AP Gov Required Supreme Court Cases

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QUESTION	ANSWER
What principle did Marbury v. Madison (1803) establish?	Judicial review: the Supreme Court can declare an act of Congress or the executive unconstitutional. Facts: William Marbury sued Secretary of State James Madison for his withheld commission as justice of the peace. The Court struck down part of the Judiciary Act of 1789.
What did McCulloch v. Maryland (1819) decide?	Congress could create a national bank (Necessary and Proper Clause), and a state could not tax it (Supremacy Clause). Facts: Maryland taxed the Baltimore branch of the Second Bank of the United States.
What test did Schenck v. United States (1919) create for limiting speech?	“Clear and present danger”: speech creating one is not protected by the First Amendment. Facts: Charles Schenck mailed leaflets urging men to resist the World War I draft.
What did Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decide?	Race-based segregation in public schools violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. It overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Facts: Black children in Topeka, Kansas, and other school districts were assigned to segregated public schools.
What did Baker v. Carr (1962) decide?	Redistricting is not a “political question”: federal courts can hear challenges under the Equal Protection Clause. Facts: Tennessee had not redrawn its legislative districts since 1901. It opened the way to the principle of “one person, one vote”.
What did Engel v. Vitale (1962) decide?	A school-sponsored prayer in public schools violates the Establishment Clause, even if it is voluntary. Facts: New York's Board of Regents wrote a nondenominational prayer to open the school day.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What did Gideon v. Wainwright (1963) decide?	States must give a lawyer to felony defendants who cannot afford one (Sixth Amendment, applied to the states). Facts: Clarence Earl Gideon, accused of breaking into a Florida pool hall, was refused a lawyer and defended himself.
What did Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969) decide?	Students' black armbands against the Vietnam War were symbolic speech protected by the First Amendment. Schools can limit student speech only if it would substantially disrupt school. Facts: students in Des Moines, Iowa, were suspended for wearing the armbands.
What did New York Times Co. v. United States (1971) decide?	The government could not block newspapers from publishing the Pentagon Papers: a “heavy presumption against prior restraint”. This holds even when national security is invoked. Facts: the Pentagon Papers were a secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam War.
What did Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) decide?	Forcing Amish children to attend school past eighth grade violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Facts: Wisconsin required school attendance until age 16, and Amish parents refused.
What did Shaw v. Reno (1993) decide?	A district drawn with race as the only factor can be challenged under the Equal Protection Clause. Facts: North Carolina's majority-Black 12th District stretched about 160 miles along Interstate 85.
What did United States v. Lopez (1995) decide?	Congress exceeded its Commerce Clause power with the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990. Carrying a gun near a school is not an economic activity, so it is left to the states. Facts: Alfonso Lopez, a high school senior in San Antonio, Texas, brought a handgun to school.
What did McDonald v. Chicago (2010) decide?	The Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms for self-defense applies to the states. Facts: Chicago residents challenged the city's laws banning almost all private possession of handguns.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What did Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) decide?	Political spending by corporations, associations and labor unions is protected speech under the First Amendment. It struck down limits on their independent spending in elections. Facts: federal law barred Citizens United from airing “Hillary: The Movie” within 30 days of the 2008 primaries.
What is selective incorporation?	Applying parts of the Bill of Rights to the states, one right at a time, through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
Which two required cases made a Bill of Rights guarantee binding on the states?	Gideon v. Wainwright (Sixth Amendment right to counsel in all felony cases) and McDonald v. Chicago (Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms).
Which three required cases were decided under the Equal Protection Clause?	Brown v. Board of Education (school segregation), Baker v. Carr (redistricting can be heard in court) and Shaw v. Reno (racial gerrymandering).
Which six required cases turn on the First Amendment?	Speech: Schenck, Tinker, Citizens United. Press: New York Times Co. v. United States. Religion: Engel v. Vitale, Wisconsin v. Yoder.
How do Engel v. Vitale and Wisconsin v. Yoder differ?	Engel: Establishment Clause, the government cannot sponsor religion. Yoder: Free Exercise Clause, the government cannot burden religious practice without a strong reason.
How do Baker v. Carr and Shaw v. Reno differ?	Baker: courts can hear cases about districts of unequal population. Shaw: a district cannot be drawn using race as the only factor.
How do McCulloch v. Maryland and United States v. Lopez differ?	McCulloch expanded federal power (implied powers, national supremacy over the states). Lopez set a limit on it (the Commerce Clause does not reach everything), in favor of the states.
How do Schenck v. United States and Tinker v. Des Moines differ?	Schenck: speech can be punished when it creates a clear and present danger. Tinker: students keep their free speech rights at school unless their speech substantially disrupts it.

QUESTION	ANSWER
In a Supreme Court case, what is the difference between the holding and the reasoning?	Holding: the court's answer to the legal or constitutional question (the issue). Reasoning: the court's explanation of why it answered that way.
What does free-response question 3, SCOTUS Comparison, ask you to do?	Compare a required case with a non-required case summarized in the question, and link them to a course concept. 4 points, about 20 minutes.
Is Roe v. Wade (1973) a required case for the 2026-27 AP Gov exam?	No: the course and exam description effective Fall 2026 lists 14 cases without it. Older lists of 15 include it; Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022) overturned it.