



**Name of Property:** U.S. Court of Appeals—Fifth Circuit (John Minor Wisdom U.S. Court of Appeals Building)

**City, State:** New Orleans, Louisiana

**Significant Dates:** 1956-1963

**NHL Criteria:** 1 and 2

**NHL Theme:** II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements  
 2. Reform movements  
 IV. Shaping the Political Landscape  
 1. Parties, protests, and movements

**Previous Recognition:** 1973 National Register of Historic Places

**National Historic Context:** 2000 *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States Theme Study*  
 2007, rev. 2009 *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights Theme Study*

**NHL Significance:**

- The U.S. Court of Appeals – Fifth Circuit building in New Orleans, Louisiana, has exceptional national significance under National Historic Landmark (NHL) Criterion 1 for the preeminent role the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals held in reshaping the South during the modern civil rights movement. In an era of southern massive resistance



to racial equality, the Fifth Circuit's precedent-setting rulings defined civil rights law, formed the basis of congressional civil rights legislation, and pioneered judicial reform.

- The courthouse also has exceptional national significance under NHL Criterion 2 for its association with Fifth Circuit appellate judge John Minor Wisdom, a scholar of legal doctrinal development whose greatest legacy is in the field of civil rights.

#### **Integrity:**

- Overall: After nearly a century of use, the U.S. Court of Appeals – Fifth Circuit building retains historic integrity in its setting and a high degree of integrity in its location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building's setting has experienced some change due to later construction visible from the courthouse; however, the remaining built environment has been in place since at least the early twentieth century and retains its urban character.
- Exterior: The courthouse has undergone sensitive rehabilitation projects. The roof has been replaced, the exterior has been cleaned, repointed (where required), and sealed. The original wooden window frames were replaced with metal frames that are practically indistinguishable from the original. Otherwise, the historic design, materials, and workmanship of the courthouse exterior are intact.
- Interior: The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) and the Courts have invested in the restoration of the Great Hall and the historic courtrooms, including restoration of the ornamental plaster work and historic light fixtures. The original 1915 historic L-shaped corridor, marble floors and pilasters, ceiling vault and arch work, and ceiling ornamentation, are intact. With the exception of new drapery and carpeting and the addition of speakers, the courtrooms retain their historic look.

**Owner of Property:** U.S. General Services Administration

**Acreage of Property:** 1.5 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** In 1998, the United States Congress authorized the National Park Service (NPS) to study the history of racial desegregation in public education, and in 1999 Congress authorized the NPS to conduct a special resource study of civil rights sites. As a result of these two Congressional directives, the NHL Program began either preparing or contracting for the completion of NHL nomination forms for properties associated with the civil rights movement in the United States and racial desegregation in public education. Nominations for the three courthouses associated with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals were drafted as part of this special study.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

- NHL designation will complete the recognition of the federal government's impact on the modern civil rights movement through its executive, legislative, and now, judicial branches.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:** Designation. Dr. Stevens moved, Dr. Chen seconded; unanimous approval.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 2/20/15):**

Jesse D. Cannon, Jr., Architect, FAIA, Assistant Circuit Executive for Space & Facilities, United States Courts Fifth Judicial Court, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Allen D. Black, Fine, Kaplan, and Black, R.P.C., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**