

THE LIMITS OF JUDICIAL POWER
University of Florida, Levin College of Law
Spring 2026, Compressed Course Week, 2 Credits

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Office hours after class

Note: Please email me at the email address listed above.

Schedule:

January 12-16, 2026
9:00am – 3:00pm (with breaks)

Location:

Classroom TBD

First Day of Class:

For the first day of class, read the first three sections of the required reading listed below on the syllabus (1. Departmentalism and Judicial Review; 2. The Supreme Court; 3. Stare Decisis).

Course Description and Objectives:

This class explores the federal judiciary's place within our system of separated powers. It starts with the Constitution, Federalist 78, *Marbury v. Madison*, and Lincoln's First Inaugural. At times we will look at specific legal doctrines, including stare decisis, standing, immunity, injunctions, political questions, and severability. At other times, we'll look at more general legal topics like originalism, departmentalism, statutory restrictions, and the Supreme Court's emergency docket. The common theme will be the limits of the power of federal courts: What should federal judges have the power to do, what should they not be allowed to do, and why? The course assumes no previous knowledge of the topics, and the standard Federal Courts course is not a prerequisite.

This is not a lecture course. Class participation is a requirement. Although I will sometimes ask for volunteers to answer a question, I will also cold call. When questioned, you may look at your notes to find relevant details from the required reading, but you should know the basic holding and basic reasoning of each required case without needing to re-read the case.

When reading, consider the following questions:

- What are the limits of the power of federal courts?
- Why do those limits matter?
- Is the author of the opinion applying neutral principles?
- How broadly should a precedent be read?
- When, if ever, should a precedent be overruled?
- Should judges be originalists?
- How is liberty protected by the separation of powers?

You may not use laptops or tablets in class:

You may bring notes to class (typed or handwritten). You may also bring paper copies of the readings to class, but that is not a requirement.

Required casebook:

None.

Updates and handouts:

See the internet links below, as well as the end of this syllabus.

Materials not covered:

You are responsible for being familiar with the readings whether or not they are covered in class.

Course requirements:

Begin by reading the United States Constitution, including its amendments.

Beyond that, at the end of this syllabus, I have listed the required reading for each day.

Sometimes I have limited the reading to certain opinions from a case and sometimes certain sections of an opinion. But unless otherwise noted, read all opinions in the assigned case (majority, plurality, concurrences, dissents).

Read the important parts of each opinion (and article, statute, etc.) closely. You are not required to bring the readings to class, but if you don't bring them to class, you should be familiar enough with what you've read that you can meaningfully participate in class discussion. Cold calling is part of the class.

You are not required to read the case syllabus or, for older cases, the summaries of the parties' arguments that precede the opinions.

Grading:

At the end of the course, there will be a proctored, closed-book, closed-notes, in-person exam. Your grade will be based 100% on that exam, with the following qualification: I will lower your final grade by a partial-grade level if, during class discussion, it is apparent you have not read an assigned reading. For example: B+ to B is a partial-grade-level reduction; A- to B+ is a partial-grade-level reduction. There is no cap on the number of partial-grade-level reductions.

Attendance:

Attendance will be taken in accordance with the law school's attendance policy. Students will be expected to attend the course physically in person, on campus during the class sessions in order to be considered present for class attendance purposes. Because this is a compressed course, attendance is mandatory for all class meetings.

Comply with UF Honor Code:

Students should be sure that they understand the UF Law Honor Code.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students should be able to describe the limits of the power of federal courts, with topics including civil procedure, constitutional law, criminal law, and torts; evaluate why those limits matter; assess judicial opinions purporting to apply those limits, arguments for overruling precedents, and congressional court reform efforts (enacted and proposed); and explain how the separation of powers protects liberty.

Artificial Intelligence ("AI") Services/Tools:

Do not use AI in connection with any written work that you submit.

Information on UF Law Grading Policies:

The Levin College of Law's mean and mandatory distributions are posted on the College's website.

Exam Delays and Accommodations:

The law school policy on exam delays and accommodations can be found [here](#).

