

Timeline of Personhood Rights and Powers

By Jan Edwards *et al**

People Gain or Lose Rights and Powers	Year	Corporations Gain or Lose Rights and Powers
---------------------------------------	------	---

<u>Somerset v Stewart</u> (England, 1772)	1772	
---	------	--

An English judge named Lord Mansfield rules slavery does not exist in England stating, “that it is so intrinsically wrong that it is incapable of being introduced into any country, or any reasons moral or political, and can only stand on positive law.” (20 State Trials, 1.)” A slave becomes free by stepping on English soil. The colonists wonder if slavery will soon be abolished in all English colonies. Runaway slaves attempt to flee to England to gain their freedom.		
--	--	--

	1776	
--	------	--

		Revolutionary War Begins (1776)
--	--	---------------------------------

	1789	
--	------	--

		<u>U.S. Constitution</u> (1789)
--	--	---

		The writers of the Constitution were very interested in protecting their property. Without using the words “slave” or “slavery,” they made slavery legal and institutionalized it. “No person held in Service or Labour in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.”
--	--	--

		<u>(Art.4, Sec.2)</u>
--	--	---------------------------------------

<u>Bill Of Rights</u> (1791)	1791	
--	------	--

The first 10 Amendments to the <u>U.S. Constitution</u> were adopted to protect We the People from excesses of government. At this time, We the People meant only white males who owned property and were over 21 years old. The states decided how much property must be owned to qualify to vote or run for office. (New Jersey women who met property and residency requirements could vote when the Constitution was ratified, but the state revoked that right in 1807.)		
---	--	--

	1803	<u>Marbury v. Madison</u> (1803) This case established the concept of judicial review. The Supreme Court ruled that they were Supreme and Congress did not contest it. This gave them the power to make law.
	1819	<u>Dartmouth College v. Woodward</u> (1819) A corporate charter <u>is ruled to be a contract</u> and can't be altered by government. The word "corporation" does not appear in the <u>Constitution</u> and this ruling gave the corporation a standing in the Constitution. It also made it difficult for the government to control corporations, so states began to write controls into the charters they granted. The Supreme Court had "found" the corporation in the Constitution.
States Begin to Loosen Property Requirements for white males to obtain voting and citizenship rights. (1840 on)	1840	
<u>Dred Scott v. Sanford</u> (1857) Supreme Court decides that slaves are property and Congress cannot deprive citizens of their property. Slaves are "not citizens of any state" and "have no rights a court must respect." This decision is the functional opposite of <u>Somerset's Case</u> .	1857	
	1861	Civil War Begins (1861)
<u>13th Amendment</u> (1865) Slavery is abolished in the U.S. and any place subject to its jurisdiction. This amendment changed the third paragraph of Article 4, Section 2 of the <u>Constitution</u> .	1865	

14th Amendment (1868)

Black males are now citizens of the USA: “. . . nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

15th Amendment (1870)

Black males get the right to vote. “The right of citizens . . . to vote shall not be denied or abridged . . . on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Minor v. Happersett (1874)

Women argued that under the 14th Amendment equal protection clause, the U.S. Constitution established that their right to vote could not be denied by the state. The Supreme Court rejected this stating that the 14th Amendment was only intended to apply to black males.

Compromise of 1877

To settle a disputed presidential election, the Republicans made a deal with the Democrats (the party of slavery) that if the Republican Hayes became president, he would remove the Union troops from the South, the last obstacle to the reestablishment of white supremacy there.

1868

Paul v. State of Virginia (1868)

Corporate lawyers argued that under the privileges and immunities clause, corporations are citizens. Supreme Court ruled that corporations are not citizens under Article IV, Section 2. “The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States.”

1870

1873

Slaughterhouse Cases (1873)

The Supreme Court said: “. . . the main purpose of the last three Amendments (13, 14, 15) was the freedom of the African race, the security and perpetuation of that freedom and their protection from the oppression of the white men who had formerly held them in slavery.” Corporations were not included in these protections.

1874

1877

Munn v. Illinois (1877)

Supreme Court ruled that the 14th Amendment cannot be used to protect corporations from state law. They did not actually rule on personhood.

	<p>1882 The Railroad Tax Cases (1882)</p> <p>In one of these cases, <i>San Mateo County v. Southern Pacific Railroad</i>, it was argued that corporations were persons and that the committee drafting the 14th Amendment had intended the word person to mean corporations as well as natural persons. Senator Roscoe Conkling waved an unknown document in the air and then read from it in an attempt to prove that the intent of the Joint Committee was for corporate personhood. The court did not rule on corporate personhood, but this is the case in which they heard the argument.</p>
<hr/> <p>Of the 14th Amendment cases brought before the Supreme</p> <hr/> <p>Court between 1890 and 1910,</p> <hr/> <p>19 dealt with African Americans,</p> <hr/> <p>288 dealt with corporations.</p> <hr/>	<p>1886 <i>Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad</i> (1886)</p> <p>“The court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does.” This statement by the Supreme Court before the hearing began gave corporations inclusion in the word “person” in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution and claim to equal protection under law. (The case was decided on other grounds.)</p>
	<p>1889 <i>Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad Co. v. Beckwith</i> (1889)</p> <p>Supreme Court rules a corporation is a “person” for both due process and equal protection.</p>
	<p>1890 Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890)</p> <p>Sections 7 & 8 define corporations as persons</p>
	<p>1893 <i>Noble v. Union River Logging R. Co.</i> (1893)</p> <p>For the first time corporations have claim to the Bill of Rights. The 5th Amendment says: “. . . nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”</p>

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

The Supreme Court ruled that state laws enforcing segregation by race are constitutional if separate accommodations are equal. Black males effectively lost 14th Amendment rights and much access to the “white world.” Plessy legalized “Jim Crow” laws.

1896

1905

Lochner v. New York (1905)

“Lochner” became shorthand for using the Constitution to invalidate government regulation of the corporation. It embodies the doctrine of “substantive due process.” From 1905 until the mid 1930s the Court invalidated approximately 200 economic regulations, usually under the due process clause of the 14th Amendment.

1906

Hale v. Henkel (1906)

Corporations get 4th Amendment “search and seizure” protection. Justice Harlan disagreed on this point: “. . . the power of the government, by its representatives, to look into the books, records and papers of a corporation of its own creation, to ascertain whether that corporation has obeyed or is defying the law, will be greatly curtailed, if not destroyed.”

1908

Armour Packing Co. v. U.S. (1908)

Corporations get 6th Amendment right to jury trial in a criminal case. A corporate defendant was considered an “accused” for 6th Amendment purposes.

1913

17th Amendment (1913)

The U.S. Senate is now elected by the people, instead of appointed by state governments.

1917

U.S. enters World War I (1917)

Slavery is the legal fiction
that a Person is Property.
Corporate Personhood is the legal
fiction that Property is a Person.

1919

Dodge v. Ford Motor Co. (1919)

Michigan Supreme Court says, "A business corporation is organized and carried on primarily for the profit of the stockholders. The powers of the directors are to be employed for that end." "Stockholder primacy" is established. This is still the leading case on corporate purpose.

1920

19th Amendment (1920)

Women finally get the vote after 75 years of struggle. "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." vote

1922

Pennsylvania Coal Co. v. Mahon (1922)

Corporations get 5th Amendment "takings clause": "...nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." A regulation is deemed a takings.

1933

Louis K. Liggett Co. v. Lee (1933)

Justice Brandeis dissents: "The Prevalence of the corporation in America has led men of this generation to act, at times, as if the privilege of doing business in corporate form were inherent in the citizen; and has led them to accept the evils attendant upon the free and unrestricted use of the corporate mechanism as if these evils were the inescapable price of civilized life, and hence to be borne with resignation. Throughout the greater part of our history a different view prevailed."

Louis K. Liggett Co. v. Lee (1933)

The people of Florida passed a law that levied higher taxes on chain stores. The Supreme Court overturned the law citing the due process and equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment and the Interstate Commerce clause.

1935

National Labor Relations Act of 1935

The National Labor Relations Board required employer neutrality when it came to the self organization of workers. It was a violation of the act if an employer interfered in any way with a union organizing drive.

	<p>1936 <u><i>Grosjean v. American Press Co.</i></u> (1936)</p> <p>A newspaper corporation has a 1st Amendment liberty right to freedom of speech that would be applied to the states through the <u>14th Amendment</u>. The Court ruled that the corporation was free to sell advertising in newspapers without being taxed. This is the first 1st Amendment protection for corporations.</p>
<p><u><i>Conn. General Life Ins. Co. v. Johnson</i></u>(1938)</p> <p>Justice Black dissented: "I do not believe the word 'person' in the <u>Fourteenth Amendment</u> includes corporations."</p> <p><u><i>Hague v. C.I.O.</i></u> (1939)</p> <p>The Court denies an incorporated labor union 1st Amendment rights. Only the individual plaintiffs, not the labor union or the ACLU, could invoke 1st Amendment protections. " (A corporation) cannot be said to be deprived of freedom of speech and of assembly, for the liberty guaranteed by the due process clause is the liberty of natural, not artificial persons."</p>	<p>1938</p> <p>1939</p>
	<p>1941 U.S. enters World War II (1941)</p>
	<p>1947 <u>Taft-Hartley Act</u> (1947)</p> <p>Corporations are granted "free speech" in the union certification process, usurping the worker's right to "freedom of association" and greatly weakening the <u>Labor Relations Act of 1935</u>.</p>
<p><u><i>Wheeling Steel Corp. v. Glander</i></u> (1949)</p> <p>Justice Douglas dissents. Regarding the ruling that corporations are given rights as persons under the <u>14th Amendment</u>, he said, "There was no history, logic or reason given to support that view nor was the result so obvious that exposition was unnecessary."</p>	<p>1949</p>
<p><u><i>Brown v. Board of Education</i></u> (1954)</p> <p>Public schools cannot be racially segregated. Often said to have overturned Plessy. The Supreme Court recognized that separate was not equal.</p>	<p>1954</p>

1963 U.S. ground troops in Vietnam War (1963)

Civil Rights Act (1964)

This act ended voting discrimination and literacy testing as a qualification for voting, established the Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and ended discrimination in public facilities. taxes

1964

24th Amendment (1964)

Poll taxes, which were used to keep Blacks and others from voting in some states, were abolished. "The right . . . to vote . . . shall not be denied . . . by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax."

Judge-made law

is not democracy.

1967

See v. City of Seattle (1967)

Supreme Court grants corporations 4th Amendment protection from random inspection by fire department. The Court framed the question in terms of "business enterprises," corporate or otherwise. An administrative warrant is necessary to enter and inspect commercial premises.

1970

Ross v. Bernhard (1970)

Corporations get 7th Amendment right to jury trial in a civil case. The Court implies that the corporation has this right because a shareholder in a derivative suit would have that right.

1971

26th Amendment (1971)

Voting age changed from 21 to 18 years of age. Passed to recognize that if 18-year-olds could be drafted into military service, they should be allowed to vote.

Reed v. Reed (1971)

Women get the 14th Amendment. There were earlier cases where it was assumed that women had equal protection. This was the case in which the 14th was ruled to apply to women.

Roe v. Wade (1973)

The Supreme Court rules that state statutes against abortion are vague and infringe on a woman's 9th and 14th Amendment rights (to privacy). Abortion is legalized in the first trimester of pregnancy.

1973

1976

Buckley v. Valeo (1976)

The Supreme Court rules that political money is equivalent to speech. This ruling expanded the First Amendment's protections to include financial contributions to candidates or parties.

United States v. Martin Linen Supply Co. (1976)

A corporation successfully uses the 5th Amendment to protect itself against double jeopardy to avoid retrial in an anti-trust case.

VA. Pharmacy Board v. VA. Consumer Council (1976)

The Supreme Court protects commercial speech. Advertisizing is now free speech.

First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti (1978)

Dissent by Justices White, Brennan, Marshall: “. . . the special status of corporations has placed them in a position to control vast amounts of economic power which may, if not regulated, dominate not only our economy but the very heart of our democracy, the electoral process . . . The State need not allow its own creation to consume it.” Rehnquist also dissented: “The blessings of perpetual life and limited liability . . . so beneficial in the economic sphere, pose special dangers in the political sphere.”

1977

First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti (1977)

The First Amendment is used to overturn state restrictions on corporate spending on political referenda. The Court reverses its longstanding policy of denying such rights to non-media business corporations. This precedent is used, with *Buckley v. Valeo*, to thwart attempts to remove corporate money from politics.

1978

Marshall v. Barlow's Inc. (1978)

This case gave corporations the 4th Amendment right to require OSHA to produce a warrant to check for safety violations.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. v. Public Utilities Commission (1986)
Dissent by Justices Rehnquist, White, Stevens:
“To ascribe to such entities an ‘intellect’ or ‘mind’ for freedom of conscience purposes, is to confuse metaphor with reality.”

