

An Overview of the Federal Court System

- District Courts
(trial courts)
- Circuit Courts
(appellate courts)
- U.S. Supreme Court



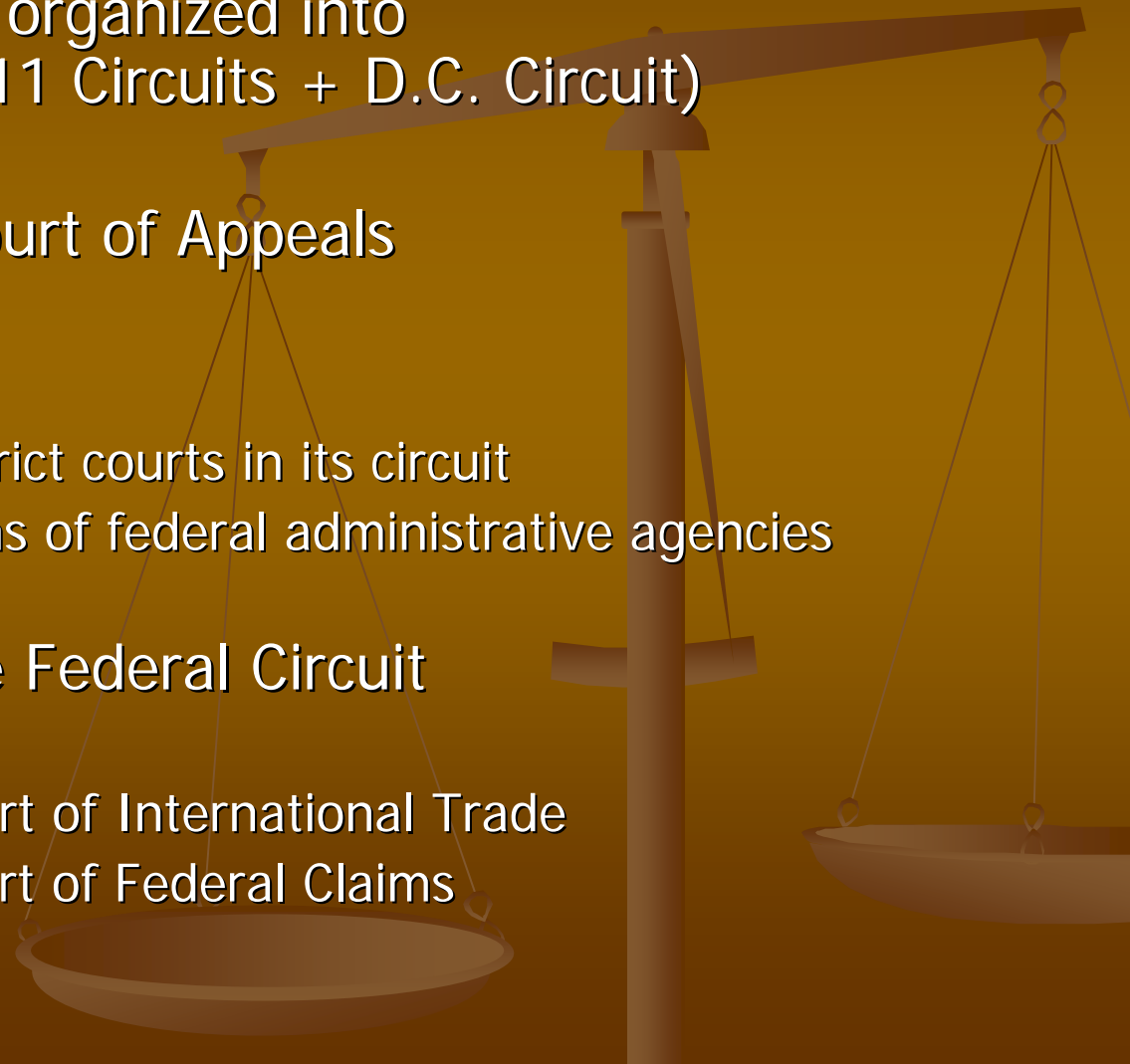
Trial Courts

- 94 district courts
 - At least one in each state
 - Includes Bankruptcy courts
- Types of Cases:
 - U.S. Constitution
 - Federal statutes
 - Diversity
- 2 special trial courts with nationwide jurisdiction
 - U.S. Court of International Trade
 - U.S. Court of Federal Claims

