The relationship between colonial American judicial institutions and the society in which they operated is an important subject which has received increasing attention these last few years. David Konig and William Nelson have taken a broad look at the way in which the law and courts reflected broad changes in the structure and values of early Massachusetts.\(^1\) Other scholars have focused on the way in which legal authorities enforced society’s rules against those who broke them.\(^2\) But the relationship between colonists and their courts needs to be explored further. How many and what kinds of legal activities did eighteenth-century Americans become involved in? Were the courts in their judicial capacity significant institutions in most people’s lives? If so, was this true for colonists of all backgrounds and socioeconomic traits, or only for particular groups?


Did the courts serve any special functions in heterogeneous communities? What role did they play in linking the people to their civic system?

This study attempts to answer these questions through an analysis of one community—Reading, Pennsylvania—during the era of the American Revolution. Reading contrasted sharply with the more fully-examined New England towns not only with respect to location, but with respect to economic structure, social composition, and governing authorities as well. Hence, this analysis will add breadth as well as depth to our understanding of judicial institutions in eighteenth-century life.

For simplicity's sake, the focus here is on legal activities in Reading during the single decade 1766-1775, and the statistical base is married male taxpayers present in sample year 1773. That year was typical of the town in the pre-revolutionary period, while married male taxpayers were clearly the dominant element within Reading's citizenry. They comprised 93 percent of all taxpayers in 1773, and probably at least nine-tenths of all adult males.

Reading was founded in 1752, one of several inland towns carefully planned by Proprietor Thomas Penn. Laid out in compact town lots on the banks of the Schuylkill River fifty-six miles northwest of Philadelphia, it was designed to serve as both the seat of government for newly-created Berks County, and as a secondary urban center for the Pennsylvania backcountry in general. The evidence suggests that Reading fulfilled the Proprietor's expectations nicely; by 1773 approximately 1,500 men, women, and children were living there.

Just who were these people and what was "the system" in Reading at this time? The town's most noticeable feature in 1773, and throughout the eighteenth century, was a large German population. While most

3 The year 1773 was chosen for its particularly good records, but this article derives from a larger study of Reading between 1767 and 1791: Laura Becker, "The American Revolution as a Community Experience: A Case Study of Reading, Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978). Reading tax lists are in the Historical Society of Berks County, Reading (hereafter cited as HSBC), and the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania Collections, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as HSP). Single men, women and minors had very different patterns of legal activity, which I have chosen not to discuss here and my sources very rarely mentioned married males who were not on the tax lists. Hence, the words "citizens," "townspeople," "taxpayers," and "men" will refer to married male taxpayers only.

4 For a more in-depth discussion of pre-Revolutionary Reading, see Becker, "The American Revolution as a Community Experience," Chapters 1-6.
colonial communities were settled by people of British background, five-sixths of the 255 married male taxpayers in Reading in 1773 were immigrants or the children of immigrants from Germany.® But Reading was actually a mixed community, with individuals representing no fewer than six nationalities and nine religious denominations, five of which had local congregations.®

There was also a considerable degree of economic diversity. As an inland market town and county seat, Reading was home to a wide range of craftsmen, along with businessmen, professionals, and laborers. At least sixty-one occupations were pursued by the town's 255 married male taxpayers. Naturally, these men varied in wealth as well. Inequality here was not as great as in larger colonial cities, but the tax lists reveal that the top 10 percent of taxpayers contributed nearly one-third of the total sum collected in Reading, while the bottom 30 percent paid only one-eighth.®

Reading citizens were also geographically mobile. Approximately one-third of the men living in the town in any given year prior to the Revolution had been there five years earlier, and, even excluding those who died, an equal proportion were gone five years later.®

The civil system under which this diversified, mobile group of eighteenth-century Americans lived was a fairly local one. Recent scholars have reaffirmed the pre-eminence of town and county government in colonial life, and Reading seems to fit this pattern.®

While both the British and Pennsylvania governments passed laws which affected all residents, they probably seemed remote to people living in backcountry towns such as this one. After all, the whole county elected only one representative to the colonial Assembly, and news of legislation filtered down irregularly to a community which lacked a

---

® Sources of information on place of birth include burial notes in Trinity Lutheran Church Records (HSP); Pennsylvania Archives, Archives (Philadelphia and Harrisburg, 1852-1935), Ser. 2 Vol. II, 345-386; M. S. Guiseppi, ed., Naturalizations of Foreign Protestants in the American and West Indian Colonies (Baltimore, 1964).

