

**WILLIAMS V. MISSISSIPPI** (170 U.S. 213 [1898])  
is a U.S. Supreme Court case that is often misrep-

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resented as having validated the constitutional DISFRANCHISEMENT of Negroes. Henry Williams was indicted, tried, and convicted by all-white juries and sentenced to be hanged for murder in Washington County, Miss. Cornelius J. Jones, an obscure black lawyer who had been a Republican state legislator from Greenville in 1890, challenged the convictions of Williams and another black client on the grounds that blacks had been unconstitutionally excluded from Mississippi juries. To save his clients' lives, Jones petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the decisions of the Mississippi supreme court and the lower state courts by declaring the suffrage clauses of the notorious 1890 Mississippi constitution, and therefore the jury lists drawn from the lists of registered voters, unconstitutional.

Jones had tried to bring the case under the rule of *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* (1886), which had said that proven administrative racial discrimination under a law subtly designed to institute such discrimination violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, even though the law did not discriminate on its face. Jones, a small-town lawyer who does not appear to have been assisted in this case by any lawyers with wider experience, showed only the intent on the part of the framers of the Mississippi constitution to discriminate against blacks. Justice Joseph McKenna remarked of the suffrage provisions for a unanimous Supreme Court, "It has not been shown that their actual administration was evil, only that evil was possible under them." On September 19, 1904, the *New York Times* noted that no Negroes had sat on juries in Vicksburg since Henry Williams was hanged.

See *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356 (1886); *Giles v. Harris*, 189 U.S. 475 (1901); R. Bardolph, *Civil Rights Record* (1970); and R. Claude, *Supreme Court and Electoral Process* (1970).

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