

A Bridge to Justice

The Life of Franklin H. Williams

narrated by
Sterling K. Brown

WNED  **PBS**

Buffalo • Toronto Public Media

Without Fear or Favor

Grades 7 - 12

2 Class Periods

Program Segment

- The Commission

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Show understanding of the term “judicial independence”
- Explain how the Franklin H. Williams Commission contributes to judicial independence

Instructional Resources

- *A Bridge to Justice: The Life of Franklin H. Williams*
- Access to the internet and/or library resources

Procedures

CLASS PERIOD 1

1. The teacher will introduce this lesson by asking the class what they think “Judicial Independence” means. After the students give their answers, the teacher will give them the Britannica definition: *“judicial independence is the ability of courts and judges to perform their duties free of influence or control by other actors, whether governmental or private.”*
2. The teacher should then ask the students why they think it is important that judges make their decisions without any type of outside influence. The teacher could ask students, for example, “If a person was deciding to give a million dollars to either you or your friend, how would you feel if the person giving away the million dollars was your friend’s mother?” Having a significant influence on a big decision is not fair. Judicial independence ensures that court decisions are made without influence.
3. The teacher will introduce Franklin H. Williams as civil rights leader, lawyer, and diplomat who, through the Franklin H. Williams Commission, helped to ensure that judicial independence would be maintained in the New York court system.
4. The teacher will show the video segment from *A Bridge to Justice: The Life of Franklin H. Williams*.
5. After watching the video segment, the teacher will initiate a class discussion on Franklin Williams’ contribution to judicial independence and pose the following questions for discussion:
 - *Do you think politics can influence judicial decisions? How?*

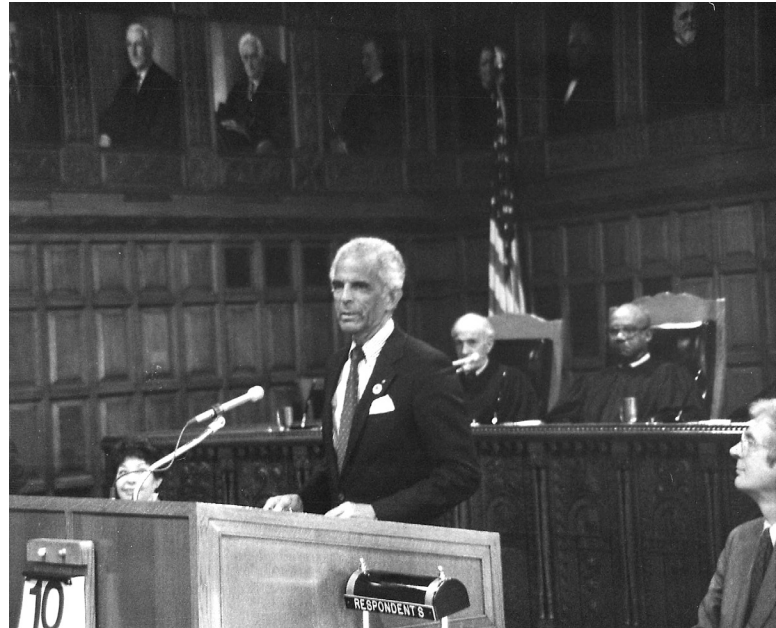


Photo credit: NYS Court of Appeals

- *Why is a fair and impartial judiciary important? Explain.*
- *What do you think would happen if the judiciary was not impartial, but biased and/or unfair?*
- *How does the Franklin Williams Commission contribute to judicial independence? Think of real-world examples and ideas.*

CLASS PERIOD 2

1. Students will be given some time for researching judicial independence and real-world examples.
2. Students will then write a 1-2 page essay on judicial independence, that includes Franklin Williams and/or real-world examples.

Assessment Task

- Students will turn in their essay on judicial independence and its importance for a fair court system.