

A User Guide to the History of the Federal Judiciary Website

The FJC's history website is packed with information about the history of the federal courts, and new content is added frequently. To help you navigate the site and to keep you up to date on what is available, here is a brief guide that highlights and explains many of our features.

Our most widely used resource is the [Biographical Directory of Article III Judges, 1789-present](#). The directory includes biographical information and listings of manuscript collections and oral histories for federal judges appointed to serve during good behavior since 1789 (as well as judges who received presidential recess appointments to federal courts but were not confirmed by the Senate to serve during good behavior).

Though we aim for all our material to be accessible to most users, the lists below will help you find materials of particular interest.

General Interest

[Demography of Article III Judges](#): A series of graphs illustrates major changes in the composition of the Article III courts from their inception to recent times using information compiled in the Federal Judicial Center's Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-Present.

[Famous Federal Trials](#): The trials in this feature illustrate the federal courts' role in issues of national controversy, such as women's suffrage, Chinese exclusion, Prohibition, the Red Scare, and Vietnam War protests.

[Federal Judicial Caseloads \(Graphs\)](#): The number of cases handled by the federal courts has long featured prominently in debates over the judiciary's institutional structure and mission. A series of graphs illustrates some of the available data on federal judicial caseloads with a view to augmenting that broader history.

[Historic Federal Courthouses](#): This section of the website lists over 700 federal courthouses and other federally owned buildings that have served as the meeting places of federal courts. Images of these buildings are included wherever possible.

[The Justices' Circuit Court Opinions](#): An exhibit summarizes selected opinions and grand jury charges delivered by justices of the Supreme Court in the course of their duties on the U.S. circuit courts, the main trial courts of the federal judiciary from 1789 to 1911.

[Maps](#): Interactive maps include Federal Judicial Circuits, the Geographical Distribution of Authorized Judgeships, and Federal Court Authorized Meeting Places.

Notable Federal Trials: This exhibit provides a timeline of notable federal trials arranged by decade. These trials reflect major historical trends or attracted significant attention and debate when they were decided.

Snapshots of Federal Judicial History, 1790-1990: This feature provides basic information about the federal judiciary at regular intervals in its historical development. Each snapshot includes charts and maps pertinent to developments occurring at or around the period in question.

Spotlight on Judicial History: An ongoing series presents short essays on interesting topics related to the federal courts. Topics thus far have included circuit riding, the Mississippi Burning case, the Ku Klux Klan trials of 1871-1872, the Supreme Court's Rule of Four, and baseball's reserve clause, among several others.

Timelines of Federal Judicial History: These timelines highlight important moments in federal judicial history in four categories: The Structure of the Federal Courts, The Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts, The Administration of the Federal Courts, and Cases that Shaped the Federal Courts.

Judges and Court Staff

[Approaches to Federal Judicial History](#): This volume presents a range of scholarly approaches to the field of federal judicial history. Essays by scholars and public historians evaluate the current state of the field and offer insights into potential areas of new study.

[Debates on the Federal Judiciary, Vol. I \(1787-1875\)](#): This three-volume series presents historical documents related to significant debates about the federal judiciary. The first volume traces the long process of defining the judiciary within the relatively brief outline provided by the Constitution.

[Debates on the Federal Judiciary, Vol. II \(1875-1939\)](#): This three-volume series presents historical documents related to significant debates about the federal judiciary. Volume II introduces readers to public debates on proposals to alter the organization, jurisdiction, and administration of the federal courts, as well as the tenure and authority of federal judges, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[Debates on the Federal Judiciary, Vol. III \(1939-2005\)](#): This three-volume series presents historical documents related to significant debates about the federal judiciary. The concluding volume of the series covers debates concerning structural changes to the federal courts, criminal justice reform, proposed civil justice initiatives, and the discipline of federal judges.

[For Further Study](#): This section of the website has a dual purpose: to compile external resources on federal judicial history, including lists of judges' published papers, scholarship on judges, and published court histories; and to provide information and guidance on the preservation of federal court history in the form of oral histories and court history programs.

[A Guide to the Preservation of Judges' Papers](#): This FJC guide discusses the importance of federal judges' papers as a documentary record of judges' careers and the work of the federal courts and provides information about organizing, managing, storing and preserving physical documents and electronic materials.

[Talking Points on Federal Judicial History](#): The modules here were developed to support people who want to speak to groups about the history of the federal courts. Included for each topic are an outline, discussion questions, a bibliography, and a PowerPoint presentation.

Educators

[Approaches to Federal Judicial History](#): This volume presents a range of scholarly approaches to the field of federal judicial history. Essays by scholars and public historians evaluate the current state of the field and offer insights into potential areas of new study.

[Cases that Shaped the Federal Courts](#): This feature includes case summaries, discussion questions, and primary documents related to cases that had a major institutional impact on the federal courts. The cases address a range of legal issues including jurisdiction, federalism, judicial review, and non-adjudicatory roles of federal judges.

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[The Executive Branch and the Courts](#): A series of six essays explores significant ways in which the judicial and executive branches interact. The first three essays focus on the structural and institutional relationships between the branches, while the final three essays explore the relationship between those branches in the adjudicative process.

