

Document A

Negro Drinking at “Colored” Water Cooler



Photograph by Russell Lee

Library of Congress

Think-Pair-Share

Observations (evidence from visual text)	Inference
What do I see?	What can be inferred? What message is the author trying to convey through the image?
What questions does this image raise?	

Document B

Plessy v. Ferguson, Quote from Justice Henry Billings Brown's Majority Opinion

“The object of the [Fourteenth] Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either.”

*Justice Henry Billings Brown,
speaking for the majority*

Think-Pair-Share

- A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

- B. Why do you think this document was written?

- C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Cite evidence from the document.

- D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

After Sharing

Corroboration: Together these documents tell me that life for African Americans in the South at this time was...

Document B *(continued)*

Plessy v. Ferguson: A Summary

Homer Plessy, a light-skinned black man who sometimes “passed” as white, took part in a plan by a small number of black professionals seeking to have a court overturn the Louisiana Separate Car Act of 1890. Plessy boarded a whites-only railroad car and was arrested, as per arrangement, by a private detective. The group intended to use Plessy’s light skin tone to demonstrate how arbitrary and unconstitutional the law was. Plessy’s lawyers argued that Louisiana’s segregation law violated both the Thirteenth Amendment, which bars slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees all Americans equal protection under the law. Louisiana courts consistently found against Plessy, and the case moved all the way to the Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-1 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that a Louisiana law requiring “equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races” was constitutional.

Writing for the Court’s majority, Justice Henry Brown ruled that the law did not “discriminate” among legal rights by race, but merely recognized a “distinction” between races “which must always exist so long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color.” ...The ruling established the “separate but equal” doctrine that informs many states’ decision to segregate public facilities—schools, railcars, even drinking fountains.

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What law did Plessy violate?

How did Plessy violate this law?

Why did Plessy believe that the Separate Car Act violated his rights under the Fourteenth Amendment?

How did the precedent set by the case affect the lives of African Americans beyond the issue of travel in railroads?