

The  
JOURNAL OF LAW

A PERIODICAL LABORATORY OF LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 4, Number 1

*containing issues of*

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*and*

NEW VOICES



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2014

# THE JOURNAL OF LAW

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# TABLES OF CONTENTS

---

Volume 4

•

Number 1

•

2014

---

Recognition and Volition: Remembering the Retirement of  
Justice Gabriel Duvall

by Ross E. Davies .....1

## • NEW VOICES •

Introducing *New Voices*

by Suzanna Sherry .....11

Whose Majority Is It Anyway? Elite Signaling and  
Future Public Preferences

by Will Marks .....13

with a preface by Suzanna Sherry .....13

The People or the Court: Who Reigns Supreme, How, and Why?

by Matthew P. Downer .....31

with a preface by Suzanna Sherry .....31

The Case for Judicial Review of Direct Democracy

by Elise Hofer .....49

with a preface by Suzanna Sherry .....49

## • THE POST •

Introduction

by Anna Ivey ..... 67

A roadmap for legal attacks on the employer mandate delay,  
ACA Death Spiral, Feb. 12, 2014

by Seth J. Chandler..... 69

Getting Law Review Fans Out of the Closet:

Liptak on Jacobs and Waxman,

PrawfsBlawg, Oct. 21, 2013

by Gabriel J. Chin ..... 85

## TABLES OF CONTENTS

The Supreme Court Issues a 5-4 Decision on Where to Order Lunch, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Mar. 29, 2012 by Eric Hague .....	87
Happy New Year and farewell, Hercules and the Umpire, Jan. 1, 2014 by Richard G. Kopf .....	91
A Lawyer and Partner, and Also Bankrupt . . . for reasons that have nothing to do with being a non-equity partner . . . , Credit Slips, Jan. 24, 2014 by Adam J. Levitin .....	93
Stephen Glass, situational forces, and the Fundamental Attribution Error, Legal Ethics Forum, Feb. 4, 2014 by W. Bradley Wendel.....	99

## OPENING REMARKS

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# RECOGNITION AND VOLITION

## REMEMBERING THE RETIREMENT OF JUSTICE GABRIEL DUVALL

*Ross E. Davies<sup>†</sup>*

When Gabriel Duvall resigned from the U.S. Supreme Court in January 1835, he became its first conventional retiree – the first Justice to voluntarily leave the Court after making a career of it. Everyone before Duvall had either died in office or left after serving briefly (anywhere from four months to five years). Duvall served for more than 23 years. By leaving while still alive, after long service, and at an advanced age (he was 82), Duvall: (a) gave his fellow Justices their first occasion to publicly salute a departing colleague who had devoted himself to the Court, and (b) gave himself a dignified, respectable ending to a long and successful career in the law. But his colleagues did not rise to the occasion, and history has not granted him that ending. This little article is an attempt to partially offset those defects.

## RECOGNITION, BELATED

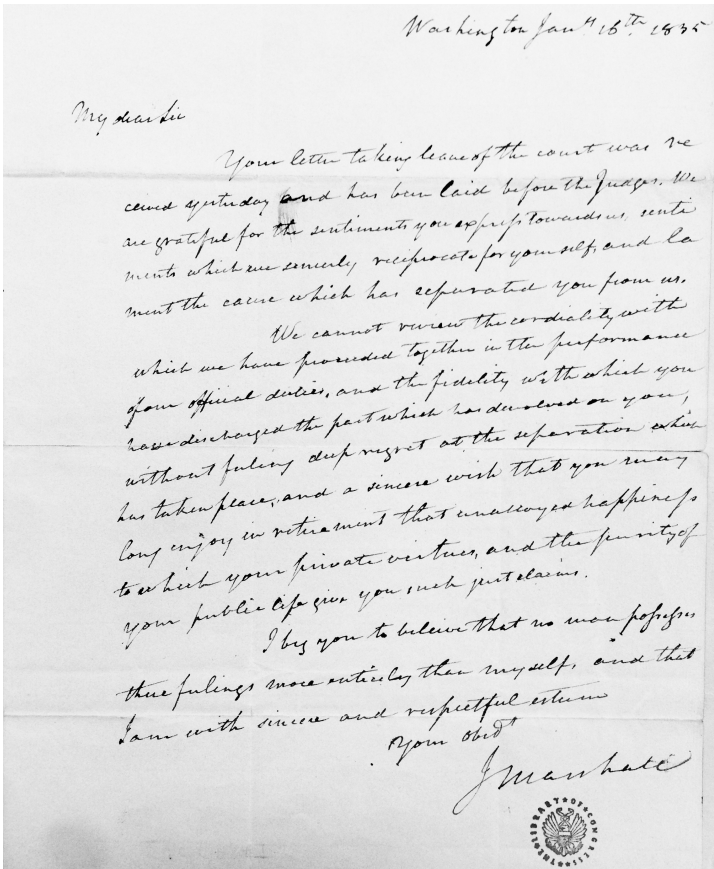
On Monday, January 12, 1835, the Supreme Court opened its January Term. Duvall was absent that day, and thereafter. On January 15, Chief Justice John Marshall received Duvall's letter of resignation from the Court. It was no surprise (see page 4 below). The next day, Marshall replied – for himself and the other Justices – with a kind letter of his own.<sup>1</sup> It is reproduced and transcribed here:

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<sup>†</sup> Professor of law, George Mason University; editor-in-chief, the *Green Bag*.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from John Marshall to Gabriel Duvall (Jan. 16, 1835), Papers of Gabriel Duvall, Box 1, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

ROSS E. DAVIES



My dear Sir

Washington Jan. 16th. 1835

Your letter taking leave of the Court was received yesterday and has been laid before the Judges. We are grateful for the sentiments you express towards us, sentiments which we sincerely reciprocate for yourself, and lament the cause which has separated you from us.

We cannot review the cordiality with which we have proceeded together in the performance of our official duties, and the fidelity with which you have discharged the part which has devolved on you, without feeling deep regret at the separation which has taken place, and a sincere wish that you may long enjoy in retirement that unalloyed happiness to which your private virtues, and the purity of your public life give you such just claims.

I beg you to believe that no man possesses these feelings more entirely than myself, and that I am with sincere and respectful esteem

Your obedt  
J Marshall



Marshall's letter did not make its way into the *U.S. Reports* or any other publication at the time. Instead, it remained a private (though not secret<sup>2</sup>) communiqué until 2006, when it was printed in *The Papers of John Marshall*.<sup>3</sup> This seems a bit unfair to Duvall, because the Court had published a salute to every other recently departed Justice: Henry Livingston (1823), Thomas Todd (1826), Robert Trimble (1828), Bushrod Washington (1829), and William Johnson (1834). Of course all of them had died in office. The Trimble and Washington tributes were even titled "Obituary."<sup>4</sup> And the Court would publish an "Obituary" for Duvall, too, after his death in 1844.<sup>5</sup> More strikingly odd was the failure to note his departure at all for several weeks. Even then he was not mentioned by name; rather, when circuit assignments were announced on February 4, the entry for the Fourth Circuit (formerly Duvall's territory) merely read, "none, there being a vacancy."<sup>6</sup> The first post-retirement mention of Duvall's name in the Court seems to have come nearly two years after the fact: On January 9, 1837, Philip Barbour (Duvall's successor) submitted to the Court an order from President Andrew Jackson assigning Barbour to the Fourth Circuit, "in the place of Gabriel Duvall, resigned."<sup>7</sup>

At the next conventional retirement – Justice Samuel Nelson's in 1872 – the Court was more generous, promptly publishing its farewell.<sup>8</sup> And in modern times, friendly and public acknowledgment by the Court of a Justice's retirement is a matter of routine.<sup>9</sup>

On the one hand, this neglect of Duvall – his colleagues could not even be bothered to give him a quick public wave goodbye – might be taken to support David Currie's suggestion that Duvall was the "Most Insignificant Justice."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Marshall's letter – honoring "the fidelity with which you have discharged the part [of

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., G. EDWARD WHITE, *THE MARSHALL COURT AND CULTURAL CHANGE* 327 (1988).

<sup>3</sup> 12 *THE PAPERS OF JOHN MARSHALL* 432 (2006) (Charles F. Hobson, ed.).

<sup>4</sup> *Obituary*, 27 U.S. v (1829) (Trimble); *Obituary*, 28 U.S. vii (1830) (Washington).

<sup>5</sup> *Obituary*, 43 U.S. v (1844) (Duvall).

<sup>6</sup> Minutes, Supreme Court U.S., p. 3172 (Feb. 4, 1835) (National Archives microfilm).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at p. 3437 (Jan. 9, 1837).

<sup>8</sup> See Ross E. Davies, *Pioneer of Retirement*, 17 *GREEN BAG* 2D 209 (2014).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., J. S. Ct. 1030 (June 28, 2010) (retirement of John Paul Stevens); J. S. Ct. 1020 (June 29, 2009) (David Souter); J. S. Ct. 806 (Mar. 27, 20006) (Sandra Day O'Connor).

<sup>10</sup> David P. Currie, *The Most Insignificant Justice*, 50 *U. CHI. L. REV.* 466 (1983).

our official duties] which has devolved on you” – might be taken to rebut Currie. It is too bad the letter did not appear in print until 23 years after Currie wrote. How might he have dealt with it?

## VOLITION, INFLATED

Why then did Duvall retire from the Court rather than expire on it? His resignation letter is nowhere to be found,<sup>11</sup> and so we cannot be certain what “cause” it was that prompted Marshall to “lament the cause which has separated you from us.”

It was probably declining health. Contemporary accounts have him first announcing his plans in the autumn of 1834. The November 7 *Farmers’ Cabinet* (a Massachusetts newspaper), for example, reported:

In our last we . . . stated that it was the intention of Judge Duvall to resign his seat upon the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States – This report is confirmed by a gentleman who has recently conversed with the judge upon the subject. The reasons assigned for this act are his advanced age and the infirmities consequent thereon – particularly a partial deafness, disqualifies him for a proper discharge of his judicial functions.<sup>12</sup>

It also seems clear that any infirmities were physical, not mental, and that Duvall had admirers who wished him to stay. For example, in a letter written shortly after the news of Duvall’s retirement plans broke, Richard Peters, the Court’s reporter of decisions, told him:

In common with your many friends I have seen the communication of your determination to leave the Supreme Court. . . . The last day our lamented friend Mr. [William] Wirt was in this Supreme Court the subject of your resignation was spoken off. “I trust” said that great and good man “Judge Duvall will not leave the bench as long as the Chief Justice remains upon it. Who desires him to resign – no one who knows him; no one who practices in the Circuit in which he presides.”<sup>13</sup>

And indeed, while Duvall’s hearing was surely failing, he was just as surely remaining an active judge in his later years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See 12 THE PAPERS OF JOHN MARSHALL at 433 n.1.

<sup>12</sup> *Judge Duvall of the Supreme Court*, FARMERS’ CABINET, Nov. 7, 1834, at 3.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Rich[ard] Peters to Judge Duval[l] at 1, 4 (Nov. 10, 1834), Duvall Papers.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *U.S. v. Cunningham*, NILES’ REGISTER, June 11, 1831, at 257 (C.C.U.S.D. Md.); *U.S. v. Richmond*, SOUTHERN PATRIOT, Nov. 15, 1834, at 2 (C.C.U.S.D. Md.). And he remained sharp in retirement. See WHITE, THE MARSHALL COURT at 326.

The newspapers went back and forth on the subject. For example, on November 27, the *Baltimore Patriot* reported: “Judge Duvall, has withdrawn the resignation, which he had tendered, of his seat on the bench of the Supreme Court of the U.S.”<sup>15</sup> A few days later the same paper said its earlier report was “wholly destitute of foundation.”<sup>16</sup>

Speculation ended with Duvall’s retirement in January 1835, and the nomination of Roger Taney to replace him. The Taney nomination failed, and Barbour took Duvall’s seat, while Taney’s turn on the Court came the next year, when he replaced Marshall as Chief Justice.

The story of Duvall’s unusual but easily understandable retirement remained unchanged for decades. His 1844 “Obituary” in the *U.S. Reports* simply referred to his long service and retirement. Newspaper obits said he “retired to private life only when warned of the necessity of doing so by a growing deafness, which disqualified him from longer discharging the judicial function with satisfaction to himself.”<sup>17</sup> Books on the Court did the same. A Joseph Story biography (1851): “In consequence of the infirmities of age, Mr. Justice Duvall also resigned his position on the Bench in the early part of the succeeding January, and Mr. Taney was nominated to supply the vacancy.”<sup>18</sup> A volume about the Chief Justices (1856): Duvall “continued in the discharge of the duties of this place for a period of nearly a quarter of a century, when, resigning his seat on account of the infirmities of age, he was succeeded by Philip P. Barbour . . . .”<sup>19</sup> And so on.

