



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse
900 Georgia Avenue
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

THE SUPREME COURT AND MY HOMETOWN

July 2024

Imagine that when you were in high school you had the chance to attend a two-week summer camp focused on an important and historic United States Supreme Court case that originated in your hometown. Imagine that someone from the Supreme Court Historical Society traveled from Washington to conduct the camp. Imagine that prominent speakers shared their expertise with you and gave you a chance to ask questions and interact with them. Imagine that you could visit the actual sites where events in the case took place. And imagine that prominent scholars would dissect Supreme Court opinions and other original sources with you.

Twenty high school students and five college-student mentors from our community actually participated in such a unique experience from June 10 through June 21 of this year. The students represented public, private, and home high schools from as far north as Athens and as far south as northern Georgia. Many of the students have ambitions to become lawyers.

Chattanooga's ambitious summer camp marked only the second time that the Supreme Court Historical Society has presented its new program, *The Supreme Court and My Hometown*. It is an intensive, in-person civics program designed for high school students to: 1) study a Supreme Court case that originated in the students' hometown; 2) engage with the case's constitutional questions and procedural history, 3) examine how the judicial branch interacts with the other two branches of government, 4) create a capstone project to promote increased understanding about the case, and 5) learn from legal mentors, professors, and historians. The Chattanooga program was sponsored by the federal court for the Eastern District of Tennessee and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, in collaboration with the Supreme Court Historical Society.

The case the students studied was that of Ed Johnson. Ed Johnson was a young Black man who was falsely accused of rape and tried and sentenced to death in 1906. Lawyers hired after the trial took the unprecedented step of taking the case to the federal courts. They were able to convince Associate Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan to intervene in the case and stay the execution, marking the first time in history the Supreme Court had done so. But before the Supreme Court could hear the case, an angry mob stormed the jail holding Johnson and took him to the Walnut Street Bridge to lynch him. Following the lynching, Hamilton County Sheriff Joseph

Shipp and others were charged with contempt of the Supreme Court's order, convicted in the first and only criminal trial held by the U.S. Supreme Court, and sentenced to jail.

The students all expressed great satisfaction with the program. They gained invaluable insights into how our legal system operates. They also learned about the historical context in which the case arose and the various figures involved in the case. Finally, they applied their new knowledge in a capstone project, designing educational panels that will be displayed for the public in the federal courthouse.



The 2024 "Supreme Court and My Hometown" students and mentors at the Ed Johnson Memorial on the second day of the program.

The camp was held at the federal courthouse, the Hamilton County Courthouse, and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Federal District Judge Curtis L. Collier and Supreme Court Historical Society Director of Civic Education Nicole Maffei led the effort. Judge Collier was extremely pleased with the program and intends to repeat the camp in future years to bring this unique opportunity to more students in our community.

Curtis L. Collier
United States District Judge
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

Carrie Brown Stefaniak
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