® Ethnic groups included Germans and Englishmen, along with a handful of Dutch, French, Scottish and Irish. There were Lutheran, Reformed, Quaker, Anglican and Catholic congregations, plus a few Presbyterians, Baptists, Mennonites and Jews. For detail, see Becker, "The American Revolution as a Community Experience," 28-33, 46-48, 224-243.

® Reading's economic structure is analyzed in ibid., Chapter 3.

® For an in-depth discussion, see ibid., 92-103.

local newspaper and lay beyond Philadelphia's immediate sphere.

Reading's citizens were undoubtedly more conscious of their county government, which was by far the most significant local government until the town was incorporated as a borough in 1783. Eighteenth-century Pennsylvania had a variety of individual county officials, such as the sheriff, the commissioners, and the recorder of deeds. But the main institutions were the courts.

The county courts, here as in most of eighteenth-century America, handled a variety of administrative duties, such as appointing constables, authorizing roads, and issuing tavern licenses. In Pennsylvania, however, their main functions were judicial, i.e. case oriented. And it is with these functions that this study is concerned.

Berks, like other Pennsylvania counties, had three courts which met in succession for a week or so four times a year and were presided over by local justices. The Court of Common Pleas handled litigation, the Court of Quarter Sessions heard minor criminal cases, and the Orphans Court was in charge of the estates of deceased persons. Significantly, however, one did not have to be a litigant, a criminal or an orphan to have dealings with these courts. On the contrary, a substantial proportion of the men in Reading became involved in judicial affairs in other ways: by serving as a member of a jury, a witness in court, or guardian to a minor; by petitioning the court, posting a bond for a criminal, or providing “surety” that a fee would be paid; by evaluating a dead man's real or personal estate prior to its division or sale; or by taking part in the proceedings as a judge or a lawyer.

Reading men appeared most frequently in the Court of Common Pleas. The majority of suits seem to have been instigated over some form of unpaid debt, reflecting the fact that the credit system was widely

---

10 Reading did have some town officials—constables, assessors, overseers of the poor—but they operated under the close direction of county officials.

11 County government is described in Wayne Bockleman, “Local Government in Colonial Pennsylvania,” in Daniels, Town and County, 216-237.

12 Wayne Bockleman contrasts the Pennsylvania courts with the more administration-oriented Virginia courts in his “Continuity and Change in Revolutionary Pennsylvania” (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1969), 71.

used and often abused in this town, as elsewhere. Fully half of Reading’s 1773 married male taxpayers showed up as plaintiffs or defendants in at least one suit during the decade before the Revolution, while more than one sixth were engaged in at least five suits in this period. Clearly, this court was an important local institution.

The Orphan’s Court also touched the lives of many townsmen. One out of every sixteen Reading taxpayers was appointed guardian to a local orphan, while nearly two-fifths were called upon to help estimate the value of a dead man’s estate between 1766 and 1775.

The number of people appearing in the Court of Quarter Sessions was particularly striking because the central judicial function of this body was the hearing of criminal cases, and very few Reading citizens were accused of breaking the law. In fact, only ten out of the 255 were brought before the justices for any kind of crime during the pre-Revolutionary decade, most for some form of disorderly conduct such as assault. However, many townsmen had contact with the Court of Quarter Sessions in a noncriminal capacity. Although the court served and drew on the services of all of Berks County, more than one-quarter of the married men on Reading’s 1773 tax list performed jury duty between 1766 and 1775, while one-eighth provided a bond or surety, appeared as a witness, or presented a petition. All together, at least forty percent of Reading’s citizens were directly involved in judicial proceedings in the Court of Quarter Sessions during the decade before the Revolution.

Recent studies by William Nelson and David Konig have shown that

---


15 Records of the Berks County Court of Common Pleas for this period are almost entirely "Issue Dockets" which simply list plaintiffs and defendants expected to appear. These records are in the HSBC and the Sheriff's Storeroom, (BCCH).

16 Guardians and real estate evaluators appear in the Orphans Court Records (BCCH, HSP). Signatures of people who evaluate personal estates are on the individual inventories of the deceased Registrar of Wills (BCCH).

