

# TRUE or FALSE?

**When you sit on a jury, you may vote on the verdict according to your conscience.**

“TRUE”, you say—and you’re right. But then...

[1] *Why do most judges tell you that you may consider “only the facts” — that you must not let your conscience, opinion of the law, or the motives of the defendant affect your decision?*

In a trial by jury, the judge’s job is to referee the event and provide neutral legal advice to the jury, beginning with a full explanation of a juror’s rights and responsibilities.

But judges only rarely “fully inform” jurors of their rights, especially their right to judge the law itself and vote on the verdict according to conscience. In fact, they regularly assist the prosecution by dismissing any prospective juror who will admit knowing about this right — beginning with anyone who also admits having qualms with the law.

**We can only speculate on why:** Disrespect for the idea of government “of, by, and for the people”? Unwillingness to part with power? Distrust of the citizenry? Fear that prosecutors may damage their careers, saying they’re “soft on crime”? Ignorance of the rights that jurors necessarily acquire when they take on the responsibility of judging an accused person?

[2] *How can people get fair trials if the jurors are told they can’t use conscience?*

Many people *don’t* get fair trials. Too often, jurors actually end up apologizing to the person they’ve convicted — or to the community for acquitting a defendant when evidence of guilt seems perfectly clear.

Something is definitely wrong when the jurors feel apologetic about their verdict. They should never have to explain “I wanted to use my conscience, but the judge made us take an oath to apply the law as given to us, like it or not.”

Too often, jurors who try to vote their consciences are talked out of it by other jurors who don’t know their rights, or who believe they “have to” reach a unanimous verdict because the judge said that a hung jury would “unduly burden the taxpayers.”

But if jurors were supposed to judge “only the facts”, their job could be done by computer. It is precisely *because* people have feelings, opinions, wisdom, experience, and conscience that we depend upon jurors, not machines, to judge court cases.

**SO, WHEN IT’S YOUR TURN to serve, be aware:**

- [1] *you may—and should—vote your conscience;*
- [2] *you cannot be forced to obey a “juror’s oath”;*
- [3] *you have the right to “hang” the jury with your vote if you cannot agree with the other jurors!*

**What is “FJIA”, the Fully Informed Jury Association?**

“FJIA” is a national educational non-profit organization which tells citizens more about their rights, powers and duties as jurors than they are likely to be told in court. FJIA believes that “liberty and justice for all” won’t return to America until the citizens are again fully informed of — and using — their power as jurors.

**Resume? Did judges fully inform jurors of their rights in the past?**

Yes, it was normal procedure in the early days of our nation, and in colonial times. And if the judge didn’t tell them, the defense attorney often would. America’s Founders realized that trials by juries of ordinary citizens, fully informed of their powers as jurors, would confine the government to its proper role as the servant, not the master, of the people.

Our third president, **Thomas Jefferson**, put it like this: “I consider trial by jury as the only anchor yet imagined by man by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution.”

**John Adams**, our second president, had this to say about the juror: “It is not only his right, but his duty...to find the verdict according to his own best understanding, judgment, and conscience, though in direct opposition to the direction of the court.”

**These sound like voices of experience. Were they?**

Yes. Only decades had passed since freedom of the press was established in the colonies when a jury decided **John Peter Zenger** was “not guilty” of seditious libel. He was charged with this “crime” for printing true, but damaging, news stories about the Royal Governor of New York Colony.

“Truth is no defense,” the court told the jury! But the jury decided to reject bad law, and acquitted.

**Why?** Because defense attorney **Andrew Hamilton** informed the jury of its rights: he told the story of **William Penn’s** trial — of the courageous London jury which refused to find him guilty of preaching what was then an illegal religion (Quakerism). His jurors stood by their verdict even though they were held without food, water, or toilet facilities for several days.

They were then fined and imprisoned for acquitting Penn — until England’s highest court acknowledged their right to reject both law and fact, and to find a verdict according to conscience. It was exercise of that right in the Penn trial which eventually led to recognition of free speech, religious freedom, and peaceable assembly as individual rights.

American colonists regularly depended on juries to thwart bad law sent over from England. The British then restricted trial by

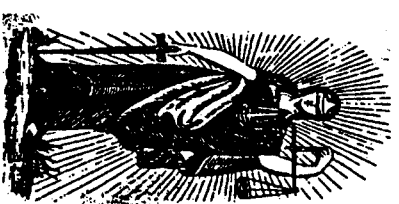
jury and other rights which juries had helped secure. Result? The Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution! Afterwards, to protect the rights they’d fought for from future attack, the Founders of the new nation placed trial by jury — meaning tough, fully informed juries — in both the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Bad law — special-interest legislation which tramples our rights — is no longer sent here from Britain. But our own legislatures keep us well supplied...Now, more than ever, we need juries to protect us!

