Rulings and Ripples

How landmark decisions address public disputes

USG.C.6.9 "Describe how significant issues in American society have been addressed by examining landmark decisions (e.g., Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, McDonald v. City of Chicago, and Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the public issue in each paragraph, circle what the Supreme Court decided, and number one way the ruling affected later policy or debate. These marks will help you explain how a decision addressed an issue without assuming the issue disappeared.

What a Ruling Changes

1. In 1978, a medical school seat became the center of a national argument about fair opportunity. The University of California at Davis reserved 16 of 100 seats for applicants from certain minority groups. Allan Bakke, a white applicant rejected twice, challenged that policy. In *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court struck down the reserved-seat system but allowed race to be considered as one factor in admissions to pursue educational diversity. The justices did not agree on one shared rationale. Later decisions changed the rules: in 2023, the Court sharply restricted the use of race in college admissions.

2. Imagine a resident who keeps a handgun at home for protection, then learns that a city bans most handguns. Chicago had such a ban when residents challenged it. In 2010, *McDonald v. City of Chicago* addressed whether the Second Amendment's protection of an individual right to keep a handgun for self-defense, recognized in an earlier case, also limits state and local governments. The Supreme Court ruled that it does through the Fourteenth Amendment. As a result, Chicago could not enforce its broad handgun ban. The ruling did not erase every firearm regulation; governments could still debate and enact restrictions consistent with the Constitution.

3. A Mississippi law banned most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, setting up another dispute about constitutional limits on state laws. In 2022, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* upheld that law and overturned *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The Supreme Court held that the Constitution does not protect a right to abortion, returning broad authority to regulate abortion to elected lawmakers. That change did not create one nationwide abortion rule: states adopted different policies, and questions about other laws and rights remained. The ruling changed who makes many abortion policy decisions, even as public disagreement continued.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Court address the dispute over fair opportunity in medical school admissions in Bakke?

2. How did McDonald address Chicago's handgun ban, and what limit on government power did the ruling establish?

3. How did Dobbs change the way abortion policy is decided?

4. How did McDonald and Dobbs differ in their effects on state policy?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A classmate says, "Once the Supreme Court decides a case, the issue is settled forever." Write 4 or 5 sentences testing this claim using Bakke and one other case from the passage. Explain what each ruling did and give a passage-based reason that policy or debate could continue.

ANSWER KEY

Rulings and Ripples

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the public issue in each paragraph, circle what the Supreme Court decided, and number one way the ruling affected later policy or debate. These marks will help you explain how a decision addressed an issue without assuming the issue disappeared. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Court address the dispute over fair opportunity in medical school admissions in Bakke?	**It struck down the school's reserved-seat system but allowed race to be considered as one admissions factor to pursue educational diversity.**
2	How did McDonald address Chicago's handgun ban, and what limit on government power did the ruling establish?	**The ruling prevented Chicago from enforcing its broad handgun ban and established that the Second Amendment right recognized by the Court also limits state and local governments.**
3	How did Dobbs change the way abortion policy is decided?	**It held that the Constitution does not protect a right to abortion, giving elected lawmakers broad authority to regulate it. States then adopted different policies.**
4	How did McDonald and Dobbs differ in their effects on state policy?	**McDonald applied a constitutional protection that limits state and local handgun bans. Dobbs removed a previously recognized constitutional protection, giving lawmakers broader authority over abortion policy.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim is misleading because a ruling can set a legal rule without ending public disagreement. In Bakke, the Court rejected reserved medical school seats but allowed race as one admissions factor, and later decisions changed that rule. In Dobbs, the Court ended the constitutional right to abortion and returned broad regulatory authority to lawmakers. States then adopted different abortion policies, so the ruling did not settle the policy debate.

Accept accurate paraphrases that connect each public issue to the decision and its effect. For Part 3, look for a distinction between a legal ruling and an ongoing policy debate, supported with details about both selected cases.