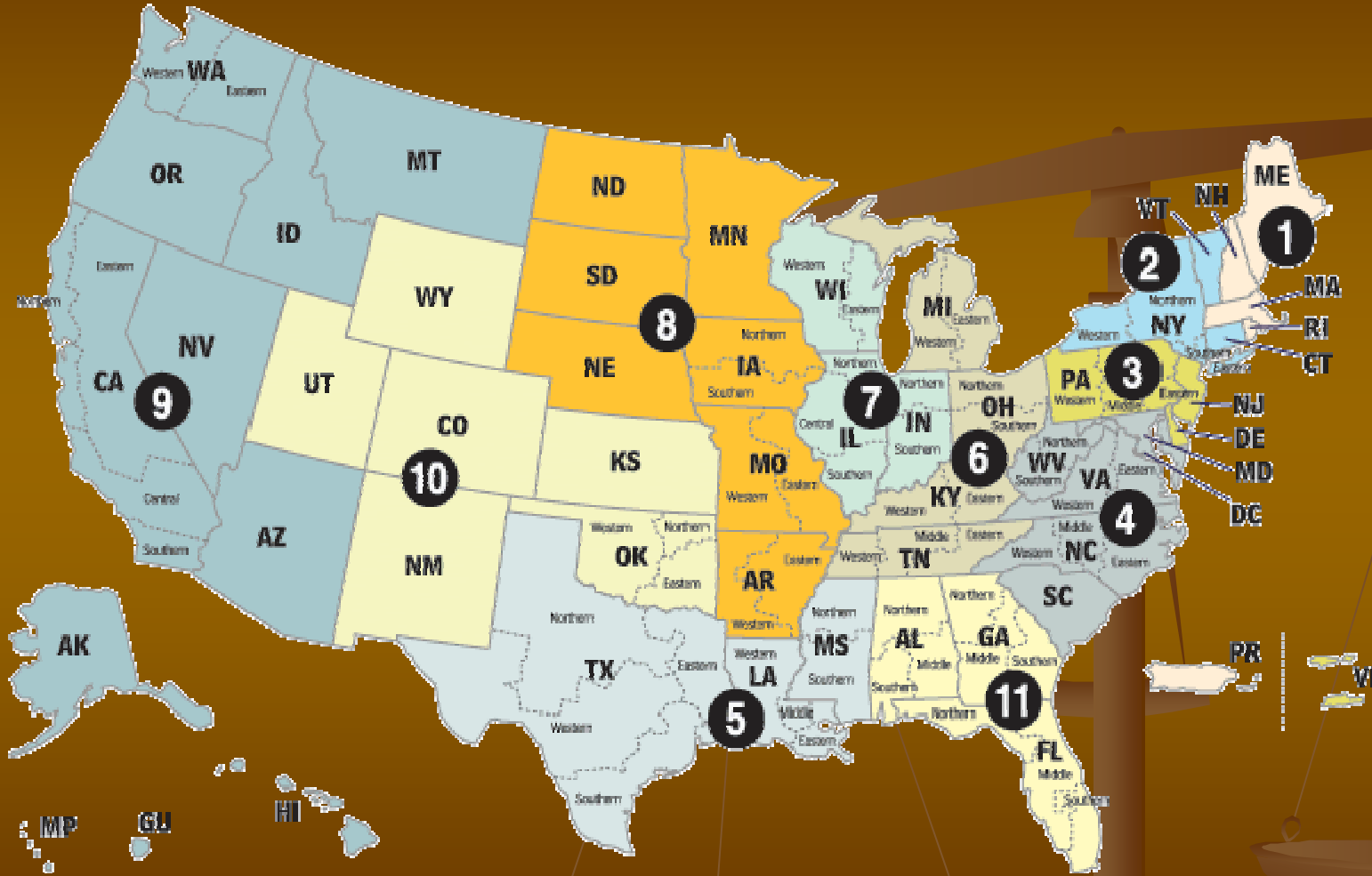


Appellate Courts

- 94 district courts are organized into 12 regional circuits (11 Circuits + D.C. Circuit)
- Each Circuit has a Court of Appeals
- Types of cases:
 - Appeals from the district courts in its circuit
 - Appeals from decisions of federal administrative agencies
- 1 special circuit – the Federal Circuit
 - Patent cases
 - Appeals from the Court of International Trade
 - Appeals from the Court of Federal Claims



Federal Circuits (13)



