** a term given to a person with one great grandparent who was identified as African American.

**Separate but Equal:** which black people could be segregated if granted equal opportunities and facilities, as for education, transportation, or jobs.

**SCOTUS:** Supreme Court of the United States.

## **BACKGROUND**

Homer Adolph Plessy, a light-skinned man who was one-eighth African American, took a seat in the whites-only section of an East Louisiana Railway train and refused to move, he was arrested.

Convicted of breaking a Louisiana law enacted in 1890, Plessy appealed his case to the Louisiana Supreme Court, then to the US Supreme Court.

The incident was planned in advance to test the statute to emphasize the discriminatory law.

## **HOW THE COURT RULED**

The Court upheld the rights of states to make laws that sustained segregation. The majority of justices wanted to distinguish between political rights and social rights.

Although the words “separate but equal” do not appear in the Court’s responses, the ruling allowed for the separation of races in public facilities. This phrase came to describe a condition that persisted until 1954.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did the words separate but equal become associated with the Supreme Court ruling against Homer Plessy?

2. Why was Homer Plessy chosen as the person to challenge the “whites-only” rule on the East Louisiana Railway?

3. How do you interpret the fact that it took the Supreme Court until 1954 to change the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling?

4. What do think was the impact on African Americans from the Plessy case from 1896 until 1954 when the separate but equal policy is overturned by the SCOTUS?