Statement Related to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/>). Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. It is important

for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester. Students may access information about various resources on the UF Law Student Resources Canvas page, available at <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/427635>.

Student Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click [here](#) for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and may complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#).

Recordings of Class

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor and Student Conduct Code.

ABA Out-of-Class Hours Requirement:

ABA Standard 310 requires that students devote 120 minutes to out-of-class preparation for every “classroom hour” of in-class instruction.

Required Reading:

1. January 12: “The Judicial Power” I: Departmentalism and Judicial Review

- [U.S. Constitution](#)
- [Federalist 78](#)
- [Jay Letter on Advisory Opinions](#)
- [Marbury v. Madison](#) (1803)
- Lincoln Speech Regarding *Dred Scott*
 - See Appendix to this syllabus
- [Lincoln First Inaugural](#)
- [Cooper v. Aaron](#) (1958)
- Michael Paulsen, [The Irrepressible Myth of Marbury](#)

2. January 12: “The Judicial Power” II: The Supreme Court

- Court Packing; Term Limits; Shadow Docket; Certiorari
 - [Report of Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court](#)
 - Pages 67-83; 111-151; 203-215; 263-266; 271-273
 - [Will Baude, Reflections of a Supreme Court Commissioner](#)
 - [Does v. Mills \(2021\)](#)
 - Barrett statement
 - Benjamin Johnson, May Federal Courts Answer Questions When Not Deciding Cases? (forthcoming Notre Dame L. Review)

3. January 12: “The Judicial Power” III: Stare Decisis

- [Kimble v. Marvel Entertainment \(2015\)](#)
- [Gamble v. United States \(2019\)](#)
 - Thomas concurrence
- [Ramos v. Louisiana \(2020\)](#)
 - Majority/plurality: Introduction, I, II, IV, V
 - Sotomayor concurrence
 - Kavanaugh concurrence
 - Alito dissent

- [Pierre Leval, Judging Under the Constitution: Dicta About Dicta](#)

4. January 13: Remedies I: Injunctions

- [Ebay Inc. v. MercExchange, L.L.C. \(2006\)](#)
- [Winter v. NRDC \(2009\)](#)
- [Dine Citizens against Ruining Our Environment v. Jewell \(CA10 2016\)](#).
 - Lucero separate opinion
- [Grupo Mexicano \(1999\)](#)
- [Bray, Multiple Chancellors: Reforming the National Injunction \(2017\)](#)
- [Trump v. Casa \(2025\)](#)

5. January 13: Remedies II: Damages

- Read 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
- [Bivens v. 6 Unknown Agents \(1971\)](#)
- [Egbert v. Boule \(2022\)](#)

6. January 14: Remedies ? : Severability

- [Seila Law v. CFPB \(2020\) \(Roberts, C.J. vs. Thomas, J.\)](#)
 - Majority/plurality: Introduction, I, IV
 - Thomas concurrence: Introduction, II
 - [California v. Texas \(2021\)](#)
 - Majority: Introduction, I, II(B)
 - Alito dissent: Introduction, I, II
- [California v. Texas \(2021\)](#)
 - Majority: Introduction, I, II(B)
 - Alito dissent: Introduction, I, II
- [Will Baude, Severability First Principles](#)

7. January 14: Justiciability I: Standing

- Introduction
 - [Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife \(1992\)](#)

- Injury
 - [TransUnion v. Ramirez \(2021\)](#)
- Causation
 - [Massachusetts v. EPA \(2007\)](#)
 - Majority: Introduction, I, II, III, IV
 - Roberts dissent
 - [United States v. Texas \(2023\)](#)
 - Majority
 - Alito dissent III.A
 - [Murthy v. Missouri \(2024\)](#)
- Redressability
 - [Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski \(2021\)](#)

8. January 14: Justiciability II: Political Questions

- [Baker v. Carr \(1962\)](#)
 - Majority
 - Frankfurter dissent
- [Rucho v. Common Cause \(2019\)](#)
 - Majority
 - Dissent: Introduction, II, III

