



## Supreme Court of Illinois

August 4, 2020

### STATEMENT ON ATTORNEYS ROOM PORTRAITS

The Illinois Supreme Court issued the following statement in response to a series of questions from the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* regarding the portrait wall in the Attorneys Room at the Illinois Supreme Court Building in Springfield:

The Attorneys Room at the Illinois Supreme Court building contains 109 portraits of justices who have served on the court. Each justice receives a portrait in the same size and style once they leave the bench. They serve as a historical record.

The Court acknowledges that some of the justices whose portraits appear on the wall, including Stephen A. Douglas, held racist views. This is historical fact and removing the portraits will not change that fact.

The racial justice movement demonstrates a need for further context and presents an educational opportunity to learn from the past. The Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission has been working on an interactive display to fully acknowledge the backgrounds of the justices whose portraits hang in the Attorneys Room.

Despite Illinois's grandfather clauses regarding French slaves, lifetime indentured servitude, and harsh black codes, the Illinois Supreme Court consistently declared slavery to be illegal. This dates back to the 1841 case *Kinney v. Cook* when the Court established the principle of "presumption of freedom." In this case, the slave Cook sued Kinney to obtain payment for services. Kinney argued that Cook was his slave and not entitled to payment. The Court ruled for Cook.

This Court recently released a statement on racial justice and declared that racism exists, whether it be actualized as individual racism, institutional racism or structural racism, and it undermines our democracy, the fair and equitable administration of justice, and severely diminishes individual constitutional protections and safeguards of full citizenship with the attendant rights and benefits sacred to all. The Court also announced the hiring of a diversity and inclusion officer to help achieve the Supreme Court's strategic goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion.