WILLIAMS V. MISSISSIPPI (170 U.S. 213 [1898]) is a U.S. Supreme Court case that is often misrep-
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 no-
torious 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 discrimi-
nation 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

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