Roe v. Wade (1973) [1]


The controversial court case Roe v. Wade [5] (1973) revolutionized the way women and the United States viewed reproductive freedom. The appellant of the case was Norma McCorvey [6], referred to in court documents as Jane Roe [7]. The appellee was Henry Wade [8], the Dallas County District Attorney against whom McCorvey and others filed a class action suit in the District Court. The outcome of this case gave American women an equal right to privacy as well as autonomy over their pregnancies. Not only were birth control [9] issues brought to the forefront of public debate, but women came closer to gaining control over their reproductive rights [10].

Norma McCorvey [6], also known as Jane Roe [7], was a twenty-three year old pregnant divorcee living in poverty in Texas. It was her wish to terminate her unwanted pregnancy [11] because she was unable to financially support a child. However, under Texas law it was illegal for women to receive an abortion [12] unless it was to save the life of the mother. Determined to end her pregnancy [11], McCorvey sought the help of two Texas attorneys Sarah Weddington [13] and Linda Coffee [14]. Weddington and Coffee had been searching for a suitable appellant to make a case and try to overturn the Texas abortion [12] laws. Weddington and Coffee believed women had a right to choose and the decision should not be up to a doctor.

The landmark Supreme Court cases Griswold v. Connecticut [15] (1965) and Eisenstadt v. Baird (1972) set the stage for Weddington and Coffee’s argument. The decisions in these two cases gave the right to privacy to both married and single persons and also gave them the freedom to choose their own method of contraception [16]. These court decisions as well as numerous other factors, such as the introduction of ‘the pill’ (1961), the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the founding of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL), created an American society that helped set the ideal stage to overturn the anti-abortion [12] laws of the United States.

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