[Famous Federal Trials](#): The trials in this feature illustrate the federal courts' role in issues of national controversy, such as women's suffrage, Chinese exclusion, Prohibition, the Red Scare, and Vietnam War protests.

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Students

Administrative Bodies: Several administrative agencies and entities supporting the work of the federal courts—such as the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the Federal Judicial Center, and the U.S. Sentencing Commission—are described in this section.

The Contempt Power of the Federal Courts: This essay explains the nature of the contempt power in the federal courts with a focus on changes over time in judicial interpretations of the scope of the power.

Court Officers and Staff: Brief descriptions of non-judicial positions in the federal courts, such as law clerks, librarians, clerks of court, reporters of decisions, U.S. attorneys, U.S. marshals and others are presented in this section.

Courts: A Brief Overview: A short essay covers some basic structural facts about federal courts, including descriptions of Article III courts and judges, specialized courts staffed by Article III judges, adjuncts to Article III courts, and Article I (or legislative) courts.

Jurisdiction: This series of essays explains the types of cases federal courts have been authorized to hear—such as federal question, diversity, and habeas corpus cases—and how each type of jurisdiction has evolved over time.

Landmark Legislation: This page contains a list of congressional statutes that were crucial in shaping the federal judiciary. The text of each law and a brief summary of its contents are included.

The Role of the U.S. Courts of Appeals in the Federal Judiciary: This essay is a broad overview of the U.S. courts of appeals, covering topics such as the law of the circuit doctrine, circuit splits, and en banc review. It also provides small samples of important cases and judges.

Snapshots of Federal Judicial History, 1790-1990: This feature provides basic information about the federal judiciary at regular intervals in its historical development. Each snapshot includes charts and maps pertinent to developments occurring at or around the period in question.

Timelines of Federal Judicial History: These timelines highlight important moments in federal judicial history in four categories: The Structure of the Federal Courts, The Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts, The Administration of the Federal Courts, and Cases that Shaped the Federal Courts.

Researchers

Courts: The Courts section of the FJC history website contains detailed, court-specific information on the Supreme Court, the U.S. courts of appeals, the U.S. district courts, and the U.S. circuit courts (1789-1911). Included are lists of judges, succession charts, legislative histories, authorized judgeships, authorized meeting places, and more.

Demography of Article III Judges: A series of graphs illustrates major changes in the composition of the Article III courts from their inception to recent times using information compiled in the Federal Judicial Center's Biographical Directory of Article III Federal Judges, 1789-Present.

Debates on the Federal Judiciary, Vol. I (1787-1875): This three-volume series presents historical documents related to significant debates about the federal judiciary. The first volume traces the long process of defining the judiciary within the relatively brief outline provided by the Constitution.

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Federal Judicial Caseloads (Graphs): The number of cases handled by the federal courts has long featured prominently in debates over the judiciary's institutional structure and mission. A series of graphs illustrates some of the available data on federal judicial caseloads with a view to augmenting that broader history.

Federal Judicial Caseloads (Tables): These pages contain tables with year-by-year caseload information in several different categories. In addition to criminal, civil (private), civil (U.S.), bankruptcy, and U.S. courts of appeals cases, there are several tables displaying Supreme Court caseload data.

Federal Judicial Circuits: Tables show changes over time in the composition of each federal judicial circuit (see also Maps).

Federal Judiciary Appropriations, 1792-2010: Throughout its history, the chief source of funding for the federal judiciary of the United States has been money authorized by Congress to be expended out of the general funds of the federal treasury. After an introductory essay

explaining the appropriations process, this publication presents tables with detailed breakdowns of appropriations from 1792 to 2010.

For Further Study: This section of the website has a dual purpose: to compile external resources on federal judicial history, including lists of judges' published papers, scholarship on judges, and published court histories; and to provide information and guidance on the preservation of federal court history in the form of oral histories and court history programs.

Guide to Research in Federal Judicial History: This guide describes the records of the federal courts, as well as records of Congress and the executive branch, that are relevant to researching federal judicial history.

Impeachments of Federal Judges: This page details each occasion on which the House of Representatives has sought the removal of an Article III federal judge by impeachment, including the grounds of the impeachment and the outcome (conviction by the Senate and removal from office, acquittal by the Senate, or resignation).

Judgeship Reassignments: As part of its power to establish Article III federal courts and judgeships, Congress has on occasion reassigned judgeships to different courts or altered them in other ways. This page provides information on all Article III judgeship reassignments.

Judicial Salaries: Tables showing year-by-year salaries for all federal justices and judges are presented here.

Jurisdiction: This series of essays explains the types of cases federal courts have been authorized to hear—such as federal question, diversity, and habeas corpus cases—and how each type of jurisdiction has evolved over time.

Maps: Interactive maps include Federal Judicial Circuits, the Geographical Distribution of Authorized Judgeships, and Federal Court Authorized Meeting Places.

Rules of Practice and Procedure in the Federal Courts: A series of essays investigates the history behind the creation of federal civil, criminal, appellate, bankruptcy, and evidence procedural rules, and includes an essay on the history of federal rulemaking prior to the Rules Enabling Act of 1934.

Unsuccessful Nominations and Recess Appointments: This feature contains tables showing every judicial nomination or attempted recess appointment since 1789 that did not result in a successful appointment.