12 – D.C. Circuit

13 – Federal Circuit: Patents, Federal Claims, International Trade

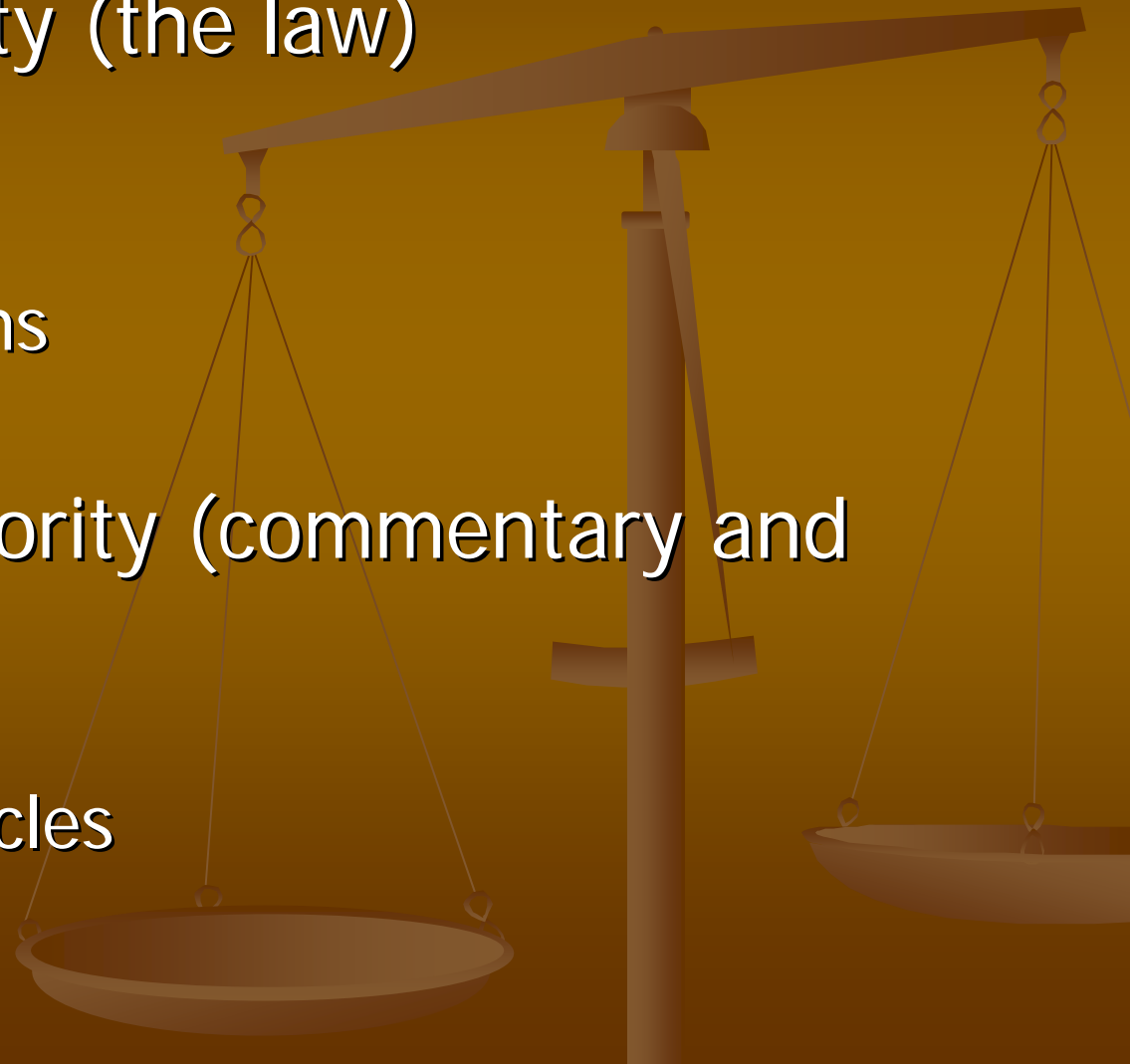
Supreme Court



- Cases may have begun in lower federal or state courts
- Cases of original jurisdiction
 - Ambassador cases
 - Controversies between states
 - New York v. New Jersey
 - Ellis Island
 - Arizona v. Colorado
 - Water rights