Then, in 1872 – 37 years after Duvall’s retirement and after all the principal actors in it were dead – came the *Memoir of Roger Brooke Taney*, by Taney’s worshipful semi-official biographer, Samuel Tyler. Here is Tyler’s version of Duvall’s retirement:

He was violently opposed to General Jackson and his policy. He was now advanced in age, and wished to resign his seat on the bench. But he feared that General Jackson would appoint a gentleman of great abilities as a lawyer, but of too much political ambition, as he thought, to

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<sup>15</sup> BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCHANT ADVERTISER, Nov. 27, 1834, at 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Judge Duvall*, BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCHANT ADVERTISER, Dec. 6, 1834, at 2.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., *Death of Judge Duvall*, SOUTHERN PATRIOT, Mar. 11, 1844, at 2.

<sup>18</sup> 2 LIFE AND LETTERS OF JOSEPH STORY 182-83 (1851) (William W. Story, ed.).

<sup>19</sup> GEORGE VAN SANTVOORD, SKETCHES OF THE LIVES AND JUDICIAL SERVICES OF THE CHIEF-JUSTICES OF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES 488 (1856).

be elevated to the Supreme Court. He expressed this opinion to a particular friend, Thomas William Carroll, the Clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States. Mr. Carroll, who was opposed in politics to Mr. Taney, knew that Judge Duvall, like himself, had the greatest admiration of his abilities and his character. He, in some way, found out that General Jackson would appoint Mr. Taney in case Judge Duvall resigned, and communicated this information to the Judge. Judge Duvall thereupon resigned his seat upon the bench in January, 1835.<sup>20</sup>

It is a juicy story, one that scholars have found hard to resist.<sup>21</sup> Which is a more intriguing cause of judicial change, bad health or back-room politicking? But no evidence supports Tyler, at least none I can find. His story has the odor of another fable: Mason Weems's disreputable tale of George Washington and the cherry tree. Both stories – of Washington's personal integrity, of Taney's judicial character – are appealing to admirers, and practically impossible to disprove. They are, however, equally impossible to prove, being free of support in the historical record or pre-existing literature.<sup>22</sup> And Tyler's story is even weaker than Weems's. It is not only unsupported, but also implausible. First, telling a Justice (Duvall) his or her seat will be filled by the chief operative (Taney) of a President whose policies that Justice “violently oppose[s]” would be, if anything, a deterrent to retirement. Second, the real Washington had the integrity of the tree-chopping boy. The real Taney's judicial character was not so pure.<sup>23</sup>

The plainer, more plausible story – based on the available record – is that Duvall remained a Justice until he felt he was no longer up to the job, and then he retired. Perhaps he even believed so deeply in his country's Constitution that he trusted its mechanisms to fill his seat with someone worthy, though maybe not to his tastes. It was a dignified, respectable ending to a long and successful career. Duvall deserves that legacy, not Tyler's Taney-serving fantasy.

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<sup>20</sup> SAMUEL TYLER, *MEMOIR OF ROGER BROOKE TANEY*, LL.D. 239-40 (1872).

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., CARL BRENT SWISHER, *ROGER B. TANEY* 311-12 (1935); CARL B. SWISHER, *THE TANEY PERIOD* 22-23 (1974) (same story, extra guilt); Irving Dilliard, *Gabriel Duvall*, in 1 *THE JUSTICES OF THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT* 250 (1997) (relying on Swisher); Charles Fairman, *The Retirement of Federal Judges*, 51 *HARV. L. REV.* 397, 406 (1938).

<sup>22</sup> See generally Marcus Cunliffe, *Introduction*, in MASON L. WEEMS, *THE LIFE OF WASHINGTON* ix-xlix (1809; 1962; 2001 prtg.); see also *id.* at 12.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., *Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857).

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Volume 1 • Number 1 • Spring 2014

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*continued inside . . .*

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# New Voices

Volume 1 • Number 1 • Spring 2014

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# CONTENTS

## Introducing *New Voices*

by Suzanna Sherry ..... 11

## Whose Majority Is It Anyway? Elite Signaling and Future Public Preferences

by Will Marks..... 13

with a *preface* by Suzanna Sherry..... 13

## The People or the Court: Who Reigns Supreme, How, and Why?

by Matthew P. Downer ..... 31

with a *preface* by Suzanna Sherry..... 31

## The Case for Judicial Review of Direct Democracy

by Elise Hofer..... 49

with a *preface* by Suzanna Sherry..... 49

JL



# INTRODUCING *NEW VOICES*

*Suzanna Sherry*<sup>†</sup>

**H**ave you ever read a truly excellent student paper and thought to yourself that it was better than a lot of the law review articles you've read recently? "You ought to publish that paper," you tell the student. Easier said than done. Students rarely have the time to repackaging last semester's research for submission to law reviews. Even if they do, law reviews are loathe to publish work submitted by students. Publication in a peer-reviewed journal is unlikelier still.

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<sup>†</sup> Herman O. Loewenstein Professor of Law, Vanderbilt University.

<sup>1</sup> Currently, that's just me: Suzanna Sherry, Vanderbilt University Law School, [new.voices@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:new.voices@vanderbilt.edu).

valuable to the reader. For examples of both types of explanations, see the first issue, which follows this introduction. We'll let both you and the student know as quickly as possible whether we can publish the paper (along with your explanation as a preface). How quickly depends on how inundated we are with submissions, something that is impossible to predict right now.

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And there it is. The next time you read a student paper that ought to be published, you can do something about it. Let the submissions begin!

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<sup>2</sup> See note 1, *supra*. *New Voices* also has one student senior editor. I might add other faculty or students to the team.

# WHOSE MAJORITY IS IT ANYWAY?

ELITE SIGNALING AND FUTURE PUBLIC PREFERENCES

*Will Marks*<sup>†</sup>

*with a Preface by Suzanna Sherry*<sup>\*</sup>

## PREFACE

This paper and the two that follow come from a seminar I taught in the fall of 2013 on Judicial Activism. The students read excerpts from books and articles about judicial review, judicial activism, and the role of the courts in a democracy. Each student was required to submit four papers (of at least ten pages each, not more than half of which could be description) in response to the assigned readings. The students were free to choose which weeks they wanted to write, and the papers were due at the beginning of that week's class. Incidentally, I highly recommend this format for a seminar: the papers kept all the students engaged throughout the semester, and the students who wrote for any particular week tended to be particularly active in the discussion.

We spent two weeks, late in the course, discussing Barry Friedman's *The Will of the People* and several commentators on that book. This paper by Will Marks focuses largely on those readings.

Marks criticizes both Friedman's theory that the Court follows popular opinion and the response by Lawrence Baum and Neal Devins that the Court follows elite opinion.<sup>a</sup> Marks argues, using gay rights

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<sup>†</sup> Vanderbilt J.D. expected May 2014. All copyrights are retained by the author, William T. Marks. For permission to copy or distribute, please contact Will Marks at marks.william@gmail.com.

<sup>\*</sup> Herman O. Loewenstein Professor of Law, Vanderbilt University.

<sup>a</sup> Lawrence Baum & Neal Devins, *Why The Supreme Court Cares About Elites, Not the American*

as an example, that what the Court is *really* doing is trying to divine *future* public opinion – to maximize both the Court’s institutional legitimacy and individual justices’ historical legacies. Of course, as he points out, predicting the future is a risky business with substantial costs. All in all, Marks first suggests, then descriptively supports, and ultimately normatively criticizes, a novel approach to describing the interaction between the court and popular opinion. A fine addition to the literature, and something that deserves further study.

• • •

## I.

### INTRODUCTION

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s majority opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger*<sup>1</sup> upholding the University of Michigan Law School’s race-conscious admissions policy ended with an important proviso. “We expect that 25 years from now,” proclaimed Justice O’Connor’s “sunset”<sup>2</sup> provision, “the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today.”<sup>3</sup>

In one sense, the Court was giving much-needed direction to colleges and universities across the country: “Affirmative action in admissions is acceptable – but only for so long.” In another sense, however, one could say that the Court was speaking to Americans of the future: “This opinion is the product of the time in which it was decided and need not be binding upon future generations.” In both senses, though, Justice O’Connor appears to have been appealing to popular opinion at some level; a twenty-five-year limit on the Constitution’s meaning seems to have no firm foundation in the Constitution itself.<sup>4</sup>

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*People*, 98 GEO. L.J. 1515 (2010).

<sup>1</sup> 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Neal Katyal, *Sunsetting Judicial Opinions*, 79 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1237, 1238 (2004).

<sup>3</sup> *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 343.

<sup>4</sup> See generally Joel K. Goldstein, *Justice O’Connor’s Twenty-Five Year Expectation: The Legitimacy of Duration Limits in Grutter*, 67 OHIO ST. L.J. 83, 134-35 (2006) (arguing that the reading of *Grutter*’s sunset provision as setting up a firm deadline conflicts with judicial precedent interpreting and policy rationales underlying the Equal Protection Clause).

The notion that popular opinion shapes outcomes at the Supreme Court is controversial. In his recent book *The Will of the People*, Professor Barry Friedman argues that the Court's holdings closely align with public majority opinion in important cases.<sup>5</sup> But as many of Friedman's critics have noted, this cannot be the whole story – the Court has been truly counter-majoritarian too many times for things to be so simple.<sup>6</sup>

In a twist on Professor Friedman's thesis, Professors Lawrence Baum and Neal Devins argue the Justices largely follow the opinions of society's elites, rather than popular opinion generally.<sup>7</sup> That, however, seems problematic as well. True, in some major cases involving hotly contested issues in which the Court did not follow popular opinion, "elites" (defined as those having some postgraduate education) tend to support the Court's opinion more than does the overall populace.<sup>8</sup> But the authors' data reveal that, in several seminal cases, not even a majority of elites supported the outcome.<sup>9</sup> Is it simply false to suggest that, as a descriptive matter, the Court considers the policy preferences of *any* lay groups?

This paper defends the thesis that lay opinion influences Supreme Court decision-making while attempting to explain why neither those who claim the Court follows public opinion generally nor those who focus instead on elite opinion fully describe the role of lay opinion in many of the Court's significant decisions. The paper focuses especially on cases whose outcomes do not align with the preferences of *either* a majority of the general public or a strong majority of elites. Both theories have missed the mark, this paper posits, because each fails to acknowledge the particular way in which both types of opin-

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<sup>5</sup> BARRY FRIEDMAN, *THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE: HOW PUBLIC OPINION HAS INFLUENCED THE SUPREME COURT AND SHAPED THE MEANING OF THE CONSTITUTION* 374 (2010).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Richard H. Pildes, *Is the Supreme Court a "Majoritarian" Institution?*, 2010 SUP. CT. REV. 103, 151 (providing some examples of Court striking down, in one decision, the laws of a majority of states); William E. Forbath, *The Will of the People? Pollsters, Elites, and Other Difficulties*, 78 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 1191, 1202-06 (2010) (arguing that the Court's slew of pro-business opinions undermines Friedman's arguments).

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Baum & Neal Devins, *Why the Supreme Court Cares About Elites, Not the American People*, 98 GEO. L.J. 1515 (2010).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 1571 (recounting popular and elite opinion on seven seminal civil liberties cases).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*; see also *infra* note 27 and accompanying text.

ion play an important role in counter-majoritarian cases.

This paper more specifically suggests that the Justices use elite opinion as a signal to identify *future general public preferences*. Just as Justice O'Connor looked to the future in *Grutter*, the Justices often attempt to forecast what future majorities will desire by considering social trends rather than current polling numbers. One way in which the Justices do this, the paper will explain, is by assuming that elite opinion precedes and guides general popular opinion. A trend in elite opinion thus likely signals future majority public support. The Justices, accordingly, may use elite opinion to decide difficult cases consistently with their prediction about how the tides of general public opinion will turn.

## II.

### CURRENT THEORIES OF POPULAR OPINION AND JUDICIAL REVIEW

#### *A. Does the Court Follow Today's Public Preferences?*

Alexander Bickel's "counter-majoritarian difficulty" – the perceived tension that exists when members of an unelected judiciary invalidate laws enacted by a democratically elected legislature<sup>10</sup> – has long been a primary issue underlying debates over the propriety, scope, and limits of judicial review.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars, however, reject the assumption on which the counter-majoritarian difficulty rests: that the Court *is* counter-majoritarian. In one of the most recent works from this band of academic iconoclasts, Barry Friedman's *The Will of the People* surveys the modern Court and concludes that the Court in fact usually follows the policy preferences

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<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Waldron, *The Core of the Case Against Judicial Review*, 115 YALE L.J. 1346, 1349 (2006) (quoting ALEXANDER M. BICKEL, *THE LEAST DANGEROUS BRANCH* 16-17 (1986)).

<sup>11</sup> Solving the counter-majoritarian difficulty seems to be what underlies both empirical analyses of judicial activism, see, e.g. Frank B. Cross & Stefanie A. Lindquist, *The Scientific Study of Judicial Activism*, 91 MINN. L. REV. 1752 (2007), and many scholars' "grand theories" of constitutional interpretation, see, e.g. DANIEL A. FARBER & SUZANNA SHERRY, *DESPERATELY SEEKING CERTAINTY: THE MISGUIDED QUEST FOR CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS* (2002) (deconstructing grand theories).

of the general public.<sup>12</sup> Marshaling a sea of polling data, and focusing on the Rehnquist Court in particular, Friedman argues that, from the *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* opinion upholding *Roe v. Wade*,<sup>13</sup> to the *Lopez v. United States* case striking down the federal Gun-Free School Zones Act on Commerce Clause grounds,<sup>14</sup> to the *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña* opinion limiting governmental use of affirmative action,<sup>15</sup> the Court's opinions on controversial issues typically follow public desires. The counter-majoritarian difficulty, then, is really no difficulty at all.

But as myriad commentators have responded, a host of significant decisions really do disagree with public opinion. A quick glance at the public response to *Brown v. Board of Education* should alone prove the point.<sup>16</sup> There are, however, many other examples. Decisions that line constitutional-law casebooks, including those on school prayer, flag burning, sodomy, and affirmative action, are all inconsistent with majority preferences.<sup>17</sup> It seems impossible, moreover, to rationally argue that the widely despised *Citizens United v. FEC* decision is consonant with public opinion.<sup>18</sup> It appears, then, that there is still some difficulty left to resolve when it comes to counter-majoritarian judicial review.

### *B. Does the Court Follow Today's Elite Preferences?*

What if the Court follows not *public* preferences, but *elite* preferences? After all, the Justices mostly grew up in the upper echelons of American society, attending some of the nation's most prestigious schools.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the Justices are most concerned with "self-

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<sup>12</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 5, at 14-15, 324.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 329-30 (discussing *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992)).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 330-31 (discussing *United States v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549 (1995)).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 326-27 (discussing *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 200 (1995)).

<sup>16</sup> See L.A. Powe, Jr., *Are "the People" Missing in Action (and Should Anyone Care)?*, 83 TEX. L. REV. 855, 866-70 (2005) (reviewing LARRY D. KRAMER, *THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES: POPULAR CONSTITUTIONALISM AND JUDICIAL REVIEW* (2004) and describing the violent, disobedient Southern response to *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)).

<sup>17</sup> See Baum & Devins, *supra* note 7, at 1571.

<sup>18</sup> See generally Pildes, *supra* note 6, at 111-14 (detailing the public response to *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010)).

<sup>19</sup> Baum & Devins, *supra* note 7, at 1537 ("[T]he Justices are 'sheltered, cosseted,' and

presentation” to similarly elite audiences.<sup>20</sup>

Professors Baum and Devins have argued just that. Employing social psychology, they explain that the Justices “are not single-minded pursuers of their preferred policy positions; instead, they adopt legal policy positions that take account of both their ideological and personal preferences.”<sup>21</sup> These personal preferences include a “reluctan[ce] to disappoint [the Justices’] respective reference groups,” groups with whom the Justices identify.<sup>22</sup> These reference groups, the authors continue, consist of elites in the legal academy, the news media, and political or judicial interest groups.<sup>23</sup>

The crux of this argument is that the Justices do care about pleasing a majority, but the relevant majority is that of the particular elite groups whose opinions they value and whose esteem they seek.<sup>24</sup> This, Professors Baum and Devins explain, is true whether or not an individual Justice is particularly partisan. More ideological Justices may look to ideological groups — such as the Federalist Society or the American Constitution Society — for guidance.<sup>25</sup> Yet the same is true with moderate or “swing” Justices, although their desire may be to “cultivate reputations of neutrality and amenability to persuasion by groups with disparate ideological positions.”<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes, however, the Court’s decisions do not align even with elite opinion. Baum and Devins report, for example, that of “elite” public opinion survey participants — those having at least some postgraduate education — only 41.4% supported the Court’s school-prayer decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, 44.1% supported the flag-burning decision in *Texas v. Johnson*, and 43.0% supported the *Grut-*

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‘overwhelmingly upper-middle or upper-class and extremely well educated, usually at the nation’s more elite universities . . . .’” (quoting RICHARD POSNER, *HOW JUDGES THINK* 306 (2008) and Michael J. Klarman, *What’s So Great About Constitutionalism?*, 93 NW. U. L. REV. 145, 189 (1998))).

<sup>20</sup> See *id.* at 1537-44 (identifying the Court’s core elite constituencies).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 1533-34.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 1534.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 1537-44.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 1534-35, 1541-42.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 1536 (discussing the outsized attention on and power of Justices O’Connor and Kennedy).



ter opinion.<sup>27</sup> The Supreme Court, in other words, is often counter-majoritarian even with regard to the elites who form the Justices' reference groups.

Why is this so? One possibility is that the Justices' reference groups may be even more elite than those with some postgraduate education, and the Court's decisions in fact align with "über-elite" opinion. This could especially be true with respect to decisions about gender equality, gay rights, free speech, and reproductive rights, since those decisions tend to lean towards the left, and at least with respect to those issues, "people with more education are more likely than other Americans to take positions that are typically identified as liberal."<sup>28</sup> But in some cases, the preference gap between "elites" and "über-elites" would need to be almost ten percent for this explanation to have traction.<sup>29</sup> That is perhaps possible, but such a large swing seems unlikely considering that "elites" (as defined by Baum and Devins) already start at such high levels of educational attainment.

It might seem, then, that the Justices do not care about public opinion at all. That certainly might be true of some,<sup>30</sup> but the Justices are people too, so they probably do consider at some level how the public, their social and professional circles, the academy, the news media, or even the history books will think of them. What we need, then, is an account of how public opinion shapes Supreme Court decision-making that does not require a current majority of either the public or elites to support the Court's decision. This paper now attempts to provide such an account.

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<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 1571.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*; see also *Beyond Red vs. Blue Part 3: Demographics, Lifestyle, and News Consumption*, PEW RESEARCH CTR. (May 10, 2005), <http://perma.cc/H2U7-RXVG> ("Liberals have the highest education level of any typology group – 49% are college graduates and 26% have some postgraduate education.").

<sup>29</sup> See *supra* text accompanying note 27 (revealing the elite-support data for school prayer and affirmative action).

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Senior, *In Conversation: Antonin Scalia*, N.Y. MAG. (October 6, 2013), <http://perma.cc/7JD-XY6H> ("I don't know [how I will be regarded in the future]. And, frankly, I don't care. . . . I have never been custodian of my legacy. When I'm dead and gone, I'll either be sublimely happy or terribly unhappy.").

## III.

A MIDDLE WAY: CURRENT ELITE OPINION AS A  
SIGNAL FOR FUTURE PUBLIC OPINION*A. How Does the Signaling Mechanism Work?*

In *The Will of the People*, Barry Friedman oscillates between utilizing current polling numbers and speaking of “social trends.” Friedman specifically notes, for example, that a more accurate version of his thesis is that “the justices were following *social trends* and by so doing were often deciding cases consistent with public opinion.”<sup>31</sup> He later notes that the Rehnquist Court, although it may have broken from the American majority at certain times, was “following *cultural trends* with remarkable steadfastness.”<sup>32</sup> “[T]he Court,” he says, “looked to be tracking public reaction to rapidly *developing events*.”<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, then, what the Rehnquist Court was following was not the state of current public opinion, but the *perceived direction* of the tide of public opinion.

The Justices, however, are not soothsayers; they need some way to discern what public opinion will be years in the future. This is where elite opinion can play a role. Since the 1960s, the American public has become more progressive with respect to many individual rights, especially reproductive rights, racial equality, gender equality, and sexual-orientation equality. And elites, being more liberal than the overall public, generally lead the way. It was liberal elite whites, after all, who supported *Brown*;<sup>34</sup> now the opinion is possibly the most popular of all time. It was liberal elites, too, who supported *Roe v. Wade*;<sup>35</sup> by the time *Casey* was decided, the public had fol-

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<sup>31</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 5, at 354 (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 359 (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

<sup>34</sup> JAMES T. PATTERSON, *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION: A CIVIL RIGHTS MILESTONE AND ITS TROUBLED LEGACY* 1-2, 9-10 (2001) (conveying the arguments of liberal whites, including President Harry Truman, who sought to end desegregation).

<sup>35</sup> Eric M. Uslaner & Ronald E. Weber, *Public Support for Pro-Choice Abortion Policies in the Nation and States: Changes and Stability After the Roe and Doe Decisions*, 77 MICH. L. REV. 1772, 1777 (1979) (showing that in December 1972, only 46% of the general public sup-

lowed along.<sup>36</sup> And finally, it is elites who have most championed gay rights,<sup>37</sup> and it seems again that public opinion is following.<sup>38</sup>

Both the public-opinion and elite-opinion scholars may therefore be correct. The Justices often do care about public opinion – not so much what today’s majority thinks, but rather what majorities in the future will think. And to determine what those future majorities will think, Justices look to policy groups, members of the media, and academics they respect – all potential vanguards of future policy preferences. This effect, of course, is likely subconscious, just as most social psychological effects are. The Justices may simply interact with the elite and unwittingly envision those elites’ opinions as necessarily ahead of the curve. That, however, does not diminish the effect. If the Justices see a social trend that they forecast into the future, that vision may shape case outcomes.

*B. One Example of the Signaling Effect in Action:  
Windsor and Gay Marriage*

A 2012 Gallup poll indicated that exactly fifty percent of the population favored legal validation of same-sex marriages.<sup>39</sup> But at the time of *Windsor v. United States*, only twelve states and the District of Columbia permitted such marriages.<sup>40</sup> Thus, despite the Gallup numbers, less than a third of the U.S. population lived in a state

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ported legalizing abortion, as compared to 63% of those with at least a college education).

<sup>36</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 5, at 329 (showing that, two years before the *Casey* decision, a majority of the population opposed overturning *Roe*).

<sup>37</sup> See Baum & Devins, *supra* note 7, at 1571 (indicating that as of 2003, 75.6% of persons polled with at least some postgraduate education thought that private, adult homosexual relations should be legal, compared with a bare majority of people with lower levels of education).

<sup>38</sup> Nate Silver, *How Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage Is Changing, and What it Means*, N.Y. TIMES FIFTYTHREEEIGHT BLOG (Mar. 26, 2013, 10:10 AM), <http://perma.cc/9ZVB-GL39> (showing clear trend from mid-1990s of increasing support for same-sex marriage). The trend, indeed, is quite pronounced: Silver’s data reveal that the polling numbers for supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage have inverted over the past decade. See *id.*

<sup>39</sup> Frank Newport, *Half of Americans Support Legal Gay Marriage*, GALLUP (May 8, 2012), <http://perma.cc/FP7P-M7A2>.

<sup>40</sup> 133 S. Ct. 2675, 2689 (2013).

where gay marriage was legal when *Windsor* came down.<sup>41</sup> What the majority of Americans really wanted at that moment is thus unclear, but for argument's sake, let's say the country was split precisely down the middle. The *Windsor* Court could not therefore have been siding with majoritarian opinion — no majority existed on the issue of gay marriage.

It is difficult, moreover, to gather precisely where elite opinion lay. The same Gallup poll cited above explains that fifty-seven percent of college graduates favored gay marriage.<sup>42</sup> The study's margin of error, however, is three percentage points;<sup>43</sup> thus, the elite preference number could have been as low as fifty-four percent of college graduates. So elites do favor gay marriage more than the rest of the population, but not by a lot. It even could be fair to argue that, with the conservative-leaning Roberts Court, the majority of elites in the current Justices' reference groups might fall on the other side of the fifty-percent threshold.

So what did the Court do in *Windsor*? A majority of the Justices, led by Justice Kennedy, struck down the Defense of Marriage Act ("DOMA") as a violation of the equal-protection component of the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause because, the majority believed, the Act's passage was based primarily on animus towards gays and lesbians.<sup>44</sup> The Court did not, of course, determine the issue of gay marriage once and for all — it dodged that issue in *Perry v. Hollingsworth*.<sup>45</sup> But at least according to Justice Scalia's dissent,

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<sup>41</sup> I used Google's population data to calculate this figure. Rounding to the nearest 100,000 people, the total U.S. population is 314.0 million. When the Court handed down *Windsor*, twelve states had legalized same-sex marriage. See Caitlin Stark & Amy Roberts, *By The Numbers: Same-Sex Marriage*, CNN (Aug. 29, 2012), <http://perma.cc/APS4-6R6G> (noting that, as of June 2013, twelve states permitted same-sex marriage). The population of all states where gay marriage was then legal, therefore, was approximately 94 million. Thus, roughly thirty percent of the population lived in a gay-marriage state when *Windsor* came down.

<sup>42</sup> Molly Ball, *Poll of the Day: America's Gay-Marriage Evolution*, THE ATLANTIC (May 8, 2012, 12:01 PM), <http://perma.cc/YA2-G7RP>.

<sup>43</sup> See *supra* note 39.