17 There were five cases of assault and battery, one case of riot, and one each of forging a deed, operating a tavern without a liquor license, failing to support a wife, and committing adultery. See Records of the Court of Quarter Sessions (HSBC).
in New England many disputes never reached the courts, because the town meeting and church played an important role in arbitrating disagreements and disciplining those who misbehaved. This was not the case in Pennsylvania towns such as Reading, however. Although justices were empowered to settle disputes involving less than forty shillings, county courts were the only institutions handling criminal or civil cases. Private agreements were still possible, of course, and they cannot be quantified, but some interesting records do exist. For example, the following was entered in the books by Reading’s Recorder of Deeds in 1779:

Whereas the said John Fister and Henry Keely on Tuesday night the first day of this instant had a difference together, at the House of Charles Goben, innkeeper in Reading . . . which occasioned a Fight between them in which Fray, the said John Fister in his own defense, bit off a piece of the left ear of the said Henry Keely . . . and they the said John Fister and Henry Keely, being sensible of their folly and imprudence, they both being in violent passions, have for peace and quietness sake, amicably settled the same.

Keely agreed not to sue Fister or his heirs, while Fister publicly acknowledged his wrongdoing. The existence of this and similar formally-worded agreements suggests that Reading citizens had a firm grasp of and appreciation for legal approaches to problems even when they deemed it inconvenient or unnecessary to resort to the courts. But in any case, it is clear that a very substantial proportion of Reading men were directly involved with the formal legal institutions in their community. Counting the eight who presided over the three courts at one time or another in this period and the four who appeared as lawyers, nearly two-thirds of those on Reading’s 1773 tax list participated in at least one judicial proceeding during the single decade before the Revolution, while more than one-quarter participated in at least five.

What gives this finding particular significance is the fact that Reading was a heterogeneous community, and these men came from many different economic and social groups, including those one would expect to have a low rate of participation in legal affairs. Poorer people, for example, probably could not post a bond and seem unlikely candidates for the role of guardian or estate evaluator. And indeed, they


19 Mortgage Book CA, p. 105, Recorder of Deeds (BCCH). For another example of a private settlement, see Berks County Deeds, Book 8, p. 89 (BCCH).
hardly ever took on these roles. Of course, one might assume that they would be over represented as defendants in civil and criminal cases. However, Reading men who fell into the bottom 30 percent of the taxpaying population (all of whom were taxed at the lowest possible rate) sued more often than they were sued, and were no more likely to be accused of a crime than anyone else in town. Their overall rate of participation in legal affairs was lower than that of their richer neighbors in the decade before Revolution. (Only one-third appeared in court, compared to two-thirds of those in the middle 30 percent of taxpayers, four-fifths of those in the upper 30 percent, and nine-tenths of those in the top 10 percent.) But the fact that even among Reading's poorest citizens so many were involved indicates that legal activities were fairly common at all economic levels.

Legal activities were also common among all religious groups in Reading, including one whose members were not supposed to appear in court at all if they could avoid it. Quakers were urged to settle disputes with each other through their Monthly Meeting and were in principle supposed to take a patient, tolerant approach toward disagreements in general. Nevertheless, the small Quaker contingent in Reading was very active in the courthouse. Forty-six percent of those on the 1773 tax list were involved in at least one suit, and a solid 84.6% participated in some kind of judicial proceeding during the pre-revolutionary decade. This was, in fact, the highest rate for any major denomination in town, followed by the Anglicans at 81.1%, the German Reformed at 67.1%, and the Lutherans at 59.9%. The higher proportion of court appearances among Quakers and Anglicans probably reflects their superior wealth and command of the English language, which

20 Of the seventy-one men in Reading taxed at the lowest rate (£2) in 1773, only one served as a guardian, three as evaluators of an estate between 1766 and 1775. None posted a bond.

21 Indeed, this pattern held true in Reading throughout the Revolutionary period. In the five years I sampled between 1767 and 1791, the bottom 30% of taxpayers contributed only 22 to 29% of the local criminals—consistently less than the 30% they would have contributed if criminals had been drawn evenly from all strata of society.

