Beyond the Door

Two Oklahoma cases about equal access to higher education

OKH.C.8.1.B "Describe issues and decisions of the landmark Supreme Court cases of Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma and McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents for Higher Education."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the unequal treatment in each case and circle what the Supreme Court decided. Write 1 beside the issue and decision in Sipuel and 2 beside the issue and decision in McLaurin so you can connect each problem to its ruling.

Access to a University Education

1. In 1946, Ada Lois Sipuel applied to the University of Oklahoma College of Law. Oklahoma denied her admission because she was Black, and the state offered no law school for Black students. A legal education mattered to her future career, but the state's rule blocked the school that could provide it. Sipuel sued, arguing that this unequal access violated the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of equal protection. In Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma (1948), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Oklahoma had to provide her a legal education on equal terms and as soon as it provided one to white applicants.

2. George W. McLaurin, a Black educator, faced a different problem at the same university. In 1948, he was admitted to a graduate program in education after a federal court ordered the university to admit him. Yet officials required him to sit apart from white students in classrooms, the library, and the cafeteria. He could attend classes but could not participate under the same conditions as his classmates. In McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents for Higher Education (1950), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that these race-based restrictions violated equal protection because they hindered his ability to study and exchange ideas with other students.

3. Sipuel dealt with a shut door: a qualified applicant could not enter the state's existing law school, and no legal education was available to her. McLaurin dealt with barriers inside an open door: admission did not bring equal participation. In both cases, the Court applied the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause to higher education. Neither ruling, by itself, ended segregation in every school. Together, the decisions pressed Oklahoma to consider more than whether a student could appear on an enrollment list. They addressed whether race-based rules denied a student the educational opportunities other students received.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What unequal treatment led Sipuel to sue Oklahoma?

2. What did the Supreme Court decide Oklahoma had to provide Sipuel, and when?

3. How did McLaurin's treatment remain unequal after he was admitted?

4. Why did the Supreme Court rule against the restrictions placed on McLaurin?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum label says, "The Court solved both disputes simply by opening university doors." Write three sentences correcting the label. Explain the issue and decision in each case, then explain why admission alone did not settle both disputes.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Door

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.8.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the unequal treatment in each case and circle what the Supreme Court decided. Write 1 beside the issue and decision in Sipuel and 2 beside the issue and decision in McLaurin so you can connect each problem to its ruling. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What unequal treatment led Sipuel to sue Oklahoma?	**Oklahoma denied Sipuel admission to its existing law school because she was Black and offered her no law school for Black students.**
2	What did the Supreme Court decide Oklahoma had to provide Sipuel, and when?	**Oklahoma had to provide her a legal education on equal terms and as soon as it provided one to white applicants.**
3	How did McLaurin's treatment remain unequal after he was admitted?	**The university required him to sit apart from white students in classrooms, the library, and the cafeteria.**
4	Why did the Supreme Court rule against the restrictions placed on McLaurin?	**The race-based restrictions hindered his ability to study and exchange ideas with other students, violating equal protection.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Sipuel was denied access to legal education because she was Black, so the Court required Oklahoma to provide it on equal terms and without delay. McLaurin was admitted to a graduate program but forced to sit apart from white students, and the Court ruled that those restrictions violated equal protection. His case showed that entry to a university was not enough if race-based rules still limited a student's participation.

Accept answers that distinguish Sipuel's lack of access from McLaurin's unequal treatment after admission. Do not treat the Sipuel ruling as an order that Oklahoma admit her to its existing law school.