


Module 6: A Nation Grows - 1877 to the 1900s
Topic 4 Content: Plessy v. Ferguson Notes

The Violation

Plessy v. Ferguson



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The Violation

In 1892, Homer Plessy boarded a whites-only railroad car in New Orleans, Louisiana. After taking his seat, Plessy was asked to move to the non-whites railroad car. He refused to vacate his seat and was arrested for violating the Separate Car Act of 1890, an act that required separate but equal railroad cars for white and non-white passengers.

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The Arrest

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The Arrest

Plessy's arrest was actually carefully organized by a group of Creole and African American professionals from New Orleans. They were attempting to overturn the Separate Car Act by challenging it in the courts. Their goal was to orchestrate a test case, or a legal action that would question the constitutionality of segregation and set a precedent. The East Louisiana Railroad Company also wanted the Separate Car Act repealed due to the extra cost of providing duplicate accommodations.

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The Plan

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The Plan

The activists shared their plan to challenge the Act with the railroad company. Homer Plessy, who was one-eighth African American, would purchase a ticket and sit in the whites-only railroad car. Plessy was selected because he had a lighter complexion and could “pass” for white. The group believed that would help reinforce the irrationality of racism. A private detective was hired to arrest Plessy, ensuring his safety, and then charged under the Separate Car Act.

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The Case

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The Case

Plessy lost twice in the lower courts before taking his case to the Supreme Court. He argued that the Separate Car Act violated the abolishment of slavery and involuntary servitude under the Thirteenth Amendment and equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Ferguson. The Court dismissed the claim that the law had violated the Thirteenth Amendment and argued that the Fourteenth Amendment was meant to enforce equality before the law, but was not intended to force social equality. This case determined that separating people by race did not imply inequality because the facilities were in fact equal.

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Completed

You have completed your exploration of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Click **Replay** to restart the interactivity or click **Exit** to close the interactivity.

Replay **Exit**

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