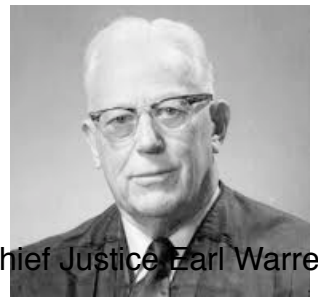


## The Warren Court 1953 - 1969

Unique within American history, the period in which Earl Warren served as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court witnessed an aggressive court unafraid to tackle controversial issues.



Chief Justice Earl Warren

An activist court that did much to expand the rights of the individual and the power of the federal government to enforce civil rights legislation, it changed the way

Americans today perceive their relationship with their government. Not since then has the Supreme Court wielded so much power in shaping American culture, and Earl Warren is remembered as one of the most influential Supreme Court Justices in American history.

### Due Process

Under *Miranda v. Arizona*, all accused persons must be informed of their rights when they are arrested. These rights have become known as “Miranda Rights.” A typical reading of someone’s Miranda Rights would state:

*You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney present during questioning. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you.*

One of the many areas in which the Warren court expanded civil rights was in guaranteeing due process of the law to all citizens. Prior to handing down such rulings as *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) and *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), indigent or minority accused persons often found themselves with no legal counsel to defend them in court and in many cases were uninformed regarding their rights. *Gideon v. Wainwright* ruled that states must provide attorneys at state expense for accused persons unable to procure their own legal defense. Similarly, *Miranda v. Arizona* expanded the rights of the accused by mandating that they must be informed of their rights upon arrest. Both of these decisions came at a time when it had become clear that minorities were often left at a disadvantage in the legal system due to ignorance and poverty. These rulings were intended to right these wrongs. Play “Match the Supreme Court Decision” to test your knowledge of the most important decisions of the period.



### The Warren Court and the Pursuit of Justice

Morton J. Horwitz

### One Man, One Vote

Other outstanding rulings of the Warren Court era dealt with the “one man, one vote” principle. Rulings such as *Baker v. Carr* (1962), *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964), and *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) attacked political inequities. These three cases established the idea that the legislative districts of both the House of Representatives and both houses for state legislatures must be of equal and proportional size regarding population. The *Reynolds* ruling read, "Legislators represent people, not trees or acres. Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests." These cases were intended to enforce relatively equal representation for both urban and rural constituents. The effect of these rulings was to trickle down to impact even city districting as well.

## Freedom of Religion

Another individual right expanded by the Supreme Court during this period was that of freedom of religion. In 1963, *Sherbert v. Verner* dealt with a woman who had been fired from her long-standing job because it conflicted with her religious beliefs. She was denied unemployment compensation as a result and took her case to court. The court ruled that under the First Amendment, if an employee can prove their religious conflicts, they are protected by law in cases of discrimination. Religious freedom was also put to the test in the case of free exercise in the public schools. *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) ruled that it was illegal for the states to require official school prayers to be recited by the students. *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1963) declared that school-sponsored Bible readings were unconstitutional.

Overall, the Warren court did much to expand the civil liberties Americans enjoy and exercise today, in part because no court had ever pushed the issues of racial discrimination, the rights of the accused, or religious freedom so forcefully to the forefront of American society. Although President Johnson's Great Society agenda did much in the way of pushing civil rights legislation into law, it was the Warren Court that set the tone for the decade in terms of the government's role in Americans' lives. It provided muscle to back up Johnson's talk by providing cause for the government to step in with force if necessary in the name of protecting individual rights.

Note:

*Roe v. Wade* (1973) was after the Warren Court.

*Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) was a decision of the Warren Court.

## Chronology

### 1953

September Chief Justice Fred Vinson dies of a heart attack

October President Eisenhower nominates Earl Warren as Chief Justice

### 1954

May

*Brown v. Board of Education*

### 1955

May *Brown v. Board of Education II*

December Montgomery Bus Boycott

### 1956

February Authornine Lucy turned away from the University of Alabama  
March Southern Manifesto against desegregation

### 1957

September Civil Rights Act passed; first since Reconstruction

September Arkansas National Guard blocks the entrance to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas

### 1958

June *NAACP v. Alabama*

September *Cooper v. Aaron*

### 1959

September Price Edward County, Virginia closes Schools



**1960**

February Sit-in, Greensboro, North Carolina  
November John Kennedy elected President of the U.S.

**1961**

May Freedom Rides begin  
June *Mapp v. Ohio*

**1962**

March *Baker v. Carr*  
June *Engel v. Vitale*

**1963**

March *Gideon v. Wainwright*  
March *Douglas v. California*  
June Medgar Evers assassinated in Mississippi  
June *Abingdon School District v. Schempp*  
August March on Washington  
September Church bombing kills four girls in Birmingham, Alabama  
November President Kennedy assassinated, Lyndon Johnson becomes president  
March *New York Times v. Sullivan*

**1964**

June Freedom Summer begins  
June *Reynolds v. Sims*  
June *Escobedo v. Illinois*  
June 1964 Civil Rights law  
November Lyndon Johnson elected president

**1965**

January *Cox v. Louisiana*  
February Malcolm X assassinated  
March *Griswold v. Connecticut*  
August Voting Rights Act

**1966**

June *Miranda v. Arizona*

**1967**

May ❖Long Hot Summer❖ of urban rioting begins  
June *Loving v. Virginia*  
July Rioting in Newark and Detroit

**1968**

April Martin Luther King assassinated  
April *Ginsburg v. New York*  
June *Terry v. Ohio*  
June Earl Warren announces retirement  
November Richard Nixon elected president

**1969**

February *Tinker v. Des Moines*  
June *Powell v. McCormack*  
June *Chimmel v. California*  
June Warren Burger replaces Chief Justice Warren