

Who are Colorado’s High Court Justices?

Objective: Students will be able to name the Supreme Court Justices and be familiar with information from their biography.

Inquiry Questions:

- Do the Supreme Court justices reflect the diversity of the population of the State of Colorado?
- Why do you think that each of these justices was selected to serve in this position?
- Does anything surprise you about who is sitting on the Supreme Court?
- How do the past professional experiences of the justices differ? What impact do you think this has on the judiciary?

Colorado Academic Standards

- **SS.HS.4.2.EOb.** Identify the structure, function, and roles of current members of local, state, and national governments. Including but not limited to: understanding the three branches of government at each level of government.
- **SS.HS.4.2.EOf.** Evaluate the role of the judicial system in protecting life, liberty, and property for all persons in the United States

Activities: Class participation activity and homework assignment.

Grade Level: High School

Anticipated classroom time: 45-60 minutes

Teacher background information:

Introduction

by former Colorado Supreme Court Justice Alex Martinez

The biographies of the members of the Colorado Supreme Court reveal many more qualifications than the minimal requirements of law for sitting on the court. Generally, justices, like all judges, are selected from the pool of lawyers and judges who have demonstrated that they are very capable in their practices and other prior activities.

Despite their many accomplishments and grave responsibilities, the justices of this court are known to some people as moms or dads, brothers or sisters, friends, and neighbors, just like anyone else. Perhaps the greatest strength of the court is that the justices who come together to discuss and resolve important issues have very different backgrounds and experiences, both personal and professional, and that those different perspectives inform the decision-making process.

More Information

Included on the following pages are biographies for each of the seven Colorado Supreme Court justices. Information is also available on the [Colorado Judicial Branch website](#).

Qualifications for becoming a Colorado Supreme Court justice: A nominee for the Colorado Supreme Court must be a qualified elector of the state of Colorado, licensed to practice law in Colorado for at least five years, and under the age of 72 at the time his or her name is submitted to the Governor.



Class activities

1. Hand out packets of the justice's biographies and have the students read through. Or you could divide the students into groups and hand out a few biographies to each group to read. Alternatively, you could have students read the [biographies of the justices online](#).
2. Generate discussion about the judges by asking the students:
 - a. Do the Supreme Court justices reflect the diversity of the population of the State of Colorado?
 - b. Why do you think that each of these justices was selected to serve in this position?
 - c. Does anything surprise you about who is sitting on the Supreme Court?
 - d. How do the past professional experiences of the justices differ? What impact do you think this has on the judiciary?

Homework assignment

1. Have students select three judges to profile. You can either send the biographies home with them or have them select [biographies of the justices online](#) at home, depending on their internet access.
2. Hand out worksheet titled "Colorado's Supreme Court Justices" and ask students to select three different justices to complete the worksheet.



Colorado's Supreme Court Justices

Read the biographies of three justices. Write down three facts that are mentioned in each justice's bio. Then explain why this experience or situation might be beneficial for an appellate judge. For example: if it says that a judge was in private practice, how might this help this person while serving on the bench of the Supreme Court?

Justice _____

FACT No. 1: _____

Why is this beneficial? _____

FACT No. 2: _____

Why is this beneficial? _____

FACT No. 3: _____

Why is this beneficial? _____

Justice _____

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Chief Justice Monica M. Márquez

Date of Judicial Appointment: September 8, 2010

Became Chief Justice: July 26, 2024



Monica M. Márquez was sworn in as Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court on December 10, 2010. She began her term as Chief Justice in July 2024. She was appointed by Governor Bill Ritter, Jr. Before joining the Court, Justice Márquez served as Deputy Attorney General at the Colorado Attorney General's Office, where she led the State Services section in representing many Colorado Executive Branch agencies and Colorado's statewide elected public officials, including the Governor, Treasurer, Secretary of State, and Attorney General. Before being appointed Deputy Attorney General, Justice Márquez also served as Assistant Solicitor General and as Assistant Attorney General in both the Public Officials Unit and the Criminal Appellate Section.

Prior to joining the Attorney General's Office, Justice Márquez practiced general commercial litigation and employment law at Holme Roberts & Owen, LLP. She clerked for Judge David M. Ebel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in Denver, Colo., and for Judge Michael A. Ponsor of the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts in Springfield, Mass.

