



South Carolina Civil Rights Cases

These important civil rights cases were directly related to South Carolina or involved South Carolinians

1944 ***Thompson v. Gibbes*** **Richland County**

Complaint filed alleging that School District No. 1 of Richland County fixed salaries on a basis whereby Negro teachers and principals received lower pay than whites and that the only reason for this difference was racial discrimination.

1947 ***Elmore v. Rice*** **Richland County**

George Elmore sued to test the legality of the action of the defendants in not permitting him and other qualified Negro electors to vote in the Democratic Party's Primary held on August 13, 1946, in Richland County, South Carolina. The primary was held for the purpose of nominating candidates on the Democratic ticket for the House of Representatives of the United States and for various state offices.

1947 ***Pearson v. County Board of Education*** **Clarendon County**

The story of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling began when a rural farmer named Levi Pearson in Clarendon County, S.C., filed a lawsuit demanding equal resources for black school children. That lawsuit led to another case that would be combined into the landmark 1954 Brown decision.

1948 ***Briggs v. Elliott*** **Clarendon County**

This Clarendon County petition led to the *Briggs v. Elliott* court case, one of five cases consolidated before the United States Supreme Court into *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka. The petitioners argued that the separate schools for African Americans were "inadequate and unhealthy," "overcrowded," and "dilapidated." In the landmark *Brown* decision of May 17, 1954, the court ruled that "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and segregated public schools unconstitutional. Thurgood Marshall was one of the attorneys for the petitioners.



1954 ***Fleming v. South Carolina Electric & Gas*** **Richland County**

Few people know that before Rosa Parks' arrest for sitting in the "white" section of the bus led to the Montgomery bus boycott, Sarah Mae Fleming filed suit against SCE&G, owners of the Columbia, SC bus company. She asserted that the bus driver struck her for sitting in the front of a bus and then trying to exit through the "white" door.

1960 ***Gomillion v. Lightfoot*** **Tuskegee, AL**

South Carolina native, Dr. Charles G. Gomillion brought a suit to fight the practice of gerrymandering as a mechanism for altering boundaries in order to minimize voting strength, thus, disfranchising many people. The case was presented in Tuskegee, Alabama, where African-Americans were systematically stripped of voting power. Gomillion won the decision.

1963 ***Peterson v. City of Greenville*** **Greenville County**

James Gober and nine other black students who were arrested in Birmingham filed a class action lawsuit, challenging the constitutionality of the segregation ordinances they were accused of violating. The NAACP combined *Gober v. City of Birmingham* with four other cases of segregation violations. That case, *Peterson v. City of Greenville* (South Carolina), was argued by NAACP attorney Constance Baker Motley in its appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

On May 20, 1963, at the height of civil rights activism in Birmingham, the Supreme Court ruled in *Peterson v. Greenville* that segregation ordinances were unconstitutional. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote: "When a state agency passes a law compelling persons to discriminate against other persons because of race, and the State's criminal processes are employed in a way which enforces the discrimination mandated by that law, such a palpable violation of the Fourteenth Amendment cannot be saved. . . ."