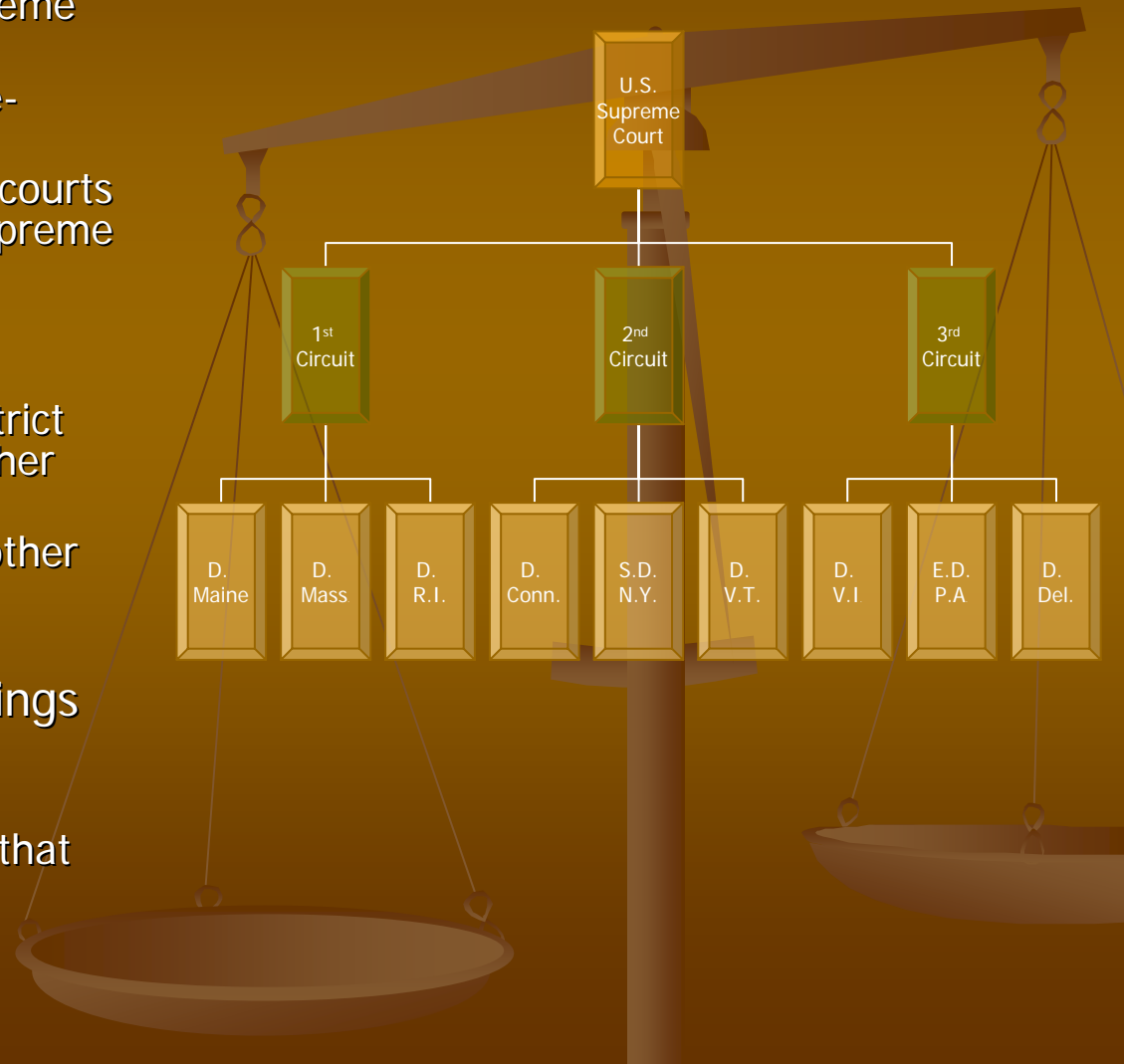
Authority by Source

- Primary authority (the law)
 - Constitution
 - Statutes
 - Judicial decisions
- Secondary authority (commentary and analysis)
 - Treatises
 - Law review articles



Case Law Authority

- **Mandatory / Binding**
 - All courts bound by U.S. Supreme Court
 - District courts bound by same-circuit court of appeals
 - Federal district and appellate courts sometimes bound by state supreme court rulings
- **Persuasive**
 - Circuit court of appeals to district courts in other circuits and other courts of appeals
 - Other district courts to each other
 - Secondary sources
- *Stare decisis* – “to stand by things decided”
 - Doctrine of *precedent*
 - Issue already decided before that court



Judicial Opinions



■ Published Opinions

- Designated by individual judge or panel of judges
- Sent to (West) and published in the commercial reporters

■ Unpublished Opinions

- Generally *not* citable as precedent but depends on court
- Proposed Rule 32.1 to Fed.R.Civ.P. (2005)
 - Narrow focus: citation permitted
 - Does not decide precedential authority
- Federal Appendix (2001)