Justice Márquez was born in Austin, Texas. She grew up in Grand Junction, Colo., where she graduated from Grand Junction High School. She earned her bachelor's degree from Stanford University, then served in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps as a volunteer inner-city school teacher and community organizer in Camden, N.J., and Philadelphia, Pa. She graduated from Yale Law School, where she served as Editor of the Yale Law Journal, Articles Editor of the Yale Law & Policy Review, and co-coordinator of the Latino Law Students Association.

Justice Márquez has been a member of the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations and the Minoru Yasui Inn of Court. Prior to joining the Court, Justice Márquez served on the boards of the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association, the Colorado GLBT Bar Association, and the Latina Initiative, and as Chair of the Denver Mayor's GLBT Commission.

Justice Márquez has received honors and awards including the Colorado GLBT Bar Association's 2009 Outstanding GLBT Attorney Award, the 2009 Richard Marden Davis Award (given to a Denver attorney who combines excellence as a lawyer with creative civic cultural, educational and charitable leadership), and the 2010 Latina Chamber Inspiración Award.



Justice Brian D. Boatright

Date of Judicial Appointment: October 27, 2011



Brian D. Boatright was sworn in as Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court on November 21, 2011. He was appointed by Governor John Hickenlooper. Before joining the Supreme Court, Justice Boatright was a District Court Judge in the First Judicial District in Golden, Colorado and had been appointed to that position on June 16, 1999 by Governor Bill Owens. As a District Court Judge, Justice Boatright presided over Felony Criminal matters, Probate matters, Civil Cases matters, Dependency & Neglect matters and Juvenile Delinquency matters. While serving on the District Court Bench, he presided well over a hundred jury trials.

Prior to his appointment to the District Court Bench, he was a Deputy District Attorney in the First Judicial District for over nine years. During his tenure with the D.A.'s office, Justice Boatright tried everything from first degree murder cases to third degree assault cases. Prior to being appointed as a Deputy D.A., he was in private practice for approximately a year and a half with the firm of Boatright and Ripp.

Justice Boatright was born in Golden, Colorado and graduated from Jefferson High school in 1980. He graduated from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri in 1984 and received his Juris Doctorate from the University of Denver in 1988.

Justice Boatright is a member of the Colorado Bar Association and the First Judicial District Bar Association and has held several offices including being President of the First Judicial District Bar Association (2000-2001). Justice Boatright has served on several boards and committees including the Juvenile Services Planning Committee; Children Youth Leadership Commission; Plain English Jury Instruction Committee; and the Lieutenant Governors Committee to Promote Adoptions.

He has been the Dean of the Advance New Judges Training, which is an annual training for all new judicial officers, since 2007. Justice Boatright was named Colorado CASA Judicial Officer of the Year for 2011.

Justice Boatright and his wife Kara have two children.



Justice William W. Hood, III

Date of Judicial Appointment: Oct. 25, 2013



Justice Hood was sworn in as a member of the Colorado Supreme Court on January 13, 2014, following seven years as a judge on the Denver District Court, where he completed rotations in criminal, civil and domestic relations. In 2014, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers gave him its Distinguished Jurist Award. In 2011, he received the Denver Bar Association's (DBA's) Judicial Excellence Award.

Before moving to the bench, Justice Hood was a litigation partner at Isaacson Rosenbaum P.C. in Denver and served as a prosecutor for ten years in Colorado's 18th Judicial District (encompassing Arapahoe, Douglas, Lincoln and Elbert Counties). At different times, he was a chief trial deputy and the chief appellate deputy.

In 1990, Justice Hood graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law where he was a member of the *Virginia Law Review*. In 1985, he received his B.A. *magna cum laude* with honors in International Relations from Syracuse University and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa.

His legal writing on trial work and criminal procedure has been published by *The Colorado Lawyer* and the *Virginia Law Review*. Justice Hood is also a certified instructor for the National Institute of Trial Advocacy and has served as a member of the Executive Council of the Colorado Bar Association and the Board of Trustees for the DBA. He has taught criminal procedure and trial practice as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law.



Justice Richard L. Gabriel

Date of Judicial Appointment: June 23, 2015



CAREER: Judge, Colorado Court of Appeals (2008-2015); Private practice (1988-2008): Partner (1994-2008) and Associate (1990-94), Holme Roberts & Owen LLP, Denver, CO; Associate, Shea & Gould LLC, New York, NY (1988-90). Practice focused on commercial, intellectual property, probate, and products liability litigation, all including appeals. Also served as City Prosecutor for Lafayette, Colorado for four years and undertook pro bono representation in habeas corpus, civil rights, and dependency and neglect matters. Judicial clerkship (1987-88): Law clerk, Hon. J. Frederick Motz, U.S. District Court, District of Maryland, Baltimore, MD.

