



# Courtroom Friezes: East and West Walls

---

## INFORMATION SHEET

---

The architect of the Supreme Court Building, Cass Gilbert (1859–1934), selected Adolph A. Weinman (1870–1952), a noted Beaux-Arts sculptor of the period who had studied under Augustus Saint-Gaudens, to design the friezes that adorn the walls of the Courtroom. Weinman’s training stressed that a sculpture’s subject matter should correlate with the function of the building in which it was to be placed. In this case, he designed friezes portraying both allegorical representations of law, on the east and west walls, and historical lawgivers, on the north and south walls. It was common practice during this period to allow the sculptor artistic freedom to create art that would fit within the framework of the architect’s vision of the building. Thus, Weinman’s choice of symbols and figures were his own and reflected his training in the classical and Beaux-Arts traditions.

### *The East Wall Frieze*



The East Wall Frieze (*above*) is located directly above the Bench. At the center are two male figures: on the left is the *Majesty of Law* with a book of law at his side; to the right is the *Power of Government* who holds the *fascēs*, an ancient Roman symbol of authority. According to a letter from Weinman to Gilbert describing the design for this frieze, the pylon carved with the Roman numerals I to X between the two central figures symbolizes the first ten amendments to the Constitution, also known as the Bill of Rights. Behind the central group, an American eagle spreads its wings.

Immediately to either side of the central figures are *Wisdom*, on the left, who holds a lantern, and *Statecraft*, on the right, whose shield is emblazoned with the Scales of Justice. Weinman described the figural group to the left, led by a judge holding a book of law, as the “*The Defense of Human Rights and Protection of Innocence.*” He called the group to the right “*Safeguard of the Liberties and Rights of the People in their pursuit of Happiness.*”

## *The West Wall Frieze*



According to Weinman, the West Wall Frieze is an allegorical representation of “Good Versus Evil.” In this sculpture, the central female figures are *Justice* and *Divine Inspiration*. Leaning on a sheathed sword representing her might, *Justice* faces to the viewer’s right, staring down the forces of Evil. The winged figure of *Divine Inspiration* holds out the Scales of Justice.

Flanking these two figures are representations of *Wisdom*, to the left, with an owl perched on his shoulder, and *Truth*, to the right, holding a mirror and a rose. Moving to the left from the central figures are the “Powers of Good”: *Defense of Virtue*, *Charity*, *Peace*, *Harmony*, and *Security*. The “Powers of Evil,” moving to the right from the central group, are: *Vice and Crime*, *Corruption*, *Slander*, *Deception*, and *Despotic Power*.



*The Courtroom, c. 1998, showing the location of the East Wall Frieze above the Bench.*