**Why haven’t I heard about “jury veto power” or “rights” before?**

During the 1800’s, powerful special-interest groups inspired a series of judicial decisions which tried to limit jury veto power. While no court has yet dared to deny that juries can “nullify” or “veto” a law, or “bring in a general verdict”, the Supreme Court in 1895 held, hypocritically, that jurors need not be *told* their rights!

That’s why, these days, it’s a rare and courageous attorney who will risk being cited for contempt for informing the jury about its rights without obtaining the judge’s prior approval. It’s also why the idea of jury rights is not taught in (government) schools.



Still, the jury’s power to reject bad law continues to be recognized, as in 1972 when the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the jury has an “...irrevocable and irreversible power...to acquit in disregard of the instruction on the law given by the trial judge. The pages of history shine upon instances of the jury’s exercise of its prerogative to disregard instructions of the judge, for example, acquittals under the *fugitive slave law*.” (473 F. 2d 1113)

And let us never forget that in the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, the defendants argued that they were “only following the law”. The Tribunal’s response was, quite correctly, that they each had a personal responsibility to judge the morality of the law, and should have acted according to conscience!

**What will happen when proposed FJIA legislation becomes law?**

Three good things: (1) Unjustly accused persons and their trial jurors, as well as crime victims and their communities — will come away satisfied that *the jury system actually delivers justice*;

(2) *Legislators will again be able to regard trends in jury verdicts as expressions of public opinion on the law*, which they can consider along with the one-sided slants they get from special-

interest groups, lobbyists and other political sources. With better information, they can better represent the people; and

(3) When the laws of the land again reflect and respect the will of the people, the people, in turn, will show *more respect for the law*.

## What can one person do to make a difference?

• **BE ALERT!** *Almost every day, new attempts are made to limit jury power, mostly via subtle changes in the rules of courtroom procedure, sometimes by court decisions, legislation, or by the creation of special courts that do not allow jury trials for the accused!*

• **BE AWARE!** *Thousands of harmless people are in prison simply because their juries weren't fully informed. The U.S. now leads the world in percent of population behind bars! New prisons are springing up everywhere, and too many of them are filling up with people whose only "crime" was to displease the government "master", not to victimize anyone (in other words, political prisoners).*

• **BE ACTIVE!** *Tell others what you know about jury veto power!\* Let them know that before a jury reaches a verdict, each member should consider:*

[1] *Is this a good law?*

[2] *If so, is the law being justly applied?*

[3] *Was the Bill of Rights honored in the arrest?*

[4] *Will the punishment fit the crime?*

## Is there a local FIJA group?

Probably—most people who receive this leaflet get it from someone on a team of local activists. Local activists may also be working with lawmakers for passage of FIJA legislation; others may be participating in radio talk shows or placing ads and public service announcements, speaking to other local groups, applying FIJA bumper stickers to their automobiles, wearing FIJA t-shirts, or otherwise getting the word out.

Since 1991, local FIJA groups in 18 states have persuaded their state governors to proclaim Sept. 5 (the day of Perini's acquittal) as "Jury Rights Day", often celebrating it by issuing news releases and leafleting courthouses — thus using our First Amendment right to explain how juries can protect the rest of our rights, simply by acquitting defendants who've been charged with breaking a bad law.

\* *Discretion may be the better part of valor. FIJA activists have been so effective at telling jurors the truth about jury veto power that judges and prosecutors nowadays not only try keep fully informed citizens off of juries, but have sometimes charged those who do inform them with contempt of court, even with jury tampering. So, if you decide to "be active", we advise you to observe any court order directed at your leafleting or other educational activity and, if you are empaneled to serve on a jury, not to distribute jury-power educational literature to fellow jurors.*

## —TO RECEIVE MORE INFORMATION—

Call 1-800-TEL-JURY, and tell FIJA where to send your *free "Jury Power Information Kit"*. It contains a history of jury veto power, tells what to do if you're going to be on a jury (or facing one), and includes an introductory reading list.

It also includes an insert with a list of *people who coordinate local jury rights groups* (most states), and who will welcome your call. The flip side contains information on how you can help support FIJA National, plus a form for ordering materials.

Or, *telephone FIJA National HQ at 406-793-5550*, and leave a message for administrative director Kathy Ballard. She may have the answers or materials you seek, or refer you to someone who does.

*The Fully Informed Jury Association also maintains a very useful web site.* It not only contains additional information about jury veto power, and about FIJA, but also lists upcoming trials, where the defendant has told us he/she wants the jury to learn about its right to bring in a verdict according to conscience. We don't promise that FIJA activists will read every posting and show up on jury selection day, armed with leaflets (like this one), but at least posting makes it possible for them to do so.

The site is <http://www.FIJA.org>. If you wish to post your *own* trial, just follow the instructions. FIJA, of course, reserves the right to refuse to post any trial which it deems inappropriate for listing.

## Restore liberty & justice by jury!



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FROM THE FULLY INFORMED JURY ASSOCIATION  
FACTUAL INFORMATION  
about  
JURY SERVICE

# FOR MORE INFO

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