**COURT SYSTEMS: LOWER COURTS**

[Slide 1]

THE LOWER COURTS

**US SUPREME COURT**

|

**US Claims Court**----------------------**US Courts of Appeal**---------**Court of International Trade**

(13 courts)

|

**US Tax Court**

**US District Courts**

(94 Courts)

\*The naming conventions tend to be interchangeable

[Slide 2]

FEDERAL DISTRICT COURTS

* The bottom-level courts of the justice system
* This is where the cases are first heard
  + ‘Original jurisdiction’ (They get to make the first decision which will be analyzed later on by other courts)
* They use juries
  + A Grand Jury decides if there should be a trial
  + A Trial Jury decides the outcome of the trial, whether one is guilty of not guilty
* There are some cases that are only heard by judges (Ex. Tax Court – where use of judges seem necessary because of specialized subject matter)
* But if you feel that something went wrong or some evidence was not taken into account, you can appeal it to a higher court and have the higher court take a look at it

[Slide 3]

US COURTS OF APPEALS

* They only hear appeals from the lower courts; they do not have an original jurisdiction; they do not make the first decision but they review the first decision made by the lower court
* They are divided into geographic areas also called as Circuit Courts (They wanted to divide the country into geographic areas to easily deal with the appeal process; judges would ‘ride the circuit’ where they would ride around from town to town and hold appeals courts wherever they are needed)
* They do not work the way traditional courts work
  + No new evidence is presented
  + No jury
  + Instead, a lawyer will submit arguments called BRIEF that details the outlines of the case and why the judges should rule in your favour (the justices review and research this)
    - A Panel of Judges hear each lawyer and cross-examine them (Your lawyer acts as a witness where they explain your arguments)
    - Then the judges study the facts and give a ruling
      * They also usually publish an opinion explaining why they ruled a specific way (this eventually becomes public record)

[Slide 4] Picture: Location of US Circuit Courts

[**District of Columbia**](https://www.britannica.com/place/Washington-DC)**Circuit**, for Washington, D.C.;

**First Circuit**, for [Maine](https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state), [New Hampshire](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Hampshire-state), [Massachusetts](https://www.britannica.com/place/Massachusetts), [Rhode Island](https://www.britannica.com/place/Rhode-Island-state), and Puerto Rico;

**Second Circuit**, for [Vermont](https://www.britannica.com/place/Vermont), [Connecticut](https://www.britannica.com/place/Connecticut), and New York;

**Third Circuit**, for [New Jersey](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Jersey), [Pennsylvania](https://www.britannica.com/place/Pennsylvania-state), [Delaware](https://www.britannica.com/place/Delaware-state), and the Virgin Islands;

**Fourth Circuit**, for [Maryland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Maryland-state), [West Virginia](https://www.britannica.com/place/West-Virginia), [Virginia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Virginia-state), [North Carolina](https://www.britannica.com/place/North-Carolina-state), and South Carolina;

**Fifth Circuit**, for [Mississippi](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mississippi-state), [Louisiana](https://www.britannica.com/place/Louisiana-state), and Texas;

**Sixth Circuit**, for [Ohio](https://www.britannica.com/place/Ohio-state), [Michigan](https://www.britannica.com/place/Michigan), [Kentucky](https://www.britannica.com/place/Kentucky), and Tennessee;

**Seventh Circuit**, for [Indiana](https://www.britannica.com/place/Indiana-state), [Illinois](https://www.britannica.com/place/Illinois-state), and Wisconsin;

**Eighth Circuit**, for [Minnesota](https://www.britannica.com/place/Minnesota), [Iowa](https://www.britannica.com/place/Iowa-state), [Missouri](https://www.britannica.com/place/Missouri-state), [Arkansas](https://www.britannica.com/place/Arkansas-state), [Nebraska](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nebraska-state), [North Dakota](https://www.britannica.com/place/North-Dakota), and South Dakota;

**Ninth Circuit**, for [California](https://www.britannica.com/place/California-state), [Oregon](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oregon-state), Washington, [Arizona](https://www.britannica.com/place/Arizona-state), [Nevada](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nevada-state), [Idaho](https://www.britannica.com/place/Idaho), [Montana](https://www.britannica.com/place/Montana-state), [Alaska](https://www.britannica.com/place/Alaska), [Hawaii](https://www.britannica.com/place/Hawaii-state), and certain Pacific islands;

**Tenth Circuit**, for [Colorado](https://www.britannica.com/place/Colorado-state), [Wyoming](https://www.britannica.com/place/Wyoming-state), [Utah](https://www.britannica.com/place/Utah), [New Mexico](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Mexico), [Oklahoma](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oklahoma-state), and Kansas and;

**Eleventh Circuit**, for [Georgia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia-state), [Florida](https://www.britannica.com/place/Florida), and [Alabama](https://www.britannica.com/place/Alabama-state).

* They are ADMINISTRATIVE and not REPRESENTATIVE
* FEDERAL CIRCUIT: You go here if you want to challenge something regarding the Constitution or a constitutional issue

[Slide 5]

US COURTS OF APPEALS

* Precedents
  + They serve to guide future judges (When a judge makes a ruling and publishes an opinion, that opinion becomes precedent; if a similar case arises in the future, the future lawyer will go to find the opinion and understand the precedent; they make the same decision based on what happened in the past)
    - Also called Stare Decisis
  + The rulings of the appellate courts are only valid for the geographic areas that they are in.