EDUCATION: B.A. *cum laude* in American Studies from Yale University (1984); J.D. from University of Pennsylvania School of Law (1987). Articles editor, University of Pennsylvania Law Review (1986-87). Winner, Keedy Cup Moot Court Competition (1987).

PROFESSIONAL: Admitted to state bars of New York (1987) and Colorado (1990) and to the following federal courts: U.S. Supreme Court (1999); U.S. Courts of Appeals for the Fourth (1988), Fifth (2007), Ninth (1998), Tenth (1990), and Eleventh (2001) Circuits; U.S. District Courts for the District of Colorado (1990), Central District of Illinois (2006), Southern and Eastern Districts of New York (1989), and District of Maryland (1988). Member: American, Colorado, Denver, and New York Bar Associations. Honors: Champion for Children, Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center (1997); Forty Under 40, Denver Business Journal (2002); Richard Marden Davis Award, Denver Bar Foundation (2002); Finalist, Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year, Denver Business Journal (2003); Best of Class, American Intellectual Property Lawyers (2006-07); W. Dean Salter Award for Lifetime Achievement to Holme Roberts & Owen (2006); Colorado Super Lawyer (2007-08); Chambers' Leading Lawyers for Business (2007-08); Intellectual Property Lawyer of the Year, Law Week Colorado (2007); Named as a Lawyer of the Year, Lawyers USA (2007).

CIVIC: CBA Board of Governors (DBA representative, 2010-present); CBA/DBA Professionalism Coordinating Council (member, 2009-present); CBA Judicial Liaison Section (member, 2008-present); Colorado Judicial Institute (director, 1999-present, vice chair, 2001-02, chair, 2004-06); Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center (director, 1999-2005, advisory board, 2005-08); Colorado Wind Ensemble (trumpeter, 1990-present, director, 1993-2008, president, 1994-2008); Volunteers of America (Meals on Wheels volunteer and Thanksgiving Food Drive chair, 1990-2008); 9 Who Care (board of governors, 2000-05); Colorado Lawyer (Civil Litigator column editor, 1996-2005); Denver Teen Court Partnership (director, 1994-2000); ACLU Legal Panel (1992-97).

PUBLICATIONS: "The *Strickland* Standard for Claims of Ineffective Assistance of Counsel: Emasculating the Sixth Amendment in the Guise of Due Process," 134 U. Pa. L. Rev. 1259 (1986); "Rule 702: Admissibility of Expert Testimony Regarding Eyewitness Identification," 21 Colo. Law. 927 (1992); "Rule 1006: Admissibility of Summary Evidence," 22 Colo. Law. 35 (1993); "Rule 501: The Privilege of Self-Critical Analysis," 23 Colo. Law. 1291 (1994); "Rule 615: Exclusion of Witnesses," 24 Colo. Law. 1299 (1995); Book Review, "Modern Evidence: Doctrine and Practice," 25 Colo. Law. 48 (1996); Co-author, "Chapter on Rule 26," *Colorado Civil Procedure Forms and Commentary* (Debra Knapp ed. 1996); "Rule 606(b): Competency of Jurors as Witnesses," 25 Colo. Law 47 (1996); numerous continuing legal education papers (1990-present).



PERSONAL: Born March 3, 1962, Brooklyn, NY. Married to Jill M. Wichlens, an appellate attorney with the Federal Public Defender’s office, Denver, CO. Rich and Jill have two wonderful daughters, Laura and Kathleen.



Justice Melissa Hart

Date of Judicial Appointment: Dec. 14, 2017



Justice Hart was appointed by Governor John Hickenlooper to serve on the Colorado Supreme Court on December 14, 2017. Prior to joining the Court, Justice Hart was a professor at the University of Colorado Law School, where she directed the Byron R. White Center for the Study of American Constitutional Law. Throughout her years as a professor, Justice Hart maintained an active pro bono practice, writing amicus briefs in appellate courts and representing clients through Metro Volunteer Lawyers. Her teaching and scholarship focused on access to justice, constitutional law, judicial decision making, legal ethics, employment discrimination, and civil procedure.

