



DOCUMENTARY GUIDE: THE SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA AT 200

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OVERVIEW OF THE SUPREME COURT OF NORTH CAROLINA [0:00 – 6:03]

- The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina Cheri Beasley and former Chief Justice Mark Martin discuss the effect of Supreme Court decisions on the lives of North Carolinians, and how the Supreme Court has provided North Carolina with a way to peacefully settle disputes. The narrator continues by discussing the position of the Supreme Court, which has had 101 associate justices and 29 chief justices, as the highest court in North Carolina and the third branch of state government.
 1. Why does North Carolina have a court system and how would society function without it?
 2. How does the Judicial Branch differ from the other branches of state government?

FIRST 100 YEARS OF THE SUPREME COURT WAS DEFINED BY STABILITY AND CERTAINTY [6:03 – 24:28]

- The narrator describes North Carolina in 1819 as a frontier state and discusses the topography, infrastructure, population centers, economy, education level, and the roles of slaves and women. The documentary continues by describing early court history beginning in 1776 until the Supreme Court was established in 1819. Martin Brinkley, Dean of UNC School of Law, spotlights William Gaston, the founder of the Supreme Court, and discusses the first members of the court and the changes in the number of justices on the court.
- Former Associate Justice Willis Whichard, a recognized Court historian, describes the Supreme Court's early body of law and its most controversial Chief Justice, Thomas Ruffin. Former Chief Justice Ruffin served as chief justice from 1833 until 1852 and authored the opinion *State v. Mann* which sanctioned the absolute power of a master over a slave. Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, the first African American woman to serve as chief justice, and former Chief Justice James Exum comment on Thomas Ruffin and the historical context of *State v. Mann*.
- The narrator continues by discussing the meeting places of the Supreme Court and highlighting the history of North Carolina's legal education system. The founders of North Carolina's legal education system, former Chief Justice Richmond Mumford Pearson, Judge William Horne Battle, and Harry Woodburn Chase, founder of UNC School of Law, are discussed in this segment.
 3. How did North Carolina's courts provide stability and certainty in North Carolina from 1819 – 1919?
 4. What is the historical context of the *State v. Mann* case?

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NORTH CAROLINA COURT OF APPEALS AND ROLE OF POLITICS [24:28 – 30:45]

- The North Carolina Court of Appeals was established in 1967 and helped to alleviate the heavy caseload of the Supreme Court. Court of Appeals Chief Judge Linda McGee discusses how a case travels through the court system, from trial court through the Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court. Chief Judge McGee describes how a judge is bound by “judicial precedent” despite their feelings about a particular case. Chief justices Beasley, Martin, Mitchell, and Billings discuss how politics and popular opinion play no role in court decisions.

5. How does a case get to the Supreme Court?
6. What is “judicial precedent” and how does it restrict the influence of politics or public opinion on the court?

20TH CENTURY CHANGES ON THE SUPREME COURT [30:45 – 50:22]

- The narrator spotlights the significant changes on the Supreme Court beginning with a profile of former Chief Justice Walter Clark (1903-1924) who expanded the rights of women and children in North Carolina. The documentary focuses on how the Court began to reflect the population of North Carolina beginning with the appointment of the first woman associate justice and chief justice, Susie Sharp. Chief Justice Sharp’s profile is followed by the profiles of former Chief Justice Henry Frye, who was the first African American associate justice and chief justice on the Supreme Court, former associate justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson, who was the first African American women on the Court, and Tabitha Ann Holton, who was the first woman licensed to practice law in North Carolina.

7. How did the court change in the 20th century?
8. Who were some of the notable justices who brought change to the Supreme Court?

FOUNDING OF THE INNOCENCE INQUIRY COMMISSION AND THE COURT’S BICENTENNIAL [50:22 – 58:26]

- The final segment of the documentary focuses on the creation of the Actual Innocence Commission later named the Innocence Inquiry Commission founded by former Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake, Jr. This commission focuses on investigating post-conviction claims of innocence and has been responsible for reversing several guilty verdicts against innocent defendants. Chief Justice Cheri Beasley wraps-up the documentary with a description of her role as the head of a unified court system and the importance of recognizing the Supreme Court’s significance during its bicentennial year.

9. What is the Innocence Inquiry Commission and how does it relate to the court system?
10. What anniversary is the Supreme Court celebrating in 2019 – 2020 and why is it important to North Carolina?

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