9. January 15: Justiciability III: Immunity

- [Harlow v. Fitzgerald \(1982\)](#)
- [Pearson v. Callahan \(2009\)](#)
 - Majority: III
- [Baude, Is Qualified Immunity Unlawful?](#)

10. January 15: Congress's Control Over the Courts I: Jurisdiction Stripping

- [United States v. Klein \(1871\)](#)
- [Patchak v. Zinke \(2018\)](#)
 - Thomas opinion
 - Breyer concurrence
 - Roberts dissent

11. January 16: Congress's Control Over the Courts III: AEDPA

- Read 28 U.S.C. §§ 2241, 2254, 2255.
- [Harrington v. Richter \(2011\)](#)
 - Majority
- [Edwards v. Vannoy \(2021\)](#)

12. January 16: Congress's Control Over the Courts II: War Habeas

- [Ex Parte Quirin \(1942\)](#)
- [Johnson v. Eisentrager \(1950\)](#)
- [Boumediene v. Bush \(2008\)](#)

Readings Appendix:

Section of 1857 speech by Abraham Lincoln regarding *Dred Scott*

LINCOLN: And now as to the Dred Scott decision. That decision declares two propositions-first, that a negro cannot sue in the U.S. Courts; and secondly, that Congress cannot prohibit slavery in the Territories. It was made by a divided court-dividing differently on the different points. Judge [Stephen] Douglas does not discuss the merits of the decision; and, in that respect, I shall follow his example, believing I could no more improve on McLean and Curtis, than he could on Taney. He denounces all who question the correctness of that decision, as offering violent resistance to it. But who resists it? Who has, in spite of the decision, declared Dred Scott free, and resisted the authority of his master over him?

Judicial decisions have two uses-first, to absolutely determine the case decided, and secondly, to indicate to the public how other similar cases will be decided when they arise. For the latter use, they are called “precedents” and “authorities.”

We believe, as much as Judge Douglas, (perhaps more) in obedience to, and respect for the judicial department of government. We think its decisions on Constitutional questions, when fully settled, should control, not only the particular cases decided, but the general policy of the country, subject to be disturbed only by amendments of the Constitution as provided in that instrument itself. More than this would be revolution. But we think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous. We know the court that made it, has often over-ruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this. We offer no resistance to it.

Judicial decisions are of greater or less authority as precedents, according to circumstances. That this should be so, accords both with common sense, and the customary understanding of the legal profession.

If this important decision had been made by the unanimous concurrence of the judges, and without any apparent partisan bias, and in accordance with legal public expectation, and with the steady practice of the departments throughout our history, and had been in no part, based on assumed historical facts which are not really true; or, if wanting in some of these, it had been before the court more than once, and had there been affirmed and re-affirmed through a course of years, it then might be, perhaps would be, factious, nay, even revolutionary, to not acquiesce in it as a precedent.

But when, as it is true we find it wanting in all these claims to the public confidence, it is not resistance, it is not factious, it is not even disrespectful, to treat it as not having yet quite established a settled doctrine for the country-But Judge Douglas considers this view awful. Hear him:

“The courts are the tribunals prescribed by the Constitution and created by the authority of the people to determine, expound and enforce the law. Hence, whoever resists the final decision of the highest judicial tribunal, aims a deadly blow to our whole Republican system of government-a blow, which if successful would place all our rights and liberties at the mercy of passion, anarchy and violence. I repeat, therefore, that if resistance to the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, in a matter like the points decided in the Dred Scott case, clearly within their jurisdiction as defined by the Constitution, shall be forced upon the country as a political issue, it will become a distinct and naked issue between the friends and the enemies of the Constitution-the friends and the enemies of the supremacy of the laws.”