<sup>44</sup> See generally *Windsor v. United States*, 133 S. Ct. 2675 (2013).

<sup>45</sup> 133 S. Ct. 2652, 2661-63 (holding that the proponent of a California ballot initiative banning gay marriage in the state did not have standing to appeal a federal district court's invalidation of that initiative).

Justice Kennedy's rationale in *Windsor* could apply directly in a head-on challenge to a state-law gay-marriage ban and might spell such a ban's defeat.<sup>46</sup> This may not turn out to be so. But if the Court was willing to accuse Congress of acting out of animus against homosexuals when passing DOMA despite at least plausible rational bases for enacting the law,<sup>47</sup> then surely it will not hold back when it comes to state laws, which the Court has always invalidated more frequently than federal laws.<sup>48</sup>

Of some significance, too, the *Windsor* Court ignored a long-standing, albeit weak, precedent on the issue of gay marriage. In the 1972 case *Baker v. Nelson*, the Court dismissed in a one-sentence order an appeal seeking to locate a right to gay marriage in the Constitution as lacking a substantial federal question.<sup>49</sup> As one lower court has subsequently recognized, *Windsor*'s refusal to rely on *Baker* amounted to a sub silentio reversal.<sup>50</sup> *Baker*'s unsigned jurisdictional dismissal is obviously not of much precedential significance, but the reversal, at least according to the Court's stare decisis jurisprudence,<sup>51</sup> indicates that something besides mere legal opinion changed between 1972 and 2013.

To summarize: Polls suggest that, when the Court handed down *Windsor*, the populace was split down the middle on the issue of gay marriage. Elites, at least defined as those with college educations,

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<sup>46</sup> See *Windsor*, 133 S. Ct. at 2709-10 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (explaining why, in his opinion, the majority's reasoning will necessarily lead to the invalidation of state-law bans on gay marriage).

<sup>47</sup> See *id.* at 2708 (explaining potential rationales for DOMA rooted in conflict-of-laws issues and desired preservation of the original intent of pre-same-sex-marriage legislation).

<sup>48</sup> See Pildes, *supra* note 6, at 149-154 ("Most of the laws the Court invalidates are state laws. By one count, for example, the Burger Court struck down ten times as many state as federal laws; the Warren Court, seven times as many.").

<sup>49</sup> See 409 U.S. 810, 810 (1972) (dismissing appeal from Minnesota Supreme Court on issue of gay marriage for "want of a substantial federal question").

<sup>50</sup> See *Kitchen v. Herbert*, 2013 WL 6697874, at \*8-9 (D. Utah Dec. 20, 2013) (invalidating Utah's ban on same-sex marriage).

<sup>51</sup> See *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 854-55 (1992) (explaining the Court's stare decisis jurisprudence). But see *id.* at 881-85 (arguably not applying the stare decisis doctrine just announced when overruling *City of Akron v. Akron Ctr. for Reproductive Health, Inc.*, 462 U.S. 416 (1983) and *Thornburgh v. Am. Coll. of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 476 U.S. 474 (1986)).

avored gay marriage, but not overwhelmingly so. Still, the Court issued an opinion whose rationale appears to spell doom for gay-marriage bans. In so doing, Justice Kennedy's majority opinion expressly noted the recent public opinion shift regarding gay marriage. And finally, the Court tacitly overruled its own precedent in the process. What gives?

The elite-signaling thesis explains the story. Regardless of the ambivalence of public opinion polls, the direction of popular preference appears to be decidedly pro-gay rights. As Justice Kennedy explained in *Windsor*, "It seems fair to conclude that, until recent years, many citizens had not even considered the possibility that two persons of the same sex might aspire to occupy the same status and dignity as that of a man and woman in lawful marriage."<sup>52</sup> He continued to explain that while some were outraged by this challenge to traditional social mores, "others, however, came [to] the beginnings of a new perspective, a new insight."<sup>53</sup>

The cultural trend, in other words, is towards legalizing gay marriage, even if at the time of *Windsor* it lacked majority support. This comports with the change from *Baker* to *Windsor*: the issue of gay marriage did not even warrant federal jurisdiction forty years ago; now, the Court concluded that a law prohibiting federal benefits to married gay couples was based on nothing but animus. In the meantime, when *Lawrence v. Texas* was decided, roughly half of the country thought homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal, as did three-fourths of elites.<sup>54</sup> At bottom, then, the social *trend* of gay rights is not split fifty-fifty, despite current polling numbers.<sup>55</sup>

What Justice Kennedy did, one could thus argue, was look at the trend, realize (whether consciously or not) that elite opinion has led the way, and conclude that future majorities would support his opinion on DOMA even if a current majority did not now. In light

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<sup>52</sup> *Windsor*, 133 S. Ct. at 2689.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> Baum & Devins, *supra* note 7, at 1571-72 & n.319.

<sup>55</sup> See Silver, *supra* note 38.

of his reputation for concern about his public image,<sup>56</sup> it is possible to surmise that Justice Kennedy went beyond current public (or even elite) opinion and looked to elite opinion to foreshadow future public policy preferences.

Obviously, the gay-marriage example only considers one Justice on one discrete issue. Teasing the elite-signaling thesis out of other case examples is unfortunately beyond this paper's scope. I believe, however, that the Justices have likely used elite opinion to anticipate future public opinion in myriad cases, including *Lawrence v. Texas*,<sup>57</sup> *Roe v. Wade*,<sup>58</sup> *Griswold v. Connecticut*,<sup>59</sup> and *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>60</sup> The thesis does not work in all cases, however: elites support physician-assisted suicide, as does a small majority of the general public,<sup>61</sup> but the Court declined to follow along in *Washington v. Glucksburg*.<sup>62</sup>

## IV.

### RATIONALES AND IMPLICATIONS

#### *A. Why Would Justices Want to Follow Future Public Opinion?*

Three main rationales might account for why the Justices may at times appeal to future public opinion: (1) institutional legitimacy, (2) personal historical status, and (3) recognition of a constitutional decision's duration. This paper will consider the first two together before turning to the third.

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<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Michael Klarman, Op-Ed., *Gay Rights May Get its Brown v. Board of Education*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 11, 2012), <http://perma.cc/P2G6-UE7G> ("Justice Kennedy's opinions often suggest that he wants to be on the right side of history, which matters greatly here because the future of gay marriage in America is so clear.").

<sup>57</sup> 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

<sup>58</sup> 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

<sup>59</sup> 381 U.S. 479 (1965).

<sup>60</sup> 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Carroll, *Public Continues to Support Right-to-Die for Terminally Ill Patients*, GALLUP (June 19, 2006), <http://perma.cc/JE33-5GRE> (finding that fifty-eight percent of all respondents and seventy percent of college graduates "support doctor assisting patient to commit suicide").

<sup>62</sup> 521 U.S. 702 (1997).

## 1. Institutional Legitimacy and Personal Historical Status

“Institutional legitimacy” refers to the public’s willingness to defer to the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution. Presumably, the more out of sync the Court is with societal norms, the less legitimate the Court will be in the public’s eyes.<sup>63</sup> “Personal historical status” refers to how positively or negatively future generations view a public official. This status falls on a spectrum from being elevated to the status of a mythical hero, as George Washington, to being widely despised as an utter failure, as Warren Harding.

If Baum and Devins are correct that the Justices are normal people to whom the basic insights of social psychology apply,<sup>64</sup> then the Justices would naturally wish to maximize both the Supreme Court’s legitimacy and their own personal historical status. By making the Supreme Court more legitimate, the value of a Justice’s service increases in the Justice’s own eyes, his or her reference group’s eyes, and, ultimately, the nation’s eyes. And maximizing personal historical status is a Justice’s way of controlling his or her legacy while still alive.

The drive to increase institutional legitimacy and personal historical status is reinforced by “right side of history”<sup>65</sup> arguments, which praise or condemn individuals based on whether their actions are viewed by later generations as correct. In the judicial sphere, these arguments stem from a handful of cases, two of which are most significant: *Dred Scott v. Sandford*<sup>66</sup> and *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>67</sup> In the 1856 *Dred Scott* decision, Chief Justice Taney felt that he was smoothing over the battle between slave and free states by leading a majority of Justices to rule that no slave could ever be a citizen.

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Larry D. KRAMER, THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES: POPULAR CONSTITUTIONALISM AND JUDICIAL REVIEW 247-48 (2004) (arguing for the removal or severe limiting of the Supreme Court’s role in interpreting the Constitution as a reaction against perceived illegitimate decisionmaking of the Rehnquist Court).

<sup>64</sup> See Baum & Devins, *supra* note 7, at 1532-33 (applying universal social psychology concepts to the Justices).

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Barack Obama, Press Briefing (June 23, 2009), available at <http://perma.cc/6MQ2-6GW7> (“[T]hose who stand up for justice are always on the right side of history”).

<sup>66</sup> 60 U.S. 393 (1856).

<sup>67</sup> 347 U.S. 483 (1954).



Many now regard this as one of the worst cases in American legal history.<sup>68</sup> *Brown*, on the other hand, in which Chief Justice Earl Warren led a unanimous Court to rule that segregated public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment, is so lauded that its outcome is now invoked as a litmus test for the validity of any jurisprudential theory.<sup>69</sup> Justices almost certainly want to avoid dragging the Court (and the country) through another *Dred Scott*, and they want to write the next generation's *Brown*.

One way the Justices can avoid becoming the next Chief Justice Taney is by considering how a future America will evaluate their decisions in landmark cases. Over the past seventy years, the liberal elites have generally ended up on the "right side of history," at least in the sense that they have generally foreshadowed future public opinion. By using elite opinion as a signal for future public opinion, a Justice can take a small amount of comfort that the history books will not teach future generations about his or her judicial misdeeds.

## 2. Duration of Constitutional Decisionmaking

One other possibility is that the Justices consider future public preferences because most Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution endure for many decades, even centuries. Considering the general difficulty of the amendment process and the relative infrequency of the Court overruling its own constitutional precedent, the Justices may take special care to ensure that any decision rendered today will still garner support in the future. This rationale is tied to the institutional legitimacy rationale in a way: ensuring that

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<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., OXFORD COMPANION TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES 889 (Kermit L. Hall, ed., 2d ed. 2005) ("American legal and constitutional scholars consider the *Dred Scott* decision to be the worst ever rendered by the Supreme Court."); Mark S. Brodin, *Bush v. Gore: The Worst (or at Least Second-to-the-Worst) Supreme Court Decision Ever*, 12 NEV. L.J. 563, 563 (2012) (labeling *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000), and *Dred Scott* as the two worst Supreme Court decisions in history); *Four Worst Supreme Court Decision of All Time*, POLICYMIC (Mar. 9, 2013), <http://perma.cc/6Z58-AXV2> (listing *Dred Scott* in the number-one slot).

<sup>69</sup> See William P. Marshall, *Progressive Constitutionalism, Originalism, and the Significance of Landmark Decisions in Evaluating Constitutional Theory*, 72 OHIO ST. L.J. 1251, 1261-64 (2011) (explaining why *Brown* is a benchmark against which jurisprudential theories should be measured).

future generations will respect and value a longstanding Supreme Court precedent cements the Court's legitimacy.

Another line of reasoning under this rationale considers the pure self-interest of the Justices. The average Supreme Court Justice sits for about eighteen years.<sup>70</sup> The average tenure thus spans at least three different presidential administrations and may sweep across vast changes in American culture or world history. Some justices sit much longer – Justice Douglas sat for thirty-six years<sup>71</sup> and Justice Stevens for thirty-four.<sup>72</sup> Attempts to predict how future majorities might respond to an opinion could be motivated by a desire to avoid future criticism if the Justice sits long enough to witness major societal changes.

### *B. What Does This Mean for the Counter-Majoritarian Difficulty?*

There are some clear benefits to the Court anticipating public opinion, as long as it predicts correctly. First, doing so in the civil rights realm ensures that disadvantaged groups gain protected status, and thus avoid discrimination, more quickly than they would if progress were tied solely to the generally slow movement of popular opinion. If a Justice is convinced that the tide is changing anyway, then protecting individual liberties sooner might be desirable. Second, this approach might improve the Court's legitimacy and create public confidence in the Constitution and the rule of law. Many look back on *Dred Scott* and question the Supreme Court's moral compass, but if they look to *Brown*, they might trust that good eventually prevails under our system. Finally, this approach allows the Court to lead society into the future without being completely counter-majoritarian: popular opinion plays a significant role, just not a direct one. We need not worry so much about the counter-majoritarian problem if the people are going to end up agreeing with the Court all the same.

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<sup>70</sup> Pildes, *supra* note 6, at 118.

<sup>71</sup> William O. Douglas, OYEZ, <http://perma.cc/S3MD-Z2KC> (archived Jan. 26, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> John Paul Stevens, OYEZ, <http://perma.cc/VD6N-22VM> (archived Jan. 26, 2014).

