

The Importance of Jury Trials to a Democratic Society

A presentation created by
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Objectives

After this presentation, you will be able to:

- List at least three reasons that the jury trial is important to our democracy
- Describe two ways that the jury trial could be important to an individual citizen



The American jury trial is a constitutional right.



The Constitution

- The founding fathers believed the right to be tried by a jury of your peers was so important that it merited inclusion in the highest law of the land.
- See Amendments 6 & 7 (Bill of Rights)

We the People



“I consider trial by jury as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution.”

— Thomas Jefferson



The jury trial is a vital part of America's system of checks and balances.



Three Branches of Government



Legislative

MAKES LAWS



Executive

CARRIES OUT LAWS



Judicial

EVALUATES LAWS

Our system of checks and balances means that the judicial branch of government is equal to the other two branches (executive and legislative).



Three Branches of Government

- Courts can overturn laws or acts of government that violate constitutional rights
- Our system of checks and balances requires a strong judicial branch. A strong judicial branch requires a healthy jury trial option.



Discussion Questions

- People from other countries often ask, “What branch of your military ensures that judicial orders are carried out?”
- *Does this question surprise you?*
- *What does it say to you about other systems of government?*
- *Who or what ensures that our court’s orders are honored?*



The Founding Fathers



Why did the Founding Fathers want to create a different system than the one they had left behind?



Jury trials prevent tyranny.



- Tyranny is excessive power exerted by the government, or absolute power vested in a single individual.
- The founding fathers sought to prevent tyranny by creating a system of checks and balances, and
- By enshrining the right to a trial by jury in the constitution.



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.



Trial by jury is a unique part of
America's democracy.



Discussion Question

- The majority of nations do not use jurors.
- *Why do you think that is the case?*



“In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same.”

— Albert Einstein



Citizens participate in
the process of governing.



Benefits to Jurors

- Serving on a jury is the most direct and impactful way for citizens to participate in the process of governing.
- Ties citizens to the constitution
- Makes jurors feel part of something larger than themselves



Jury trials educate jurors
about the justice system.



Juror Perceptions

- Studies have shown that jurors have a more positive view of the entire justice system.
- *Why do you think this is the case?*



“Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt



ASK THE AUDIENCE:

What is Your Involvement with Juries?

- *How many of you have been called to serve as jurors?*
- *How many of you ultimately served on a jury?*
- *How many of you who have served thought the experience was worthwhile?*
- *Of those who served on juries, how many of you initially dreaded the thought but later discovered it was a positive experience?*



Small Groups

- Select a reporter.
- Discuss what you liked about serving as a juror.
- Discuss what you found challenging.
- Discuss what you found confusing (if anything).
- Report back to the large group.



Jury trials provide a method of peaceful dispute resolution.



- Without a judicial system to resolve disputes, citizens who could not reach a resolution may resort to methods that are not peaceful.
- *What are examples of disputes (disagreements) that might end up in court?*



Do we use juries in these cases?

- **Divorce:** Who gets to keep the poodle and the dishes?
- **Contract dispute:** You sold me a hot tub but it didn't work.
- **Personal injury dispute:** Our cars collided at the intersection, and it was your fault.
- **Criminal:** I've been accused of driving under the influence of alcohol.



*“Truth never damages a cause
that is just.”*

— Mahatma Gandhi



Jury trials offer the voice of the people
to the justice system.



We the People

- Jury trials provide the voice of common sense and the perspective of citizens in the justice system.
- Jury service is your chance to have a voice in the judicial branch of government.



“...of your peers...”

- If you are accused of a crime, you have the right to ask for a jury of your peers to judge your guilt or innocence.
- In a civil case, a jury of citizens will determine community standards and expectations in accordance with the law.
- Citizens have power in their own government!



Final Thought

- **Exercise your constitutional right to participate in a process that is a cornerstone of American democracy: *the jury trial!***



“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