1986

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. v. Public Utilities Commission (1986)
Supreme Court decided that PG&E was not required to allow a consumer advocacy group to use the extra space in their billing envelope, upholding the corporation's right not to speak and protecting the corporation's “freedom of mind.”

1990

Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce (1990)
Supreme Court upholds limitations on corporate spending in candidate elections. First Amendment rights can be infringed if the state has a compelling interest.

1996

International Dairy Foods Association v. Amestoy (1996)
The U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals overturns a Vermont law requiring the labeling of all products containing bovine growth hormone. The right not to speak inheres in political and commercial speech alike and extends to statements of fact as well as statements of opinion.

Battle for Seattle WTO protest (1999)

1999

Patriot Act [2001] Passed by Congress following Sept. 11, the Act violates the civil liberties and privacy of individuals. Originally scheduled to expire, key provisions were renewed in 2011.]

2001

Afghan War 2001

2003

Iraq War 2003

Nike v. Kasky [2003] The Supreme Court heard arguments on whether purposeful untruths in advertising are protected political speech before sending the case back to a California court where it was settled in Kasky's favor, finding that the state laws requiring truth in advertising had been violated. The question of whether the 1st Amendment gives a corporation the right to speak lies remains unsettled.

[Speechnow.org v FEC.](#)

[DCC 2010]

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia invalidated federal contribution limits for independent expenditure groups. This decision resulted in the proliferation of super PACs, which are independent expenditure groups that can take in unlimited contributions. The decision was based on the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, which held that independent.

Occupy Wall Street 2011

[Wal-Mart v. Dukes](#) [2011] Supreme Court rules that employees can only bring class action suits if there is proof a company has a policy of paying less to women or minorities. Statistics showing that a company's female workers earn far less and get fewer promotions than men will not suffice.

[McCutcheon v. FEC](#) [2014]

A landmark campaign finance decision that held that the contribution limits imposed by Section 441 of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), to national party and federal candidate committees violates the Right to Free Speech and is unconstitutional. This removed limits to campaign contributions from individual donors.

[Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores](#) [2014] A landmark decision allowing closely held for-profit corporations to be exempt from a law its owners religiously object to if there is a less restrictive means of furthering the law's interest. It is the first time that the court has recognized a for-profit corporation's claim of religious belief. The decision is an interpretation of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) and does not address whether such corporations are protected by the free-exercise of religion clause of the 1st Amendment.

[Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) [2022] Landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in which the court held that the Constitution of the United States does not confer a right to abortion.

[West Virginia v. E.P.A.](#) [2022]

Landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court relating to the Clean Air Act, and the extent to which the Environmental Protection Agency can regulate carbon dioxide emissions related to climate change.

2010

[Citizens United v. Federal Elections Comm.](#) [2010]

Supreme Court overturned most provisions of McCain-Feingold legislation that restricted corporate money in federal elections and reversed a hundred-year precedent of Congressional authority to regulate federal elections. Most explicit justification of "corporate personhood" by the Court.

[Emergence of Social Movements](#) [2010-2020]

- Black Lives Matter
- Me Too
- March for Our Lives
- Rights of Nature

2010-2020

[Shelby Co v. Holder](#) [2013]

The Supreme Court held the coverage formula in Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Though the Court did not find Section 5 unconstitutional, the preclearance regime of Section 5 could not be enforced without Congress enacting a new coverage formula. This case resulted in renewed attempts by previously covered states to enact restrictive voting laws aimed at minority voters.

2014

[C'Qdgt i ghgnl'x0J qf i gu](#) [2015]

The Supreme Court holds that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment

2014

2021

[Americans for Prosperity v. Bonta](#) [2021]

The Supreme Court holds a California law, which mandated that tax-exempt groups must disclose data on their top donors to the state, unconstitutional. This decision resulted in the addition of "narrow tailoring" to the over half-centuryold exacting scrutiny formula, which had been used to uphold decades of both state and federal campaign finance disclosure laws.

2022

This Timeline was compiled by Jan Edwards with much help from:

*Doug Hammerstrom, Bill Meyers, Molly Morgan, Mary Zepernick, Virginia Rasmussen, Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, Thomas Linzey, Jane Anne Morris, and Richard Grossman. Thanks to Carl Mayer for his article "Personalizing the Impersonal." Early supporters of this work include: The Alliance for Democracy, The Program on Corporations Law and Democracy, and The Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. Thanks to Kimmy Boyle for her work updating this timeline.