There are costs, though, too. Most obviously, the Justices do not always predict correctly. Remember, Chief Justice Taney thought he was doing the nation a great favor in *Dred Scott*. Additionally, if the Court uses elite opinion as a signal for future public opinion, it will usually lock in increasingly liberal cultural norms. It seems to me that we are still, at least in some ways, in the liberal wake of the 1960s. Whether there will be a future conservative cultural shift as strong as the sixties remains to be seen. Hitching future public majorities to current elite trends in opinion, however, may thwart a strong future change in the political and cultural winds.

And even if the Justices do generally guess correctly, there are still substantial costs. Having the Justices decide what the people want before the people actually reach their own conclusions will strike many as both paternalistic and deterministic. Once the Justices have constitutionalized an issue, there is almost no going back. Further, the process of working out contentious issues through the democratic process may provide a sense of resolution and closure that society desperately needs.<sup>73</sup> Constitutionalizing an issue based on anticipated future public preferences stops the swinging pendulum that our society may need to settle on an ultimate resting place. Public opinion may move strongly in one direction for a while but may come swinging back even further in the future. The judiciary correctly anticipating the first wave and settling public opinion with a constitutional decision might erroneously forestall the next wave.

In the end, the popular constitutionalist movement may provide a valuable insight. The Founders believed that the aim of government is to help the people create a society that protects core rights but operates primarily democratically.<sup>74</sup> The Constitution and the

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Offers Critique of *Roe v. Wade* During Law School Visit, U. CHI. L. SCH. (May 15, 2013), <http://perma.cc/LC2Z-WL45> (“My criticism of *Roe* is that it seemed to have stopped the momentum on the side of change,” Ginsburg said. She would’ve preferred that abortion rights be secured more gradually, in a process that included state legislatures and the courts, she added.”).

<sup>74</sup> THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE para. 2 (U.S. 1776) (“[A]ll men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed . . .”).

American government ultimately belong to the people, and it is for the people to determine how they wish to protect their fundamental rights. But the more the government stands in the way of the people's changing social and cultural mores, the less legitimate and less useful government becomes. Perhaps, then, there are some times when the Court should anticipate future public opinion and use it as a guide to solving some of our society's most significant issues. Unfortunately, constructing a method for deciding exactly when that anticipation is appropriate seems challenging, to put it lightly. In the end, whether that fact alone leads to the rejection of consideration of anticipated future public preference is a decision that each jurisprudential thinker must decide for himself or herself.

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# THE PEOPLE OR THE COURT

## WHO REIGNS SUPREME, HOW, AND WHY?

*Matthew P. Downer*<sup>†</sup>  
*with a Preface by Suzanna Sherry*<sup>\*</sup>

### PREFACE

Matt Downer's paper comes from the same seminar<sup>a</sup> as that of Will Marks, and also focuses partly on Barry Friedman's *The Will of the People*. But Downer considers Friedman's work together with Larry Kramer's *The People Themselves: Popular Constitutionalism and Judicial Review*. He finds intriguing similarities and differences between the two, and he criticizes both for their failure to be specific about who "The People" are and whether there are any limits on what they can do. Downer ultimately identifies what he calls a "fundamental flaw" in each book. Kramer, he argues, doesn't really trust the people after all. And Friedman's most arresting claims are either unconvincing or, if true, essentially trivial. Downer's paper is an excellent critical review of two celebrated and influential recent scholarly books, more interesting than some of the previously published reviews.

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<sup>a</sup> For a description of the seminar, see Suzanna Sherry, *Preface to Will Marks, Whose Majority Is It Anyway? Elite Signaling and Future Public Preferences*, 4 J.L. (1 NEW VOICES) 13, 13 (2014).

I.

INTRODUCTION

In his book, Barry Friedman argues that since our founding the Supreme Court has increasingly aligned itself with *The Will of the People*.<sup>1</sup> While this view seems to directly contradict Larry Kramer's central thesis – that *The People Themselves*<sup>2</sup> initially directed the Court but have since abdicated that role – the two theories share key elements, assertions, and flaws. Both advance a normative view of The People as arbiters of constitutional meaning and directors of Supreme Court decisions. Because their descriptive narratives conflict, however, their prescriptive recommendations predictably diverge as well. Their frameworks also share similar bouts of vagueness and lack of constraint: 1) neither sufficiently defines *who* constitutes The People, and 2) neither adequately describes what, if anything, constrains the substance of popular will – are *any* interpretations permitted, no matter how implausible or rights-endangering? Finally, two foundational – and equally surprising – flaws undermine their primary contributions: upon close scrutiny, Kramer lacks faith in The People after all and Friedman's most celebrated conclusions prove either unsurprising or unconvincing.

II.

ALONG THE SAME LINE,  
BUT IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS

Like Kramer,<sup>3</sup> Friedman purports to describe both how things are as well as how they should be.<sup>4</sup> Normatively, they both ad-

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<sup>1</sup> BARRY FRIEDMAN, *THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE: HOW PUBLIC OPINION HAS INFLUENCED THE SUPREME COURT AND SHAPED THE MEANING OF THE CONSTITUTION* (2009).

<sup>2</sup> LARRY D. KRAMER, *THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES: POPULAR CONSTITUTIONALISM AND JUDICIAL REVIEW* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> See *id.* at 227 (“Americans in the past always came to the same conclusion: that it was their right, and their responsibility, as republican citizens to say finally what the Constitution means.”).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 16 (“This, then, is the function of judicial review in the modern era: to serve as a catalyst, to force public debate, and ultimately to ratify the

vance very similar proposals: The People *should* assume primary responsibility for interpreting constitutional meaning. Descriptively, they almost directly contradict each other. Kramer argues that The People once embraced – and have since abdicated – their role as constitutional arbiters. Friedman, by contrast, suggests that The People had to – and did – grow into their current authority to direct the Court’s trajectory and have maintained it to varying degrees ever since. Unsurprisingly, their conflicting narratives produce conflicting prescriptions. Kramer urges The People to seize back their abdicated role whereas Friedman seems content to stay the course.

### A. Normative Alignment

While Kramer explicitly idealizes The People’s role as “the final authority on the meaning and interpretation of the Constitution,”<sup>5</sup> Friedman proves far more circumspect. He initially seems to maintain careful objectivity, focusing primarily on his view of the historical reality, rather than his ideal. Upon closer scrutiny, however, his normative view shines through, both in the slightly broader context of these careful statements and in the passion of his ostensibly objective prose.

Friedman’s language is a far cry from Kramer’s forceful advocacy. As eloquently described by commentators, Kramer challenges the Supreme Court’s usurpation of constitutional interpretive authority<sup>6</sup> and seeks to “[b]ring[] the people back as the protagonists of American constitutional history.”<sup>7</sup> Friedman, by contrast, carefully neutralizes his use of “should” and “ought” with sharply conditioned language: “To say that the Supreme Court follows popular opinion,” he writes, “or even that it *should*, is hardly to say that the Court *ought* to be responsive to every passing fancy . . . of the American

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American people’s considered views.”).

<sup>5</sup> L.A. Powe, Jr., *Are “The People” Missing in Action (and Should Anyone Care)?*, 83 TEX. L. REV. 855, 855-56 (2005).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 855.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Hulsebosch, *Bringing the People Back In*, 80 N.Y.U. L. REV. 653, 655 (2005) (reviewing LARRY D. KRAMER, *THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES: POPULAR CONSTITUTIONALISM AND JUDICIAL REVIEW* (2004)).

people.”<sup>8</sup> But in context, it seems that he means only that the Court should divine the enduring will of The People rather than follow popular whim.<sup>9</sup> He quickly follows his disclaimer with ringing endorsements from Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt of judges who will “follow” the “permanent popular will” rather than the “popular opinion at the moment.”<sup>10</sup> If invoking revered American figures falls short of revealing his inclination, his next move lays it bare. Friedman cites *Korematsu v. United States*<sup>11</sup> — one of the most reviled opinions in Supreme Court history<sup>12</sup> — to illustrate the danger of judges following the “popular opinion at the moment” rather than the “permanent popular will.”<sup>13</sup>

If juxtaposing Wilson and Roosevelt with the justices who decided *Korematsu* does not indicate Friedman’s normative views, the passion with which he closes his book seems to settle the question: “Judicial review is our invention; we created it and have chosen to retain it. Judicial Review has . . . forc[ed] us to . . . interpret[] our Constitution ourselves. In the final analysis, when it comes to the Constitution, we are the highest court in the land.”<sup>14</sup> While couched in descriptive terms, it is hard to mistake Friedman’s normative view: that The People are — and *should* be — “the highest court in the land.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite differences in how explicitly they acknowledge their normative commitments, Kramer’s and Friedman’s normative visions of the relationship between The People and the Court seem closely aligned.

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<sup>8</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 382 (emphasis added).

<sup>9</sup> See *id.* (noting the long-standing distinction between “the passions of the moment and some deeper sense of the popular will”).

<sup>10</sup> See *id.*

<sup>11</sup> 323 U.S. 214 (1944).

<sup>12</sup> Suzanna Sherry, *Why We Need More Judicial Activism* in CONSTITUTIONALISM, EXECUTIVE POWER, AND POPULAR ENLIGHTENMENT 14 (Giorgi Areshidze, Paul Carrese, and Suzanna Sherry eds., forthcoming 2014), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2213372> (including *Korematsu* as one of the six most “universally condemned [Supreme Court] cases”).

<sup>13</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 382; see also *id.* (“Decisions like *Korematsu* indicate the difficulty with putting one’s faith in the notion that judges will be able to perceive the difference between what is momentarily popular opinion and what is ultimately right . . .”).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 385.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*



*B. Descriptive Conflict*

Because both authors focus on the shifting degree to which The People – rather than the Court – direct constitutional interpretation, we might expect similar descriptive narratives. But Kramer views The People’s influence as sharply declining whereas Friedman sees a steady increase. Even more striking, Kramer views the Court as the current supreme arbiter of constitutional meaning – in practice if not by right – and Friedman views the Court as firmly under The People’s collective thumb. Kramer sees popular abdication; Friedman sees popular conquest.

Kramer cites numerous examples of The People controlling constitutional interpretation from early American history, including the 1795 protests against the Jay Treaty of New York<sup>16</sup> and the constitutional debates preceding the election of 1800.<sup>17</sup> He argues that the colonists, framers, and early Americans all viewed constitutional meaning as subject to popular interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Since then, however, The People have steadily abdicated their authority to the courts.<sup>19</sup>

Friedman views the shift in control over constitutional interpretation as flowing in the other direction. In his view, the period immediately following independence saw the “remarkably quick acceptance of judicial review.”<sup>20</sup> But before long, The People “saw the danger of unaccountable judges.”<sup>21</sup> Though sometimes marked by ebbs and flows, this recognition initiated the shift toward constitutional interpretation by The People.<sup>22</sup>

More notable than their conflicting views of the shift’s direction, Kramer and Friedman also fundamentally disagree about the current

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<sup>16</sup> KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>18</sup> See generally *id.* at 4-21.

<sup>19</sup> See *id.* at 7 (“Time and again, the Founding generation and its successors responded to evolving social, political, and cultural conditions by improvising institutional and intellectual solutions to preserve popular control over the course of constitutional law – a kind of control we seem to have lost, or surrendered, today.”).

<sup>20</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 12.

<sup>21</sup> See *id.*

<sup>22</sup> See *id.* at 12-16 (surveying the “four critical periods in the American people’s changing relationship with judicial review and the Supreme Court”).

balance of power. Kramer explicitly suggests that “[w]e the People have – apparently of our own volition – handed control of our fundamental law over to” the courts.<sup>23</sup> He then frames much of the book as urging The People to reclaim “the full responsibilities of self-government.”<sup>24</sup> Friedman, on the other hand, dedicates the bulk of his six-hundred-page book to demonstrating that The People’s will has constrained and still constrains the Court’s behavior. He acknowledges that the Court “exercises more power than it once did” but quickly argues that it does so with the permission – and under the watchful eye – of The People.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps most strikingly, Kramer’s and Friedman’s views of how The People came to occupy their current roles directly contradict each other. Kramer cites The People’s volitional abdication of interpretive authority as the cause of the current balance of power.<sup>26</sup> Friedman depicts a more rocky transition of power. He notes “the fragility of [the Court’s] position”<sup>27</sup> and suggests that The People’s supremacy was hard won by “disciplining the Court,” sometimes causing “violent upheaval.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Friedman argues that such “violent[ce] . . . is no longer necessary” because the Court now “underst[ands]” its place.<sup>29</sup> When the Court merely contemplates overstepping its delegated authority, The People need only “raise a finger” for “the Court . . . to get the message” and shrink back into its corner to avoid “retribution.”<sup>30</sup> Friedman suggests that the relationship between The People and the Court is like “any other marriage,”<sup>31</sup> but such a – seemingly abusive – “marriage” is a far cry from Kramer’s characterization of the Court as aggressive and The People as acquiescent.

