



# We As Freemen: Plessey v. Ferguson

*Keith Weldon Medley*

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## **We As Freemen: Plessy v. Ferguson** Keith Weldon Medley

In June 1892, a thirty-year-old shoemaker named Homer Plessy bought a first-class railway ticket from his native New Orleans to Covington, north of Lake Pontchartrain. The two-hour trip had hardly begun when Plessy was arrested and removed from the train. Though Homer Plessy was born a free man of color and enjoyed relative equality while growing up in Reconstruction-era New Orleans, by 1890 he could no longer ride in the same carriage with white passengers. Plessy's act of civil disobedience was designed to test the constitutionality of the Separate Car Act, one of the many Jim Crow laws that threatened the freedoms gained by blacks after the Civil War. This largely forgotten case mandated separate-but-equal treatment and established segregation as the law of the land. It would be fifty-eight years before this ruling was reversed by *Brown v. Board of Education*. Keith Weldon Medley brings to life the players in this landmark trial, from the crusading black columnist Rodolphe Desdunes and the other members of the Comité des Citoyens to Albion W. Tourgee, the outspoken writer who represented Plessy, to John Ferguson, a reformist carpetbagger who nonetheless felt that he had to judge Plessy guilty.

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