22 These figures are biased in that nontaxpayers, who obviously fell at the bottom in terms of wealth, are not included. However, as noted earlier, such men comprised only a small fraction of local heads of households.


24 On wealth differences, see Becker, "The American Revolution as a Community Experience," p. 133. Virtually all Quakers and Anglicans in Reading were of Anglo-American heritage.
will be discussed shortly. But the fact that between three-and-four-fifths of each group appeared at least five times clearly indicates that court activities were common among all denominations.

The ethnic pattern is most intriguing of all. As noted earlier, Reading citizens were predominantly Germans—specifically, German immigrants—and they had to overcome significant cultural barriers in order to participate actively in the legal system. Since we know so little about the relationship between non-English colonists and civic institutions in colonial America, their case merits special attention.

Acculturation is a slow process, especially when the immigrant group is large, recently arrived, and densely settled, and there are substantial differences between the native culture and that of the new homeland. All of these conditions characterized the Germans in Reading. Most of the town’s eighteenth-century German residents arrived in America between 1745 and 1770, and they always formed a large majority. Old country ways were reinforced by the fact that everyone lived close together. (Residential Reading covered only 235 acres, so roughly 1,500 people were crowded into less than half a square mile.) Moreover, there was no governmental policy or even a set of expectations encouraging the assimilation of foreigners in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. Naturalization was available but not pressed, and its requirements were undemanding: proof of being a Protestant, seven years residency, and a loyalty oath. The only real effort to further assimilation in the colony was the charity school movement providing free English schools for immigrant children, and it was a dismal failure, due largely to German resistance. This certainly was the case in Reading: both the Lutheran and Reformed churches ran their own schools, much to the dismay of the local Anglican missionary, who complained that the Germans were “blindly attached to their native tongue” and “tho’ they might be at no loss for English schoolmasters, yet they choose to send their children to German schools.”


Further details on Reading’s immigrants can be found in Becker, “The American Revolution as a Community Experience,” 29-46, 461.

Despite the virtual cessation of new immigration from the Old Country after 1770, the German language predominated in Reading well into the nineteenth century. An observer passing through in 1795 commented that "great numbers of the inhabitants do not understand a word of English," and Reading's first newspaper, established in 1789, was in German. So were Lutheran and Reformed Church services in town until the mid-1800s.

Court sessions, on the other hand, were always conducted in English, and most of justices were of Anglo-American background. While interpreters were present at some and perhaps even most of the court sessions, there was clearly a language barrier for the Germans to overcome.

The law itself presented another barrier. By the 1700s, German legal traditions rested on a combination of customary and Roman law, with the latter increasingly dominant. While these traditions varied from one principality to the next, as a whole they differed significantly from the English-derived structures and procedures used in the colonies. For example, throughout eighteenth-century Germany legal rights, privileges, and punishments varied in a formal way according to one's class, and sometimes one's religion. These variations were written into the law. Thus, noblemen, burghers, and peasants, sometimes even merchants and artisans, were treated differently in the courts by law.

With respect to civil procedure, suits in Germany were decided by a single judge after a highly ritualized and lengthy process involving twelve appearances and a formally-structured complaint.
In criminal cases, guilt was determined by the testimony of two witnesses or by a confession from the accused, often achieved through torture. Except in very isolated instances, there was no trial by jury.\(^{33}\) Princes could circumvent the established courts entirely and make arbitrary legal decisions—a process known as *Kabinettjustiz*, which was apparently used with increasing frequency as the eighteenth century progressed. On a more local level, members of the landowning aristocracy had “patrimonial jurisdiction” over their tenants in a wide variety of legal matters, and tenancy was common throughout Germany in this period.\(^{34}\)

Coming from such a background, facing a language barrier as well, German immigrants certainly would have found active participation in legal affairs more difficult than men of English or Anglo-American birth. And the latter group did have a higher rate of participation in Reading (77.4%). But the Germans also went to court in striking numbers. Sixty-one percent of those on the 1773 tax list were in court at least once during the decade before the Revolution, nearly a quarter of them at least five times.\(^{35}\) How do we account for this?