Why this same Supreme court once decided a national bank to be constitutional; but Gen. Jackson, as President of the United States, disregarded the decision, and vetoed a bill for a re-charter, partly on constitutional ground, declaring that each public functionary must support the Constitution, “as he understands it .” But hear the General’s own words. Here they are, taken from his veto message:

“It is maintained by the advocates of the bank, that its constitutionality, in all its features, ought to be considered as settled by precedent, and by the decision of the Supreme Court. To this conclusion I cannot assent. Mere precedent is a dangerous source of authority, and should not be regarded as deciding questions of constitutional power, except where the acquiescence of the people and the States can be considered as well settled. So far from this being the case on this subject, an argument against the bank might be based on precedent. One Congress in 1791, decided in favor of a bank; another in 1811, decided against it. One Congress in 1815 decided against a bank; another in 1816 decided in its favor. Prior to the present Congress, therefore the precedents drawn from that source were equal. If we resort to the States, the expressions of legislative, judicial and executive opinions against the bank have been probably to those in its favor as four to one. There is nothing in precedent, therefore, which if its authority were admitted, ought to weigh in favor of the act before me.”

I drop the quotations merely to remark that all there ever was, in the way of precedent up to the Dred Scott decision, on the points therein decided, had been against that decision. But hear Gen. Jackson further-

“If the opinion of the Supreme court covered the whole ground of this act, it ought not to control the co-ordinate authorities of this Government. The Congress, the executive and the court, must each for itself be guided by its own opinion of the Constitution. Each public officer, who takes an oath to support the Constitution, swears that he will support it as he understands it, and not as it is understood by others.”

Again and again have I heard Judge Douglas denounce that bank decision, and applaud Gen. Jackson for disregarding it. It would be interesting for him to look over his recent speech, and see how exactly his fierce philippics against us for resisting Supreme Court decisions, fall upon his own head. It will call to his mind a long and fierce political war in this country, upon an issue which, in his own language, and, of course, in his own changeless estimation, was “a distinct and naked issue between the friends and the enemies of the Constitution,” and in which war he fought in the ranks of the enemies of the Constitution.

I have said, in substance, that the Dred Scott decision was, in part, based on assumed historical facts which were not really true; and I ought not to leave the subject without giving some reasons for saying this; I therefore give an instance or two, which I think fully sustain me. Chief Justice Taney, in delivering the opinion of the majority of the Court, insists at great length that negroes were no part of the people who made, or for whom was made, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States.

On the contrary, Judge Curtis, in his dissenting opinion, shows that in five of the then thirteen states, to wit, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and North Carolina, free negroes were voters, and, in proportion to their numbers, had the same part in making the Constitution that the white people had. He shows this with so much particularity as to leave no doubt of its truth; and, as a sort of conclusion on that point, holds the following language: “The Constitution was ordained and established by the people of the United States, through the action, in each State, of those persons who were qualified by its laws to act thereon in behalf of themselves and all other citizens of the State. In some of the States, as we have seen, colored persons were among those qualified by law to act on the subject. These colored persons were not only included in the body of ‘the people of the United States,- by whom the Constitution was ordained and established; but in at least five of the States they had the power to act, and, doubtless, did act, by their suffrages, upon the question of its adoption.”

Again, Chief Justice Taney says: “It is difficult, at this day to realize the state of public opinion in relation to that unfortunate race, which prevailed in the civilized and enlightened portions of the world at the time of the Declaration of Independence, and when the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted.” And again, after quoting from the Declaration, he says: “The general words above quoted would seem to include the whole human family, and if they were used in a similar instrument at this day, would be so understood.”

In these the Chief Justice does not directly assert, but plainly assumes, as a fact, that the public estimate of the black man is more favorable now than it was in the days of the Revolution. This assumption is a mistake. In some trifling particulars, the condition of that race has been ameliorated; but, as a whole, in this country, the change between then and now is decidedly the other way; and their ultimate destiny has never appeared so hopeless as in the last three or four