Justice Hart grew up in Denver, where she graduated from East High School. She earned her bachelor's degree from Harvard-Radcliffe College and then spent a year teaching at a high school in Athens, Greece. She returned to study at Harvard Law School, where she was the Articles Editor for the *Harvard Law Review* and Book Review Editor on the *Harvard Women's Law Journal*. After graduating from law school in 1995, she clerked for Judge Guido Calabresi of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals and for Justice John Paul Stevens on the United States Supreme Court. She practiced law for several years in Washington, D.C., including as a Trial Attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Justice Hart is a member of the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations, the Colorado Women's Bar Association, the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association, the Sam Cary Bar Association, and the Colorado LGBT Bar Association. She is a founding member of the Sonia Sotomayor Inn of Court, a 2017 graduate of the Denver Metro Chamber Leadership Foundation's Leadership Denver program, a 2016 graduate of the Colorado Bar Association Leadership Training (COBALT) program, and a Commissioner on the Colorado Access to Justice Commission.

For her active work in community service, Justice Hart has been recognized with the 2016 Women Who Light the Community Award from the Boulder Chamber of Commerce, the 2014 Raising the Bar Award from the Colorado Women's Bar Association, the 2012 Chase Faculty Community Service Award from the University of Colorado, the 2011 Clifford Calhoun Public Service Award from the University of Colorado Law School, the 2009 Serving Communities Award from the CU-Boulder Institute for Ethical and Civil Engagement, and the 2008 Outstanding Community Service Award from the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association.

Justice Hart and her husband, Kevin Traskos, have two children.



Justice Carlos A. Samour Jr.

Date of Judicial Appointment: May 30, 2018



Justice Samour was appointed by Governor John Hickenlooper to serve on the Colorado Supreme Court effective July 2, 2018. Before joining the Supreme Court, Justice Samour was a district court judge in the 18th Judicial District (encompassing Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert, and Lincoln Counties) for eleven and a half years. During his tenure as district court judge, Justice Samour presided over criminal, civil, domestic relations, juvenile delinquency, and dependency and neglect cases. On July 1, 2014, Chief Justice Nancy E. Rice appointed him Chief Judge of the 18th Judicial District; he served in that role for four years until joining the Supreme Court. In 2015, Justice Samour received the Colorado Judicial Branch's Judicial Officer of the Year Award. That same year, he received the Judicial Excellence Award from the Colorado Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates. In 2018, Justice Samour received the Charles B. Dillion Award of Merit for Outstanding Public Service.

Before his appointment to the district court bench, Justice Samour worked as a prosecutor in the Denver District Attorney's Office for approximately ten years. Prior to becoming a prosecutor, he worked in civil practice for almost five years at Holland & Hart LLP. His first job out of law school was a one-year clerkship with the Honorable Robert McWilliams in the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.

Justice Samour currently serves as the Chair of the Bail Blue Ribbon Commission. He was appointed Chair of that commission by Chief Justice Nancy E. Rice in 2018. The Bail Blue Ribbon Commission is charged with evaluating Colorado's pretrial practices and making recommendations for improvement to the Colorado Supreme Court. Justice Samour is also the Chair of the Colorado Supreme Court's Model Criminal Jury Instructions Committee. He is a member of the Justice Sonia Sotomayor Inn of Court, the Colorado Bar Association, the Arapahoe County Bar Association, and the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association. Justice Samour previously completed two terms on the Board of the Colorado Hispanic Bar Association.

Justice Samour was born in El Salvador. He immigrated to the United States when he was 13 years old after his family was forced to flee El Salvador during a time of political upheaval. He grew up in Littleton, CO, where he graduated from Columbine High School. Justice Samour subsequently graduated with honors from the University of Colorado at Denver. In 1990, he graduated Order of St. Ives from the University of Denver Sturm College of Law.



Maria E. Berkenkotter

Date of Judicial Appointment: Nov. 20, 2020



Justice Berkenkotter was sworn in to the Colorado Supreme Court on January 4, 2021.

Prior to her appointment, she handled complex mediations, arbitrations and judge pro tem appointments at Judicial Arbiter Group, Inc. From August 2006 to November 2017, Justice Berkenkotter was a District Court Judge in the Twentieth Judicial District. She was the Chief Judge of the Twentieth Judicial District for the last four years of that time.

Prior to her appointment to the trial court bench, she ran the Antitrust, Consumer Protection and Tobacco Litigation Units of the Colorado Attorney General's Office. Justice Berkenkotter's practice focused on national and local antitrust enforcement litigation. Before joining the Attorney General's Office in 1990, Justice Berkenkotter was in private practice at Holmes & Starr, P.C. in Denver, Colorado. She clerked for Justice Howard M. Kirshbaum of the Colorado Supreme Court after graduating from the University of Denver Law School in 1987.



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