Part of the answer lies in the characteristics of the immigrants themselves, for they seem to have been prepared for civic participation in a number of ways. One of the most important factors was their high rate of literacy. Almost all of the German men in Reading in 1773 could sign their names. The language barrier was obviously there—most signed in German script—and it is unfortunate that signatures are our only measure of literacy, because they are a crude measure indeed. But even “technical literacy,” as Lawrence Cremin has termed this evidence of a most basic education, opens up an individual’s world and could facilitate adjustment to a new legal environment.\(^{36}\)

The form and background of their emigration also had an impact on the extent of the Germans’ civic participation. The Lutherans and Reformed, or “church Dutch” as they are called, came to America in an essentially disorganized manner, as individuals or families rather than


\(^{35}\)Given the factors just discussed, and the fact that the English were noticeably wealthier (their average 1773 tax was £7.1, compared to the German average of £4.3), the difference in participation between the two ethnic groups is not very large.

in larger units such as congregations or villages. Thus, as one put it,

The mass of Germans strangled and struggled their way into the life and culture which was developing in the colonies. . . . [This] provided that condition of malleability which made it possible for the environmental pressures of colonial life to forge these Germans integrally into the structure of the rising American nation. . . .

Environmental pressures were mitigated somewhat in Reading because the Germans were in the majority. But they came from a variety of states, and their legal traditions were not uniform. Therefore, the Germans in Reading would have had difficulty reconstructing their familiar legal world even if they had wanted to or Pennsylvania had allowed it.

In all probability, they did not want to. In many instances, the decision to emigrate had been fueled by discontent with "the system" in the Old Country: corruption in the courts, plus the absence of civil and legal parity, equality of economic opportunity, religious toleration and security before the law." Generally speaking, these benefits were offered in Pennsylvania, which not only helped inspire the Germans to choose this particular colony as a more-or-less permanent new home in the first place, but also probably made them more willing to get involved in legal affairs than later immigrant groups whose motives for coming were more strictly economic and whose planned stay in America more temporary.

External pressures also pushed the Germans into legal activities. While Pennsylvania was liberal with respect to the retention of "personal" forms of behavior such as language and religion, civic behavior was more closely directed. This meant that a certain amount of legal activity, such as defense against a civil or criminal accusation, was virtually compulsory. But the substantial rate and diverse forms of participation, not only among the Germans but among most social and

38 Reading Germans whose birthplaces are known came from Baden, Wurtemburg, the Palatine, Hesse, Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, Franconia, Saxony, Prussia, Westphalia, and Hanover. On the importance of territorial law, see Huebner, A History of Germanic Private Law, Chapter 1.
39 Wolf, "The Americanization of the German Lutherans," 37-63 (especially 40-41); Horst Dippel, Germany and the American Revolution, 1770-1800 (Chapel Hill, 1977), 348-349.
economic groups in Reading, suggest that there was something in the nature of the community which gave the courts their prominence.

On the most superficial level, one cannot ignore the fact that Reading was a county seat, because this meant that the courts met right in town. Thus, they were convenient to local citizens. But more importantly this was a pluralistic, individualistic market town. In short, it was just the kind of community most likely to need and to accept the use of formal legal institutions.

William Nelson's recent work on Plymouth County, Massachusetts, supports the notion that commercial people—businessmen, artisans, etc.—were most likely to have wide-ranging economic dealings, and hence were most likely to need the courts to settle disputes over money. Reading was also fairly large by colonial standards, with a diversified population and significant in- and out-migration. All of these factors promoted an individualistic, impersonal atmosphere. Comprised entirely of residents who joined the community simply by purchasing a lot, Reading had none of the New England towns' utopian, communal spirit to hold it back from embracing formal, impersonal means of settling disputes and maintaining order. There were no all-encompassing private institutions, such as a single church, to which everyone belonged and whose authority everyone acknowledged. And arbitration as a regular device was simply not feasible in a community where people had such varied backgrounds and came and went so frequently. (Indeed, by the late seventeenth century, arbitration was no longer considered viable even in the more stable and homogeneous New England towns.)

On the other hand, Reading and its institutions were sufficiently stable so that neither widespread violence nor aggressive extra-legal action was needed to insure that "justice was done." Behavior of this kind did occur in towns close to the frontier, such as Paxton, Pennsylvania. It even occurred in more established towns such as Salem, Massachusetts, where disputes prompted threats, violence, destruction of property and even attempts at witchcraft among the minority who did

not accept the legitimacy or the efficacy of litigation. But aside from a few cases of assault (which could have been spontaneous emotional outbursts rather than calculated attempts to settle outstanding grievances) there are no records of extra-legal actions in Reading. People here apparently felt that the system worked in a sufficiently open and effective fashion to make it worth using regularly.