years. In two of the five States-New Jersey and North Carolina-that then gave the free negro the right of voting, the right has since been taken away; and in a third-New York-it has been greatly abridged; while it has not been extended, so far as I know, to a single additional State, though the number of the States has more than doubled. In those days, as I understand, masters could, at their own pleasure, emancipate their slaves; but since then, such legal restraints have been made upon emancipation, as to amount almost to prohibition. In those days, Legislatures held the unquestioned power to abolish slavery in their respective States; but now it is becoming quite fashionable for State Constitutions to withhold that power from the Legislatures. In those days, by common consent, the spread of the black man's bondage to new countries was prohibited; but now, Congress decides that it will not continue the prohibition, and the Supreme Court decides that it could not if it would. In those days, our Declaration of Independence was held sacred by all, and thought to include all; but now, to aid in making the bondage of the negro universal and eternal, it is assailed, and sneered at, and construed, and hawked at, and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him; ambition follows, and philosophy follows, and the Theology of the day is fast joining the cry. They have him in his prison house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him, and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places; and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is.

It is grossly incorrect to say or assume, that the public estimate of the negro is more favorable now than it was at the origin of the government.

...

Chief Justice Taney, in his opinion in the Dred Scott case, admits that the language of the Declaration is broad enough to include the whole human family, but he and Judge Douglas argue that the authors of that instrument did not intend to include negroes, by the fact that they did not at once, actually place them on an equality with the whites. Now this grave argument comes to just nothing at all, by the other fact, that they did not at once, or ever afterwards, actually place all white people on an equality with one or another. And this is the staple argument of both the Chief Justice and the Senator, for doing this obvious violence to the plain unmistakable language of the Declaration. I think the authors of that notable instrument intended to include all men, but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness, in what respects they did consider all men created equal-equal in "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This they said, and this meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly

approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere. The assertion that “all men are created equal” was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration, nor for that, but for future use. Its authors meant it to be, thank God, it is now proving itself, a stumbling block to those who in after times might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should re-appear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.

Now let us hear Judge Douglas’ view of the same subject, as I find it in the printed report of his late speech. Here it is:

“No man can vindicate the character, motives and conduct of the signers of the Declaration of Independence except upon the hypothesis that they referred to the white race alone, and not to the African, when they declared all men to have been created equal—that they were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain—that they were entitled to the same inalienable rights, and among them were enumerated life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British crown, and dissolving their connection with the mother country.”

My good friends, read that carefully over some leisure hour, and ponder well upon it—see what a mere wreck-mangled ruin—it makes of our once glorious Declaration.

“They were speaking of British subjects on this continent being equal to British subjects born and residing in Great Britain!” Why, according to this, not only negroes but white people outside of Great Britain and America are not spoken of in that instrument. The English, Irish and Scotch, along with white Americans, were included to be sure, but the French, Germans and other white people of the world are all gone to pot along with the Judge’s inferior races. I had thought the Declaration promised something better than the condition of British subjects; but no, it only meant that we should be equal to them in their own oppressed and unequal condition. According to that, it gave no promise that having kicked off the King and Lords of Great Britain, we should not at once be saddled with a King and Lords of our own.

I had thought the Declaration contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere; but no, it merely “was adopted for the purpose of justifying the colonists in the eyes of the civilized world in withdrawing their allegiance from the British crown, and dissolving their connection with the mother country.” Why, that object having been effected some eighty years ago, the Declaration is of no practical use now—mere rubbish—old wadding left to rot on the battle-field after the victory is won.

I understand you are preparing to celebrate the “Fourth,” tomorrow week. What for? The doings of that day had no reference to the present; and quite half of you are not even descendants of those who were referred to at that day. But I suppose you will celebrate; and will even go so far as to read the Declaration. Suppose after you read it once in the old fashioned way, you read it once more with Judge Douglas’ version. It will then run thus: “We hold these truths to be self-

evident that all British subjects who were on this continent eighty-one years ago, were created equal to all British subjects born and then residing in Great Britain.”

And now I appeal to all-to Democrats as well as others,-are you really willing that the Declaration shall be thus frittered away?-thus left no more at most, than an interesting memorial of the dead past? thus shorn of its vitality, and practical value; and left without the germ or even the suggestion of the individual rights of man in it?

From <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/speech-on-the-dred-scott-decision/>