

How to Decipher Court Lingo

THE FEDERAL GRAND JURY—once independent and removed from a prosecutor’s influence—no longer functions as the Founding Fathers intended. In this series, Mike Brown examines what has gone wrong and what must be done to correct this problem. Here is Part 4, which is really a handy glossary for deciphering the legal lingo of court citations.

It’s simple. The U.S. government has 50 codes. For example, 28 U.S.C. § 515 means Title 28 of the United States Code, which is judiciary and judicial procedure. Section 515 is one of the statutes in the title. Section 515 allows government attorneys to conduct federal grand jury proceedings.



References to U.S. Supreme Court and other lower federal court decisions are equally simple. For example, the first set of numbers is the volume number, the letters designate the court, the third set of numbers is the page number where the case begins. For example, *Miranda v. Arizona*, 86 S.Ct. 1602, 1636 (1966) simply means you find the case in the 86th volume of the Supreme Court Reporter, 1602 is the page where the ruling begins, 1636 is the page where you will find the quoted passage. The first party, *Miranda*, petitioned the Supreme Court to

review the state criminal case brought against him by the state of Arizona and decided in 1966.

Supreme Court decisions are also cited as “U.S.” for United States Reports, and L.Ed. (for Lawyer’s Edition).

Other federal court citations, e.g. F.3d (for Federal Reporter, 3rd series, which began in 1993), and “F.Supp.” (for Federal Supplements, federal district court decisions), are followed by the Circuit Court of Appeals or district court they were issued from with the year. For example, *United States v. Zielinski*, 740 F.2d 727, 730 (9th Cir. 1984) or *United States v. Eilberg*, 536 F.Supp. 514 (E.D. Pa. 1982).

Prior to 1880 most federal cases simply had numbers stuck on them and Supreme Court cases were bound into a book named after the court clerk at the time—Dallas, Cranch, etc. ★