Because legal activities were so common, they had real significance in the lives of Reading's citizens. Aside from their entertainment and ritualistic value, county court proceedings provided an important arena for intergroup interaction. Along with markets and fairs, they served as an opportunity to meet people from outside the town. They also enabled members of different groups within Reading to get to know each other better. For example, while few marriages crossed ethnic lines in pre-Revolutionary Reading, and private organizations such as the local Library Company and the Rainbow Fire Company were largely unmixed, men of English and German background did meet in the court house.

Some of their interactions, of course, were hostile. But even law suits bring people into direct contact, helping them to learn about each other. And other kinds of legal activities had men of different ethnicity (and religion and occupation and wealth) working cooperatively as a unit. Various teams were brought together by the

---


44 Bruce Daniels and the contributors to his volume *Town and County* drew the same conclusions about local government, and students of violence have asserted that "the potential for vigilantism varies positively with the intensity and scope of belief that the regime is ineffective in dealing with challenges." See H. Jon Rosenbaum and Peter Sederburg (eds.), *Vigilante Politics* (Philadelphia, 1966), 7.


46 During the pre-Revolutionary period, fewer than one percent of the taxpayers in Reading had ethnically-mixed marriages. Members of the Reading Library Company and the Rainbow Fire Company appear respectively in Documents of the Louis Richards Collection (HSBC) and Morton Montgomery, *A History of Berks County in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1886), 814.

47 Konig also feels that conflict serves a social function, and he cites some of the anthropological literature on this subject in *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts*, xiii.
courts, to evaluate a dead man’s estate or to serve on a jury, for example. Significantly, there is no evidence of overt discrimination for or against any particular groups when it came to making up these “teams,” with the possible exception of the town’s poorest citizens. Otherwise, all types of Reading men participated. Thus, the courts played an “integrative” role. They were probably an agent of assimilation for the immigrants, and they helped bring Reading citizens of different backgrounds and different characteristics into close contact.

Legal activities also provided an all-important point of contact between “the people” and “the system” in general. Most historians interested in civic participation have focused on voting patterns. But in addition to the lack of data hampering this effort, one must also take into account the nature of the civic system. In pre-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, for example, a large proportion of officials were appointed, so there wasn’t that much to vote for. This pattern, along with the fact that backcountry Berks County had only one representative in the Assembly and only minimal town government prior to the Revolution, gave the courts and court activities an even greater importance in the civic system than they otherwise would have had.

Furthermore, court activities themselves can be construed as political acts. In a statement referring to law suits but applicable to other forms of legal action as well, Joel Grossman and Austin Sarat have asserted that “Litigation is political in the sense that the very act of involving the formal, public authority of the courts . . . is part of the political process. . . . [It] is a form of political participation even if the individual who enters the judicial arena is not fully cognizant of the political ramifications of his act.”

48 For jury lists, see the Court of Quarter Sessions Records (HSBC). Teams evaluating estates are listed in the Orphans Court Records (BCCH and HSP).

49 The work on this subject is voluminous. Classic studies include Robert E. Brown, Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780 (New York, 1955); Robert E. Brown, Virginia 1705-1786: Democracy or Aristocracy? (New York, 1964); Charles Kent, Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent (New York, 1961); Charles American Revolutionaries in the Making.


In conclusion, it is clear that the citizens of pre-Revolutionary Reading were frequently and directly involved in a variety of legal activities: law suits, jury duty, bond posting, petitions to the court, guardianship and the evaluation of estates, among others. Significantly, those involved had a wide range of socio-economic characteristics. They came from the lower as well as the upper wealth brackets, all major local denominations, and different ethnic groups, including German immigrants. This shows that the courts were important generally, not just to a small coterie of men, that they met general needs of the townspeople. Widespread participation on the part of Reading residents also enabled the courts to serve an integrating function. Finally, as a form of civic participation in a society with a relatively limited number of ways to participate, legal activities played an important part in linking “the people” to “the system” at this point in American history.

Clemson University

Laura L. Becker