

# Wolfe: June 2012 Supreme Court decisions



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# Gavel to Gavel: Landmark Supreme Court decisions to make it a hot month for hot topics

Two of the most hotly anticipated decisions in years are due this month from the U.S. Supreme Court. They will decide the constitutionality of national health care reforms and Arizona's immigration law.

Let's take a look back at what are arguably the 10 most significant decisions to come down from our nation's highest court.

1. *Marbury v. Madison* established the Supreme Court's role as the ultimate decider of the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress. Interestingly, while it is virtually never questioned (except by Newt Gingrich), this power is not explicitly granted in the Constitution.
2. *Gibbons v. Ogden* granted Congress extremely broad powers to regulate interstate commerce, which involves just about everything, including, perhaps, "Obamacare."
3. *Plessy v. Ferguson* determined that "equal but separate accommodations" on railway cars for African-Americans was constitutional. This held for nearly 60 years, until ...
4. *Brown v. Board of Education* acknowledged the error of *Plessy* by invalidating racial segregation in schools. This ultimately led to the unraveling of segregation in all areas of life.
5. *New York Times v. Sullivan* extended the First Amendment protections afforded the press, by making it more difficult for public officials to sue for defamation.
6. *Gideon v. Wainwright* guaranteed criminal defendants something we now take for granted: the right to counsel.
7. *Miranda v. Arizona* built upon *Gideon*, requiring that citizens placed under arrest be informed of their right

to counsel, giving rise to the “You have the right to remain silent ...” line in cop movies.

8. Roe v. Wade legalized first-trimester abortion on the basis of a woman’s “right to privacy.” This obscure decision receives little attention, especially in the lead-up to an election.
9. Regents of the University of California v. Bakke placed limitations, designed to protect the majority, on affirmative action.
10. Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission upheld the right of corporations to spend money influencing political campaigns, ruling that these entities should have the same First Amendment rights as individuals to engage in “political speech.”

As for the Supreme Court itself, Tom Petty had Marbury v. Madison figured out when he reminded us: “It’s good to be king and have your own world. It helps to make friends, it’s good to meet girls.”