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<sup>23</sup> KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 233-34 (internal quotation marks omitted).

<sup>24</sup> See *id.* at 247.

<sup>25</sup> See FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 12, 14, 376 (“The Court has [more] power only because, over time, the American people have decided to cede it to the justices.”).

<sup>26</sup> KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 233-34.

<sup>27</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 376.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

*C. Prescriptive Divergence*

Unsurprisingly, Kramer prescribes far more drastic action than Friedman finds necessary. Given their common normative ideal, their conflicting narratives result in conflicting prescriptions. Kramer urges The People to seize back their abdicated role whereas Friedman seems to support staying the course of popular control.<sup>32</sup> Although Kramer's book can fairly be characterized as a call to arms urging The People to "assume once again the full responsibilities of self-government,"<sup>33</sup> Friedman can afford more complacency. To the extent that The People have, in Friedman's view, already achieved his normative ideal, staying the course makes perfect sense. Perhaps his contentment with the current state of affairs also helps to explain his willingness to leave his normative view implied.<sup>34</sup> Regardless, if "we" – The People – already constitute "the highest court in the land," foregoing a forceful call to arms seems quite reasonable.<sup>35</sup>

III.

COMMON SHORTCOMINGS: EXCESSIVE VAGUENESS  
AND INSUFFICIENT CONSTRAINTS

Comprehensive theories of judicial review often suffer from excessive vagueness and insufficient constraints. Kramer's and Friedman's books are no exceptions. Specifically, neither Kramer nor Friedman sufficiently defines *who* constitutes The People and both fail to adequately describe what, if anything, constrains the substance of popular will. These two critiques could be interpreted to overlap. For example, a higher standard for who constitutes The People would necessarily constrain popular will. As explained be-

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<sup>32</sup> Compare KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 8 ("[I]n charting how the[] [Founding Fathers tried] to explain and preserve the active sovereignty of the people over the Constitution[][,] perhaps, we may find some reasons to reawaken our own seemingly deadened sensibilities in this respect.") with FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 376 ("Now that the justices and the public understand how things work, the system tends to rest in a relatively quiet equilibrium. . . . [T]here is every indication the American people and the justices want this [relationship] to [continue].").

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 247.

<sup>34</sup> See *supra* Part II.A.

<sup>35</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 385.

low,<sup>36</sup> I use “constraint” narrowly to reflect limits on the *substance* of The People’s constitutional interpretations.

### A. *Who Are The People?*

A theory that subjects the Supreme Court’s interpretive authority to the will of The People would seem to depend upon a clear definition of exactly who constitutes The People. And yet, Kramer and Friedman both fail to provide one. One way to approach the question is to divide it into two: who can be counted as among The People and how do we know when a group is speaking as (or for) The People?

#### 1. Who Can Be Counted As Among The People?

Although this inquiry may seem unnecessary, Kramer highlights the question by discussing at some length the constitutional interpretation performed by pre-Declaration colonists.<sup>37</sup> Daniel Hulsebosch further suggests that “Kramer’s ordinary people are not necessarily citizens” and that immigrants of questionable political status have constituted an “enduring problem[]” for definitions of The People since the 1790s.<sup>38</sup> Friedman, meanwhile, avoids introducing similar doubts by leaving the question entirely open. He begins his narrative after the Declaration and does not seem to contemplate non-citizens getting a say.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, to the extent that Friedman fails to address who can count as The People, he fails to resolve this ambiguity.

#### 2. How Do We Know When a Group is Speaking as (or For) The People?

Kramer struggles to illustrate exactly when and how The People speak. He cites examples of The People speaking through their elected officials, but not every act by the President or Congress is

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<sup>36</sup> See *infra* Part III.B.

<sup>37</sup> See KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 4-21.

<sup>38</sup> Hulsebosch, *supra* note 7, at 692.

<sup>39</sup> See FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 12 (beginning historical analysis “from the time of independence”).

necessarily endorsed by The People.<sup>40</sup> Kramer offers no mechanism to distinguish which actions by elected officials represent The People and which do not. Ironically, his omission empowers the Court to decide.

If efforts by the Congress and the President prove troublesome, we can turn to Kramer's discussion of The People acting even more directly. Citing precedent from Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke, and the Boston Tea Party, Kramer commends "mob or crowd" action as a "respectabl[e]" and "direct expression of popular sovereignty."<sup>41</sup> As an example of this expression, Kramer highlights the 1795 protests against the Jay Treaty in New York City. Alexander Hamilton led a group of "hastily assembled" Federalist merchants to disrupt a 5,000-person protest against the treaty. Hamilton argued that whether to ratify the treaty was, constitutionally, a question for the Senate and the President.<sup>42</sup> The protesters "hiss[ed,] cough[ed,] and hoot[ed,]" eventually "explod[ing] in fury" and driving Hamilton and his supporters away, allegedly throwing a rock or two for good measure.<sup>43</sup> How should Kramer's ideal Supreme Court interpret such an episode? Should it make a difference if, instead of merely 5,000 protestors, there had been "similar scenes . . . repeated around the country"?<sup>44</sup> How many protestors would be enough to justify the Court inferring the popular will? Should the Court con-

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<sup>40</sup> Kramer cites the 1800 election of Thomas Jefferson as an exercise of The People's "interpretive authority." Because "the great controversies of the 1790s had been *constitutional* controversies," he argues, "the fiercely contested election of 1800" served as "an extended national referendum on whose views of the Constitution were correct." KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 49. But unless we conclude that *all* of Jefferson's constitutional interpretations represented The People's will, a court would have to decide which issues were contested with sufficient ferocity. Kramer's example thus ironically empowers the Court to decide which constitutional interpretations earned The People's endorsement. This method of resolving constitutional disputes superficially resembles Bruce Ackerman's idea of constitutional moments, with a key difference. Whereas Ackerman's framework incorporates multiple factors in the attempt to constrain the inquiry, Kramer provides none at all. See generally 1 BRUCE ACKERMAN, *WE THE PEOPLE* (1991).

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 27 (internal quotation marks omitted).

<sup>42</sup> See *id.* at 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

sider the centrality of the constitutional question at issue?<sup>45</sup>

Friedman is equally guilty of proposing an inadequate method to determine when The People have spoken.<sup>46</sup> If Friedman wants the Supreme Court to subject its constitutional interpretations to the will of The People, he should provide some mechanism that allows the Court to do so. To ascertain the popular will, Friedman variously looks to opinion polls,<sup>47</sup> opinion editorials,<sup>48</sup> political commentators,<sup>49</sup> and newspaper accounts of outraged letters to the Court.<sup>50</sup> If we rely on Friedman's suggested indications of The People's will, a judge's opportunity to scan the crowd for friendly faces seems even greater in the quest for popular will than in the search through legislative history for definitive statutory meaning.<sup>51</sup>

Compounding this uncertainty, Friedman uses the term "majoritarian" throughout his book, but never defines it. Can a plurality constitute the popular will? The barest of majorities? What about a majority of the popularly elected House of Representatives? The less proportionate Senate? The President? Like Kramer, Friedman never tells us. He entrusts the authority to interpret the Constitution to The People, but then never tells us how to know when a group actually speaks for them.

Friedman introduces even more uncertainty than Kramer does by suggesting that the Court should distinguish between the "permanent popular will" and the "popular opinion at the moment."<sup>52</sup> Friedman acknowledges the "problem" that judges might not "be able to perceive the difference" but then argues that "[t]he magic of

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<sup>45</sup> For a modern example raising these sorts of questions, see Powe, *supra* note 5, at 884 (citing protests against the World Trade Organization).

<sup>46</sup> In a later work, Professor Friedman appears to recognize the problem, but does not satisfactorily resolve it. See Barry Friedman, *The Will of the People and the Process of Constitutional Change*, 78 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 1232, 1240-44 (2010).

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 373.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., *id.* at 336.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., *id.*

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., *id.*

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Patricia M. Wald, *Some Observations on the Use of Legislative History in the 1981 Supreme Court Term*, 68 IOWA L. REV. 195, 214 (1983) ("It sometimes seems that citing legislative history is . . . akin to 'looking over a crowd and picking out your friends.'").

<sup>52</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 382.

... [this] system ... is that it works whether the judges rule properly or not – precisely because everything important happens after they render their decision.”<sup>53</sup> The Court can get a case wrong, he explains, reflect upon the public reaction, and then correct its course as needed.<sup>54</sup> To illustrate this “magic,” Friedman cites *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>55</sup> There, he argues, the Court accurately predicted the popular opinion *trend* but the decision still only received “plurality support in the polls.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, when *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*<sup>57</sup> came along, the Court had the opportunity to converge on a position that “was remarkably in line with popular opinion.”<sup>58</sup>

Friedman’s assurances, however, ring hollow for two primary reasons. First, public opinion can prove fickle and difficult to predict. Abortion seems a likely candidate for an issue on which public opinion would remain steady. Yet, a 2012 Pew study concluded that support for legalized abortion fell 10% between 1995 and 2001.<sup>59</sup> From 2004 to 2013, opposition to gay marriage fell 17%,<sup>60</sup> while support for gun control fell 21% between 2000 and 2012.<sup>61</sup> In all three cases, the shift reversed the majority and minority positions. Are these trends or fluctuations? The Court would be hard pressed to decide. Indeed, the support for legalized abortion had rebounded 4% by 2012, with a majority again supporting “legalized abortion in all or most cases.”<sup>62</sup>

Second, Friedman’s safety mechanism creates an inverse relationship between the certainty the Court reaches before acting and the speed with which it can correct errors. Distinguishing between permanent and momentary public opinion – that is, between trends and fluctuations – seems to require a substantial waiting period be-

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<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

<sup>56</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 382.

<sup>57</sup> 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

<sup>58</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 382.

<sup>59</sup> *Pew Research: Gun rights, abortion, gay marriage views over time*, JOURNALIST’S RESOURCE (May 16, 2012), <http://perma.cc/8HES-R3RK>.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

fore a Court feels confident in overturning a previous holding. Doing so, however, prolongs the error. Returning to Friedman's example, nineteen years passed between *Roe* and *Casey*. Fifty-eight years passed between *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>63</sup> and *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>64</sup>

### *B. What Constrains The People's Constitutional Interpretations?*

Both Kramer and Friedman base their theories on the idea that the popular will limits – or even dictates – the behavior of the Supreme Court. But neither author identifies what – if anything – constrains the assortment of constitutional interpretations available to The People. Are they limited to choosing between *reasonable* constructions of an ambiguous provision? If not, does their ability to embrace *unreasonable* constructions essentially replace Article 5 as the mechanism by which we actually *amend* – rather than merely interpret – the Constitution?

Such an amendment-by-popular-acclamation seems within Friedman's grandest descriptions of The People's authority – "[W]e are the highest court in the land"<sup>65</sup> – but it seems to exceed his more modest explanations that "[t]he people . . . have had the ability all along to assert pressure on the judges."<sup>66</sup> The former seems similar in nature to Bruce Ackerman's theory that sufficiently salient "constitutional moments" can *amend* the constitution.<sup>67</sup> As I noted previously, Ackerman's framework at least maintains a relatively high standard for when such a moment exists.<sup>68</sup> Neither Kramer nor Friedman provides any such standard.

If The People are limited to choosing among reasonable constructions of ambiguous constitutional provisions, who decides which constructions are reasonable? If The People decide, we are back to amendments-by-acclamation. If the Court decides, then it is hard to determine how exactly The People "are the highest court in

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<sup>63</sup> 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

<sup>64</sup> 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>65</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 385.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.* at 370.

<sup>67</sup> See ACKERMAN, *supra* note 40.

<sup>68</sup> See *id.*



the land.”<sup>69</sup> Kramer never addresses the question at all. Friedman seems to avoid directly confronting it by describing the interaction between The People and the Court as a “dialogic process” of “popular response” and “judicial re-decision.”<sup>70</sup> But truly resolving the quandary would require a clear delineation of authority. And if the resolution allows the Court to play a role, even one that allows for a popular outrage forcing a judicial reversal, that seems at odds with Friedman’s basic and explicit premise that “[u]ltimately, it is the people (and the people alone) who must decide what the Constitution means.”<sup>71</sup>

Neither Friedman nor Kramer sufficiently specifies how the relationship between the Court and The People should maintain (Friedman) or revive (Kramer) The People’s authority. But each also suffers from a central flaw, to which I turn in the next section.

## IV.

### THE FLAWS AT THE CENTER OF THE ARGUMENTS

The final similarity between Kramer and Friedman is that each of their arguments contains a central flaw. Kramer’s argument suffers from an inherent contradiction: it simultaneously depends upon but fails to embrace faith in The People’s decisions. Friedman’s flaw lies in his basic description that the Court avoids substantial deviation from popular will because of The People’s threat of violent discipline: the parts of his description that are accurate are unsurprising and the parts that would be surprising he fails to persuasively demonstrate as accurate.

