

Soundbites with Dr. Stan Deaton:

“Hear it now; see it tonight; read about it tomorrow.”

A resource for the 2025-2026 *Georgia History Festival*

The Georgia Historical Society has created a collection of resources to investigate the 2025-2026 *Georgia History Festival* theme, A Nation of Laws: Courts and the Foundation of Freedom.

This discussion guide is an accompaniment to the Soundbites with Dr. Stan Deaton playlist, accessible on YouTube. Soundbites can be used independently or as an entire collection. They range from under 60 seconds to over 90 seconds. The segments below show the set-up question for Dr. Deaton’s response, as well as discussion questions.

Soundbite 1 – Addressing this year’s *Georgia History Festival* theme.

Welcome to our conversation with Dr. Stan Deaton, Senior Historian and Dr. Elaine B. Andrews Distinguished Historian, at the Georgia Historical Society. The years’ Festival theme is A Nation of Laws: Courts and the Foundation of Freedom.

Dr. Deaton, what does a nation of laws mean?

Questions for Discussion:

- In what ways did the colonists react against the King or Parliament during this time of revolutionary upheaval?
- What is a monopoly?

### Soundbite 2 – The independent judiciary in context.

The legal system needs to be stable enough so that people in business and government know what the rules are, but flexible enough to change when necessary.

What is an independent judiciary?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- What does the term partisan mean? Understanding this new term, what does it mean to be bi-partisan?

### Soundbite 3 – The foundation of the U. S. Supreme Court.

The idea of the U. S. Supreme Court is a unique one. It was primarily designed to act as the final arbiter of the U.S. Constitution. The foundation of this idea was also born from frustration with the British legal system.

Where did the idea of the Supreme Court come from?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- In what ways is the U.S. Supreme Court an independent judiciary?
- What were the pros and cons to each individual colony having their own set of courts?

#### Soundbite 4 – Changes and amendments to the Constitution.

When founding the nation, the founders believed that the Constitution should be a living and breathing document that should be able to reflect the beliefs and values of the people. While it can change, this process is often a difficult one but one that is important to our nation of laws.

How did the Founding Fathers write the Constitution in such a way that it could be a document that changes and reflects the will of the people while also maintaining and protecting the core rights and liberties.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- Why are changes and amendments to the Constitution important for the United States?
- If you were a politician, what changes and amendments would you like to see brought to the Constitution?
- What are some current technologies or events you think could impact the Constitution?

#### Soundbite 5 – Life terms for U.S. Supreme Court Justices.

In order to fully embody the values of an independent judiciary, the U.S. Supreme Court justices serve life terms.

Why do the Supreme Court justices serve life terms?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- What are the pros and cons of having the U.S. Supreme Court justices serve life terms?
- What is an “independent arbitrator?”

#### Soundbite 6 – Quantity of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices.

Much like our nation, the number of Supreme Court justices has changed over time, but has remained at nine justices since 1868.

Why are there nine Supreme Court justices? Were there always nine?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- If you were a part of the founding of the U.S. Supreme Court, how many judges would you have chosen? Would you prefer an even or odd number of justices?
- What was the minimum and maximum amount of U.S. Supreme Court justices that we've had in our Nation's past and why?

#### Soundbite 7 – Reversing of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Since the founders wanted the Constitution to be able to change and adapt with the American people, that some Supreme Court decisions might be overturned by later courts as political whims shift and change.

Could you further explain why the Supreme Court overturns an opinion? And what happens when a ruling is reversed?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- Dr. Deaton describes the Constitution as a “organic document,” what does he mean by this?
- Additionally, Dr. Deaton states "...the political makeup of the court changes over time..." What are the pros and cons of this aspect of the U.S. Supreme Court?

### Soundbite 8 – Landmark U.S. Supreme Court case decisions.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's founding in 1789, it has heard a number of cases, some of which have had more impact on the history of our country than others.

What are the most consequential, landmark cases in the U.S. Supreme Court? How do they resonate/remain relevant?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- Which court cases that Dr. Deaton mentioned were you already familiar with and what was the ruling associated with the case(s)?
- Has there been a time when you overheard someone at home or out in public discussing an ongoing U.S. supreme Court Case? Did they mention how they heard about the case?

### Soundbite 9 – Landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases that began in Georgia.

Over hundreds of thousands of court cases are brought before Georgia's legal system each year. Only a small quantity of them are brought all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

What are some notable Georgia court cases that have reached the U.S. Supreme Court?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- Which court cases, if any, that Dr. Deaton mentioned were you already familiar with and what was the ruling associated with the case?
- What is the Commerce Clause?

### Soundbite 10 – Enforcing U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court, in theory, is separate from the other branches of the U.S. Government, it has no way to directly enforce its rulings other than to rely on the Executive Branch to help enforce these decisions.

How does the Supreme Court enforce their decisions?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- What is the separation of powers and how does it relate to the idea of the independent judiciary?
- What are the three different branches of the U.S. Government and how do they interact with each other?