The Federal Court System
Federal Court Hierarchy

Supreme Court (1)

Appellate Court (12)

District Court (94)
The Judicial Branch

• Responsible for Interpreting the Laws
• Headed by the Supreme Court
  – Comprised of 1 Chief Justice and 8 Associate Justices
Qualifications for a Supreme Court Justice

• Age
  – None

• Citizenship/Residency
  – None

• Length of Term
  – Life

• Term Limit
  – One
How the Justices are selected

• All Federal Judges are appointed by the President and approved by the Senate
Jurisdiction

• The authority to act, hear a case, investigate, or make an arrest
The Federal Court System

- Supreme Court of the United States
  - US Court of Appeals
    - US Court of Appeals Federal Circuit
    - US District Courts
    - US Claims Court & Various Admin Agencies
    - US Court of International Trade
    - US Court of Veterans Appeals
  - Court of Military Appeals
  - Highest State Court
Original Jurisdiction

• Courts with Original Jurisdiction
  – **District** Courts- ex: state crimes
  – **Supreme** Court- ex: cases between states
Appellate Jurisdiction

- **Description** - The authority to hear a case on appeals
- **Courts with Appellate Jurisdiction**
  - *Appellate courts*- hear cases from district level in which there was an error in the case
  - *Supreme Court*- hears cases from Appellate level
Limits on Congress and Court System

- **Ex post facto** – allowing a person to be punished for an action that was not against the law when it was committed. *(CAN’T)*
- **Writ of habeas corpus** – a court order that requires police to bring a prisoner to court to explain why they are holding the person. *(MUST)*
- **Bill of attainder** – a law that punishes a person accused of a crime without a trial or a fair hearing in court. *(CAN’T)*
Powers of the Supreme Court

• Judicial Review
  – Can declare laws unconstitutional
  – Can declare executive action unconstitutional
• Settles disputes involving the United States
• Settles disputes between the states
Key Judicial Terms

- **Plenary Review**: oral arguments before the court
- **Sitting**: when justices hear & deliver opinions
- **Recess**: when justices consider the business of the court
- **Brief**: written documentation submitted by the lawyers to explain and argue the case that is presented before the court.
- **Judicial Review**: the court can review any federal or state law to see if it is agreement with the Constitution
Terms continued

- **Writ of Certiorari** - directs the lower courts to send its records on the case to the Supreme Court (looking for errors)
- **Majority Opinion** - written documentation of the opinion of the majority voters
- **Minority Opinion** - written documentation of the opinion of the minority voters
- **Concurring Opinion** - written documentation of the majority but, with a different reason why