#### *A. Kramer Doesn’t Trust The People After All*

Kramer ties the outcome of the struggle between The People and the Court to a simple question: “[W]hether [Americans] share [a] lack of faith in themselves and their fellow citizens.”<sup>72</sup> If The

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<sup>69</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 385.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.* at 382.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.* at 367.

<sup>72</sup> KRAMER, *supra* note 2, at 247.

People *lack* faith in each other, he writes, they will “hand[] their Constitution over to the” courts.<sup>73</sup> But if they *have* faith in each other, they will “assume once again the full responsibilities of self-government.”<sup>74</sup> Kramer acknowledges that “the choice is ours to make, necessarily and unavoidably.”<sup>75</sup> Neither the Constitution, history, nor tradition “make[s] it for us.”<sup>76</sup> In advocating his popular constitutionalism, Kramer claims to possess this faith in The People. But he also seems to acknowledge that The People have already chosen to cede their authority to the courts.<sup>77</sup> Kramer argues that The People should have faith in each other and abandon this decision. Perhaps instead he should trust the choice they have already made to delegate some of their authority to the courts. He attributes the abdication to The People’s lack of faith in each other.<sup>78</sup> But his refusal to accept The People’s decision seems to reflect his own lack of faith instead.

Friedman avoids this mistake. He recognizes that “the Court has this [interpretive] power only because, over time, the American people have decided to cede it to the justices.”<sup>79</sup> But, unlike Kramer, Friedman treats that choice with respect, acknowledging that “there is every indication the American people” want “the relationship to continue.”<sup>80</sup>

### *B. Friedman’s Fundamental Descriptive Conclusions Prove Either Unsurprising or Unconvincing*

Friedman’s most notable descriptive conclusion is that the Court is majoritarian after all. While he concedes that the Court defies popular will on occasion, he argues that it does so rarely and not by

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<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> *Id.*

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> See *id.* at 233-34 (“We the people have – apparently of our own volition – handed control of our fundamental law over to [the courts]”).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at 247.

<sup>79</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 376.

much.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps more notably, Friedman claims that the Court *tries* not to deviate from popular will to avoid The People's discipline.<sup>82</sup> But both of these conclusions prove disappointing.

### 1. The Unsurprisingly Majoritarian Court

Friedman's argument that the Court acts in a manner *largely* consistent with the popular will introduces a few new details in the long scholarly debate about the counter-majoritarian difficulty. But his broader position – that the Court hews more closely to the popular will than some assume – is not entirely new.<sup>83</sup> More importantly, it should be completely unsurprising because of our constitutional structure.

Structurally, we should not be surprised that the Supreme Court largely acts within an “accept[able]” range of the popular will.<sup>84</sup> After all, the Justices are appointed by a popularly elected President and confirmed by at least half of the popularly elected Senate.<sup>85</sup> How far, then, should we expect Justices to stray from the will of those who popularly elected the President and the Senate?

The People also retain the Article V right to amend the Constitution, an additional structural constraint that limits the degree to which the Court can stray from popular will. This does not prevent all deviations, of course, but it imposes an outside limit. Friedman might respond that Article V requires such a high degree of consensus that amending the Constitution proves an unrealistic check on judicial defiance. To the extent this is true, Friedman should also consider the implications for his own theory. If the constitutionally

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<sup>81</sup> See *id.* at 381-84 (describing the “democratic constitution”).

<sup>82</sup> See *id.* at 376 (“[I]t has taken the Court and the public some time to learn how their relationship might work; now that it is understood, violent upheaval is no longer necessary.”).

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Powe, *supra* note 5, at 890 (“If the Court were countermajoritarian, then popular constitutionalism would offer a functional solution, but given the realities of modern judicial review, that solution does not seem necessary.”).

<sup>84</sup> FRIEDMAN, *supra* note 1, at 13.

<sup>85</sup> Though Senate confirmation only requires fifty votes, overcoming a filibuster has long required sixty votes. The Senate recently removed the ability to filibuster all but Supreme Court nominees. See Jeremy W. Peters, *In Landmark Vote, Senate Limits Use of the Filibuster*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 21, 2013), <http://perma.cc/7LXD-AG2P>.

sanctioned process for amendments requires such a high degree of consensus, then extra-constitutional processes for “amendments” – including at least those of Ackerman, Kramer, and Friedman himself – seem increasingly suspect as legitimate exercises of constitutional authority.

## 2. The Unconvincing Description of the Court’s Motivation

Friedman also argues that the Court conforms to the popular will deliberately in order to avoid The People’s threats of “disciplin[e]” and “violent upheaval.”<sup>86</sup> Specifically, Friedman enumerates some of the “weapons [available] to control the justices”: Court packing, impeachment, and jurisdiction-stripping measures.<sup>87</sup> He quotes Lord Bryce to justify the Court’s surrender in the face of such threats: “To yield a little may be prudent, for the tree that cannot bend to the blast may be broken.”<sup>88</sup> Acknowledging that these weapons have fallen out of use, Friedman suggests that the memory of “violent upheaval” in years gone by continues to deter deviations from the popular will.<sup>89</sup> Friedman then moves on to his next argument, leaving the attentive reader to notice the lack of compelling evidence to support this naked assertion.

Of course it is not difficult to understand how past battles *could* create a more compliant Court, historical reexaminations notwithstanding.<sup>90</sup> But *could* falls far short of *did* or *does*. In addition to failing to support this conclusion, Friedman fails to seriously consider alternative explanations.

One possibility is that the disputes of today are structured in a way that makes counter-majoritarian decisions unlikely. Consider the survey data already discussed.<sup>91</sup> Guns, gay marriage, and abor-

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<sup>86</sup> *Id.* at 376.

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> *Id.* (citation omitted).

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*

<sup>90</sup> See generally BARRY CUSHMAN, *RETHINKING THE NEW DEAL COURT: THE STRUCTURE OF CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION* (1998) (contending that FDR’s Court-packing plan did not really cause the Court’s “switch in time”). This uncertainty undermines the claim that such threats can coerce Court compliance with the popular will.

<sup>91</sup> See *supra* text accompanying notes 59-62.

tion are three of the most contentious issues of the last few decades. Yet public opinion was so close on all three that a small shift over a short period reversed the majority and minority positions.

Friedman persuasively argues that the Court has largely served majoritarian ends. Given our governmental structure and confirmation process, however, this conclusion should not surprise us. Friedman then argues that the Court is motivated to pursue majoritarian ends in order to avoid threats from The People. This conclusion proves unconvincing: Friedman lacks evidence and fails to consider alternative explanations.

## V.

### CONCLUSION

Despite a shared normative ideal – The People as the ultimate arbiters of constitutional meaning – Friedman’s and Kramer’s descriptive narratives and prescriptive recommendations sharply clash. Nevertheless, their theories both suffer from excessive vagueness and insufficient constraint in terms of how we define *who* constitutes The People, and how (or even whether) we constrain the substance of popular will. Upon close scrutiny, moreover, central flaws undermine both theories. Kramer’s claim of faith in The People seems overcome with doubt and Friedman’s most celebrated conclusions prove either unsurprising or unconvincing.

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# THE CASE FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

*Elise Hofer*<sup>†</sup>  
*with a Preface by Suzanna Sherry*<sup>\*</sup>

## PREFACE

Elise Hofer focuses on the last few weeks of the same seminar,<sup>a</sup> when we read three scholars' defenses of judicial review and judicial activism: Christopher Eisgruber's *Constitutional Self-Government*, Jonathan Siegel's "The Institutional Case For Judicial Review,"<sup>b</sup> and my own short essay, "Why We Need More Judicial Activism."<sup>c</sup> She asks how the various arguments – from political theory, institutional competence, and history – translate from the context of representative democracy to the context of direct democracy. This is an important question, as about half the states have some form of popular referendum. It is also a novel question, to which Elise gives a counter-intuitive answer: Judicial activism is even *more* justified and *more* necessary in the context of direct democracy. She supports her conclusion with fascinating information about the actual workings of the referendum process, which by itself makes the paper worth reading.

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<sup>a</sup> For a description of the seminar, see Suzanna Sherry, *Preface* to Will Marks, *Whose Majority Is It Anyway? Elite Signaling and Future Public Preferences*, 4 J.L. (1 NEW VOICES) 13, 13 (2014).

<sup>b</sup> 97 IOWA L. REV. 1147 (2012).

<sup>c</sup> Suzanna Sherry, *Why We Need More Judicial Activism*, in CONSTITUTIONALISM, EXECUTIVE POWER, AND POPULAR ENLIGHTENMENT (Giorgi Areshidze, Paul Carrese, and Suzanna Sherry eds., forthcoming 2014), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2213372>; see also Micro-Symposium, *Suzanna Sherry's Why We Need More Judicial Activism*, 16 GREEN BAG 2D 449 (2013).

## I.

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous scholars have dealt with the apparent tension between judicial review and majoritarian democracy. Critics of judicial review have frequently cited the “counter-majoritarian difficulty” – that is, the argument that judicial review is illegitimate because it allows unelected judges to overrule the law-making of elected representatives, thus undermining the will of the people.<sup>1</sup> In response, the courts’ defenders have traditionally advanced two arguments in favor of judicial review. The first is that judicial review is appropriate only to the extent that it secures rights necessary to a well-functioning democracy.<sup>2</sup> The problem with this argument, however, is that most people believe that judges should enforce some rights that bear little or no relation to the electoral or legislative process.<sup>3</sup> The second is that the courts *should* limit democracy in ways that promote justice and protect individual fundamental rights.<sup>4</sup> An obvious weakness with this latter argument is that it concedes that judicial review is, in fact, undemocratic.<sup>5</sup>

The three authors discussed in this paper are also defenders of judicial review, and advance three additional arguments in favor of judicial review, which attempt to rebut the counter-majoritarian difficulty in distinct ways. First, Christopher Eisgruber argues that judicial review thwarts the will of the *legislature*, not the will of the *people*, and that it is a mistake to equate the two.<sup>6</sup> Based on this distinction, he reconceives judicial review as a kind of democratic institution that is “well-shaped to speak on behalf of the people about

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Alexander M. Bickel, THE LEAST DANGEROUS BRANCH 16-23 (1962) (“[J]udicial review is a counter-majoritarian force in our system.”).

<sup>2</sup> See generally JOHN HART ELY, DEMOCRACY AND DISTRUST: A THEORY OF JUDICIAL REVIEW (1980).

<sup>3</sup> See CHRISTOPHER L. EISGRUBER, CONSTITUTIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT 46-47 (2001) (“Judicial review is usually regarded as a constraint upon the American people’s ability to act on their own judgments.”).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> See EISGRUBER, *supra* note 3, at 49-50 (“It does not always follow that the best institution to represent the people will always be . . . thoroughly majoritarian.”).



questions of moral and political principle” due to judges’ life tenure and consequent disinterestedness.<sup>7</sup> Second, and relatedly, Jonathan Siegel posits that the judicial process has additional “institutional characteristics” (beyond life tenure) that make the judicial process “the superior method of constitutional enforcement” when compared to the electoral and legislative processes.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Suzanna Sherry summarizes the arguments of many scholars that the central problem of democratic government is protecting minorities from the tyranny of the majority; thus, Sherry argues, the courts have an obligation to act as a counter-majoritarian institution dedicated to protecting constitutional rights against legislative excess.<sup>9</sup> In other words, contrary to conventional wisdom, the judiciary’s counter-majoritarian nature is its strength, not its weakness.

Notably, all three authors defend judicial review in the context of *representative* democracy. The question remains, however, whether their arguments hold in the context of *direct* democracy. Although most laws originate in a legislative body, the constitutions of approximately half the states authorize lawmaking by the electorate itself, usually in the form of statewide initiatives (which allow citizens to enact new statutes or constitutional amendments) or referenda (which allow citizens to repeal a statute enacted by the state legislature).<sup>10</sup>

Like legislative enactments, the results of voter enactments are subject to constitutional challenge, and have sometimes been invalidated on equal protection or other grounds.<sup>11</sup> Judicial opinions in

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan R. Siegel, *The Institutional Case for Judicial Review*, 97 IOWA L. REV. 1147, 1147 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Suzanna Sherry, *Why We Need More Judicial Activism*, in CONSTITUTIONALISM, EXECUTIVE POWER, AND POPULAR ENLIGHTENMENT (Giorgi Areshidze, Paul Carrese, & Suzanna Sherry eds., forthcoming 2014) (“The courts *should* stand in the way of democratic majorities, in order to keep majority rule from degenerating into majority tyranny.”).

<sup>10</sup> See *Initiative and Referendum States*, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE LEGISLATURES (Sept. 2012), <http://perma.cc/WB9R-4UEW> (listing the twenty-six states with either statutory or constitutional provisions for direct democracy).

