

# Unleashing the Titans: A Journey Through Mid-20th Century Antitrust Supreme Court Cases

## Antitrust to the Supreme Court: The Expediting Act

W. WALLACE KIRKPATRICK\*

The Supreme Court normally does not propose legislation or otherwise recommend action to Congress, and especially not in a formal fashion. It therefore is particularly interesting to explore the circumstances leading the Court to call for the abolition of a 66-year-old statute.

The statute in question, the Expediting Act of 1903,<sup>1</sup> accelerates final decisions in important antitrust cases by providing for direct Supreme Court review in certain situations. Some suggest that it is now time to modify these provisions, and in the last Congress the Senate passed a bill effecting major changes in the Act.

The Act is procedural. Yet this article will argue that the Act's repeal would result in far less effective enforcement of the antitrust laws. If repeal is accomplished, the Government will be successful in a much smaller proportion of antitrust cases it initiates, and confusion and uncertainty in the antitrust field are likely to be substantially increased. The single voice of the Supreme Court would no longer

\* Professor of Law and Associate Dean, The National Law Center, The George Washington University. A.B., LL.B., Harvard University. Formerly First Assistant and Acting Assistant Attorney General, Antitrust Division, United States Department of Justice.

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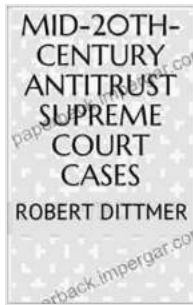
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1. 15 U.S.C. §§ 22-29 (1964).

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In the mid-20th century, the United States Supreme Court emerged as a pivotal arena in the battle against anti-competitive business practices. A

series of landmark cases challenged the dominance of corporate giants, reshaped American industry, and sparked fierce legal battles between government and business interests. This article explores the most influential antitrust decisions of that era, shedding light on their impact and the enduring legacy they left on the American economy.



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★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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### The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890

The foundation for antitrust enforcement in the United States was laid with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. This seminal legislation prohibited practices such as monopolization, cartels, and price-fixing, aiming to protect consumers from exploitation and foster fair competition.

### Landmark Cases of the Mid-20th Century

Over the course of the 20th century, the Supreme Court played a crucial role in interpreting and enforcing the Sherman Act. Here are some of the most notable antitrust cases of the mid-century:

### Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey v. United States (1911)

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court ruled that Standard Oil was an illegal monopoly. The company controlled over 90% of the oil refining industry in the United States and engaged in anti-competitive practices to maintain its dominance. The ruling forced Standard Oil to break up into 34 separate companies, effectively ending its monopoly power.

### **United States v. American Tobacco Co. (1911)**

The Supreme Court's decision in this case led to the breakup of the American Tobacco Company, which controlled over 90% of the tobacco industry. The ruling declared that the company's control over the entire tobacco production chain, from leaf procurement to product distribution, constituted an illegal monopoly. The company was split into four separate entities.

### **Alcoa v. United States (1945)**

Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) was found guilty of monopolizing the aluminum industry. The Supreme Court ruled that even if a company does not possess an absolute monopoly, it can still violate the Sherman Act if it has dominance over a substantial market share and engages in anti-competitive practices.

### **United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc. (1948)**

This case targeted the motion picture industry, where Paramount Pictures and other major studios held a dominant position. The Supreme Court ruled that the practice of "block booking," where studios forced movie theaters to purchase packages of films instead of individual movies, was an illegal restraint of trade.

### **United States v. Bethlehem Steel Corp. (1951)**

Bethlehem Steel was found guilty of monopolizing the steel industry in the Eastern United States. The Supreme Court ruled that the company's acquisition of Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company substantially lessened competition and violated the Sherman Act.

### **Brown Shoe Co. v. United States (1962)**

Brown Shoe was accused of violating the Sherman Act by acquiring Kinney Shoe Corporation, another major shoe manufacturer. The Supreme Court ruled that the merger would substantially lessen competition in the shoe industry and the acquisition was therefore illegal.

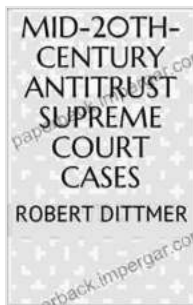
### **Impact and Legacy**

The Supreme Court's antitrust decisions of the mid-20th century had a profound impact on the American economy and business landscape. These rulings:

- \* Broke up powerful monopolies, fostering competition and innovation.
- \* Protected consumers from anti-competitive practices and excessive prices.
- \* Established clear guidelines for business conduct, preventing companies from engaging in unfair or predatory tactics.
- \* Laid the groundwork for a more competitive and dynamic marketplace.

The legacy of these cases continues to shape antitrust enforcement in the United States today. The Supreme Court's rulings established a strong precedent for antitrust law, which has been used to challenge mergers, break up monopolies, and protect the interests of consumers and businesses alike.

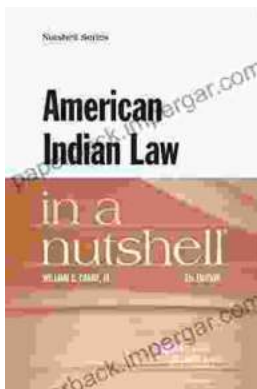
The mid-20th century antitrust Supreme Court cases were pivotal moments in American legal and economic history. These decisions forever altered the landscape of corporate power, promoted fair competition, and protected consumers from exploitation. As we navigate the complexities of modern antitrust issues, the lessons and precedents established by these cases continue to provide valuable guidance.



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