

Segregated Benches: Judges of Color Belong on All of Our Courts

Our federal court system has failed to live up to its promise of equal justice under the law. Our system of justice, founded predominantly by white men who enslaved Black people, was constructed to protect white wealth and power. The Reconstruction and the civil rights movement has made progress to help build a judiciary that serves all of us. There are now more judges on our courts who look like us and care about us, but this work must continue for there to be a judiciary that truly delivers equal justice. For far too long, our judges have disproportionately been white men and have possessed very narrow legal experiences. We need more perspectives — including the perspectives of more judges of color — on our courts.

The progress made during the Biden administration to diversify our federal bench has been historic. In addition to the confirmation of fair-minded and professionally diverse lifetime judges who are [Black](#), [AANHPI](#), [Latino/a](#), [Native](#), [openly LGBTQ](#), and [disabled](#), President Biden has appointed the first lifetime judges of color on four district courts:

- **Judge Jerry Edwards, Jr.**, Western District of Louisiana
- **Judge Melissa DuBose**, District of Rhode Island
- **Judge Jasmine Yoon**, Western District of Virginia
- **Judge Meredith Vacca**, Western District of New York

[Judicial diversity](#) strengthens our democracy and improves judicial decision-making by ensuring more viewpoints are heard.

- Racially diverse judges [include the perspectives](#) of communities who were traditionally excluded from seats of power in the judiciary's formal and informal decision-making.
- Judges from different demographic — and legal — backgrounds [infuse more viewpoints](#) into judges' conversations, preventing a single set of values from dominating judges' decisions.
- Judges with diverse experiences often [better understand the needs and respect the interests](#) of communities who have been marginalized by the judicial system and help communities trust that courts' decisions are not biased in favor of a select few.

Still, 21 U.S. district courts (nearly a quarter of all U.S. district courts) have never had a lifetime judge of color, and 41 U.S. district courts (nearly half) have never had a woman of color lifetime judge. Additionally, two U.S. circuit courts of appeals, the Eighth and Tenth Circuits, have never had a woman of color lifetime judge. All administrations, and all senators, must work to ensure this is rectified by selecting, nominating, and confirming fair-minded judges — to all of our courts — who reflect and represent the vast and rich diversity of our nation.

District courts that have NEVER had a non-white lifetime judge:

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| 1. District of Alaska | 11. Northern District of New York |
| 2. Southern District of Georgia | 12. Western District of North Carolina |
| 3. District of Idaho | 13. District of North Dakota |
| 4. Northern District of Iowa | 14. Middle District of Pennsylvania |
| 5. Southern District of Iowa | 15. District of South Dakota |
| 6. Western District of Kentucky | 16. Eastern District of Texas |
| 7. District of Maine | 17. District of Utah |
| 8. District of Montana | 18. District of Vermont |
| 9. District of Nebraska | 19. Northern District of West Virginia |
| 10. District of New Hampshire | 20. Western District of Wisconsin |
| | 21. District of Wyoming |

District courts that have NEVER had a woman of color lifetime judge:

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| 1. Northern District of Alabama | 21. District of Montana |
| 2. Middle District of Alabama | 22. District of Nebraska |
| 3. Southern District of Alabama | 23. District of New Hampshire |
| 4. District of Alaska | 24. Northern District of New York |
| 5. Eastern District of Arkansas | 25. Eastern District of North Carolina |
| 6. Western District of Arkansas | 26. Western District of North Carolina |
| 7. District of Delaware | 27. District of North Dakota |
| 8. Northern District of Florida | 28. Southern District of Ohio |
| 9. Southern District of Georgia | 29. Eastern District of Oklahoma |
| 10. District of Idaho | 30. Middle District of Pennsylvania |
| 11. Central District of Illinois | 31. District of South Dakota |
| 12. Northern District of Iowa | 32. Eastern District of Tennessee |
| 13. Southern District of Iowa | 33. Middle District of Tennessee |
| 14. Eastern District of Kentucky | 34. Eastern District of Texas |
| 15. Western District of Kentucky | 35. District of Utah |
| 16. Western District of Louisiana | 36. District of Vermont |
| 17. Middle District of Louisiana | 37. Eastern District of Washington |
| 18. District of Maine | 38. Northern District of West Virginia |
| 19. Southern District of Mississippi | 39. Eastern District of Wisconsin |
| 20. Western District of Missouri | 40. Western District of Wisconsin |
| | 41. District of Wyoming |



District courts whose current active lifetime judges are all white (but where at least one lifetime judge of color has previously served):

1. Middle District of Alabama
2. Northern District of Alabama
3. Western District of Arkansas
4. Northern District of Florida
5. Central District of Illinois
6. District of Kansas
7. Eastern District of Kentucky
8. Eastern District of Oklahoma
9. Eastern District of Tennessee
10. Western District of Tennessee
11. Eastern District of Washington
12. Eastern District of Wisconsin

District courts that have NEVER had a woman lifetime judge:

1. Western District of North Carolina
2. District of North Dakota
3. Eastern District of Oklahoma

Data as of July 31, 2024.

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