

HMH Social Studies

CASE:

WALLACE V. JAFFREE

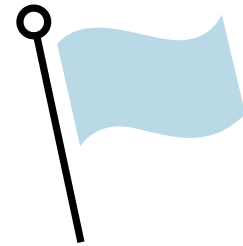
DATE DECIDED 06/04/1985

An Alabama law allowed teachers to set aside time each day for a moment of “silent meditation or voluntary prayer.” A parent of three children enrolled at a Mobile, Alabama, school sued the state, complaining that the law amounted to forcing prayer upon the students.

The Supreme Court ruled 6–3 that the Alabama law was unconstitutional. In its opinion, the court wrote that even though prayer was considered voluntary, the state statute was designed to endorse religion and was “not motivated by any clear secular purpose.”

IMPACT OF THE DECISION

This ruling declared that a state law authorizing a moment of silence for prayer violated the First Amendment’s establishment clause.



QUESTIONS

1 Do you think the Alabama statute would have passed the other two parts of the Lemon test? Why or why not? If so, should the court have taken this under consideration in reaching its decision?

2 Do you think there is a difference between the Alabama law and one that would follow Justice Powell’s “undefined moment of silence” idea? Why or why not?