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the best known example of this is *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620 (1996), in which the Supreme Court held that Colorado’s anti-gay rights initiative did not pass rational basis review under the Equal Protection Clause.

such cases have applied the same standards they would have applied to a legislative enactment.<sup>12</sup> A plausible argument can be made, however, that the judiciary should afford greater deference to exercises of direct democracy than it would to products of representative democracy. This is so for at least two reasons. First, if the legislature's inability to speak accurately on behalf of the people justifies, at least in part, judicial review of legislative enactments (as Eisgruber and Siegel claim), then the need for judicial review would seem to diminish when the people are able to speak for themselves, as in the context of direct democracy. Second, striking down an action taken directly by the public, rather than by their elected representatives, seems to make the counter-majoritarian difficulty even more readily apparent.

Notwithstanding these two arguments, I will argue in this paper that the results of direct democracy call for *more*, not less, judicial review. This is so because in the context of direct democracy, the judiciary is the only functioning check on majority power. While critics of judicial review are likely to reject the notion that the judiciary should be able to check the clear will of the people, this line of thinking incorrectly assumes that the outcomes of direct democracy accurately reflect majority will. Instead, I argue below that those outcomes are hardly a perfect reflection of majority will; rather, the same shortcomings of the electoral process plague both direct and representative democracy. Moreover, even if direct democracy results *were* accurate gauges of the majority's views, views do not become constitutional merely because they are majoritarian. To the contrary, the Framers were acutely aware of the threat that unchecked majorities pose to unpopular groups and viewpoints, and designed a system of government to combat that threat.<sup>13</sup> Thus,

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 704 F. Supp. 2d 921, 938 (N.D. Cal. 2010) (holding that, although "[a]n initiative measure adopted by the voters deserves great respect," California had no rational basis in denying homosexuals marriage licenses), *aff'd sub nom.* *Perry v. Brown*, 671 F.3d 1052 (9th Cir. 2012), *aff'd on other grounds sub nom.* *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, 133 S. Ct. 2652 (2013) (holding petitioners lack standing to bring appeal).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., THE FEDERALIST NO. 10, at 72 (James Madison) (Clinton Rossiter ed., 2003) ("Complaints are everywhere heard . . . measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an inter-

while strong judicial review of direct democracy may at times place courts in the precarious position of standing in the way of democratic majorities, it is both necessary and desirable in order to safeguard minority rights.

## II.

### THE AUTHORS' CASE FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

In *Constitutional Self-Government*, Eisgruber refutes the notion that judicial review is undemocratic. He argues that, if we deepen our understanding of democracy, we can view the Supreme Court as a kind of representative institution that is sometimes better able than legislatures to speak on behalf of the people.<sup>14</sup> Eisgruber begins by noting that, in large nation-states (such as the United States), “the people” can never act in any direct way; instead, they act through a variety of institutions, including the legislature, none of which represent them perfectly.<sup>15</sup> This is so for two reasons.

First, democracy is governed by the *whole*, while a majority is by definition only a *fraction* of the people.<sup>16</sup> In order to truly speak on behalf of the people, Eisgruber contends, a government must take into account the interests and opinions of *all* the people, not just those of the majority.<sup>17</sup> Second, Eisgruber argues that both legislators and voters have incentives to make political decisions on the basis of self-interest.<sup>18</sup> In the case of legislators, the incentive is clear: to keep their jobs. This may lead them to disregard their own moral judgments in order to please voters. Of course, that would not be a problem if voters' preferences were good proxies for “the people's” values. Unfortunately, however, the office of “voter” also provides incentives for self-interested behavior for several reasons:

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ested and overbearing majority.”).

<sup>14</sup> EISGRUBER, *supra* note 3, at 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 50-52.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 52-56.

[V]oters act anonymously; they are neither required nor enabled to give reasons for their decision; and they must choose among a very limited set of options (for example, selecting one candidate from among a small set of competitors, or by voting “yes” or “no” on a ballot question). Moreover, each voter knows to a virtual certainty that her individual ballot will have no impact on the outcome of the election. The office of “voter” thus gives people very little incentive to take their responsibilities seriously . . . .<sup>19</sup>

After explaining why “the people” should not be equated with the legislature, Eisgruber argues that four crucial features of the judiciary make it the institution best suited to speak on behalf of the people on contested issues of morality.<sup>20</sup> First, judges have life tenure, and their consequent disinterestedness makes it more likely that they will decide contested moral issues on the basis of principled judgment, rather than self-interest.<sup>21</sup> Second, judges’ votes often have a decisive impact on the outcome of a case; therefore, they have a much stronger incentive to take full responsibility for their choices.<sup>22</sup> Third, judges are held publicly accountable for their decisions and must give a public account of their reasoning.<sup>23</sup> Finally, judges are politically appointed and selected “on the basis of their political views and political connections,” helping to ensure that the views of each judge are “unlikely to be radically at odds with the American mainstream.”<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, Eisgruber concludes that judges, while unelected, are nevertheless representative of the people and are better able to protect rights and advance principles of justice than are legislatures.

In “The Institutional Case for Judicial Review,” Siegel points to other institutional characteristics of the judicial process to reach the same conclusion: that judicial review is the superior method of constitutional enforcement when compared to the electoral and legisla-

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 50.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 71.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 57-59.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* (“[Federal judges] are not required to stand for election, but they must quite literally give a public account of their reasoning.”).

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 71.

tive processes.<sup>25</sup> The most important of these characteristics, according to Siegel, is that the judicial process is focused: it “resolves a specific claim raised by a specific plaintiff.”<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the electoral process forces voters to choose between particular candidates; they are in essence voting for a package of positions on many different issues, and have no way to express their views on any one issue in particular.<sup>27</sup> For example, a voter may be forced to choose between a candidate who reflects her views on economic issues or one who reflects her views on social issues. Elections thus deliver results but no reasons, making it impossible for politicians to follow the voters’ judgment on constitutional issues, given that they do not know for sure why they were elected in the first place or what the voters’ positions are on any specific issue.<sup>28</sup> Siegel points to various other characteristics of the judicial process as well, and concludes that “[t]he full range of distinctive institutional characteristics, not just the political isolation of judges, normatively justifies judicial review.”<sup>29</sup>

While Eisgruber essentially argues that judicial review is not really undemocratic, in “Why We Need More Judicial Activism,” Sherry *embraces* the fact that judicial review is undemocratic, arguing that the “courts *should* stand in the way of democratic majorities, in order to keep majority rule from degenerating into majority tyranny.”<sup>30</sup> Her argument rests on three grounds. First, she distinguishes between a pure democracy, in which the majority is entitled to enact its wishes into law, and a constitutional democracy, in which the Constitution places limits on the majority’s power.<sup>31</sup> Because our Constitution establishes a constitutional democracy, constitutional *theory* suggests a need for judicial oversight of the popular branches.<sup>32</sup> Second, and relatedly, our own constitutional *history* confirms

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<sup>25</sup> Siegel, *supra* note 8, at 1147.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 1169.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 1169-70.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 1173.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 1147 (noting that judicial review is focused and mandatory, whereas the legislative process is unfocused and discretionary).

<sup>30</sup> Sherry, *supra* note 9, at 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 7; see also *id.* (“The Constitution establishes liberty as well as democracy.”).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 7-9.

that the Framers saw a need for a strong bulwark against majority tyranny, and recognized that the remedy for legislative excess was judicial activism.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Sherry argues that an examination of constitutional *practice* shows that too little activism – or, in other words, the failure to invalidate a law that should be declared unconstitutional – produces worse consequences than does too much.<sup>34</sup> To illustrate this point, Sherry compiles a list of “condemned cases”<sup>35</sup> (consisting of such predictable names as *Plessy v. Ferguson*<sup>36</sup> and *Korematsu v. United States*<sup>37</sup>) and notes that each case on the list has at least two commonalities: first, it is universally recognized as wrong; and second, the Supreme Court *upheld* the challenged governmental action rather than invalidating it.<sup>38</sup> While there have clearly been unpopular decisions in which the Court struck down the challenged action (the Court’s recent decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*<sup>39</sup> immediately jumps to mind), Sherry’s list nevertheless persuasively demonstrates that an overly deferential Court may not be as desirable as critics of judicial review suggest.

### III.

## THE CASE FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Although the authors’ arguments in defense of judicial review appear to have been articulated with representative democracy in mind (particularly in the case of Siegel), their arguments apply with equal – if not greater – force in the context of direct democracy. Democracy, whether direct or representative, reflects majority

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<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 9-11.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 11 (“[W]e are better off erring on the side of too much judicial activism than too little.”).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> 163 U.S. 537 (1896) (upholding Louisiana’s racially segregated railcars).

<sup>37</sup> 323 U.S. 214 (1944) (upholding an executive order excluding Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II).

<sup>38</sup> Sherry, *supra* note 9, at 16.

<sup>39</sup> 558 U.S. 310 (2010) (holding that the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting political independent expenditures by corporations, associations, or labor unions).

will only when citizen participation in government is both widespread and informed. As I will explain below, however, in the United States few citizens vote in elections and even fewer are adequately informed of the issues at stake. Because these problems affect the outcomes of both direct and representative democracy, both direct and representative democracy fail to accurately reflect the will of “the people.” Perhaps more importantly, even if exercises of direct democracy better reflect majoritarian preferences, they also uniquely facilitate majoritarian oppression of disfavored minority interests. The Framers designed our system of government with deviations from pure democracy that better protect such minority interests. Thus, I conclude that the case for judicial review is *stronger*, not weaker, in the context of direct democracy. I conclude by illustrating this point with examples of recent direct democracy measures that have consistently disfavored minority rights.<sup>40</sup>

*A. Direct democracy fails to accurately reflect  
“the will of the people.”*

Given that “town hall democracy” is an impractical model for the United States,<sup>41</sup> the next best way to gauge majority sentiment would seem to be direct democracy, which allows each citizen to vote on issues rather than on candidates.<sup>42</sup> As a practical matter, however, popular votes do a flawed job of ascertaining what the people really want, even in the context of direct democracy. To begin with, only about half of the voting age population regularly votes, and this number drops even further in midterm election years.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, data demonstrate that significant numbers of

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<sup>40</sup> Although other authors have occasionally called for increased judicial review of the products of direct democracy, they have not elaborated on the underlying reasons for doing so. See, e.g., Julian N. Eule, *Judicial Review of Direct Democracy*, 99 YALE L.J. 1503 (1990); Philip P. Frickey, *Interpretation on the Borderline: Constitution, Canons, Direct Democracy*, 1996 ANN. SURV. AM. L. 477 (1996); Mihui Pak, *The Counter-Majoritarian Difficulty in Focus: Judicial Review of Initiatives*, 32 COLUM. J.L. & SOC. PROBS. 237 (1999).

<sup>41</sup> EISGRUBER, *supra* note 3, at 49.

<sup>42</sup> See Siegel, *supra* note 8, at 1168-69 (discussing taking a case “to the polls” as a costly alternative to litigation).

<sup>43</sup> See *Voter turnout data for United States*, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND

those who vote for candidates at the top of the ballot – already a reduced segment of the populace – fail to vote on initiatives and referenda (the “drop-off” problem).<sup>44</sup> Based on these facts, it seems unlikely that the small subgroup that actually does vote on these issues accurately reflects the preferences of the full citizenry. To the contrary, data indicate that those who are less educated, poorer, and younger are far less likely to vote on such measures.<sup>45</sup>

Given the complexity of the issues presented by direct democracy measures, voters who do respond to such measures are often confused, ignorant, or mistaken about what their vote really signifies. As Eisgruber explained, voters know that their own vote rarely affects the outcome of the election; thus, rational voters have little incentive to become well informed, regardless of whether they are voting for candidates or issues.<sup>46</sup> While Eisgruber made this point in the context of candidate-voting, it is especially true in the context of issue-voting, particularly because a ballot is rarely limited to a single measure. For instance, California’s infamous Proposition 8 was just one of twenty-one statewide propositions on its 2008 ballot, in addition to 380 local ballot measures.<sup>47</sup> Such overloads are all but

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ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE, <http://perma.cc/L2VD-28NG> (archived Feb. 8, 2014) (showing that 53.6% of voting-age population voted in the 2012 election, and just 38.5% in the 2010 midterm election).

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., James N.G. Cauthen, *Referenda, Initiatives, and State Constitutional No-Aid Clauses*, 76 ALB. L. REV. 2141, 2155 (2013) (citing THOMAS E. CRONIN, *DIRECT DEMOCRACY: THE POLITICS OF INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM, AND RECALL* 66-67 (1989)) (“[B]allot propositions generally attract fewer voters, with significant ballot drop-off between the number participating in elections for office and those who vote on the ballot proposition.”).

<sup>45</sup> See David B. Magleby, *Let the Voters Decide? An Assessment of the Initiative and Referendum Process*, 66 U. COLO. L. REV. 13, 33-34 (1995) (“Voting on ballot propositions only amplifies the social class bias in participation, because those with lower incomes or less education tend to skip voting on ballot questions at much higher rates.”).

<sup>46</sup> See EISGRUBER, *supra* note 3, at 50-51; see also Frank H. Easterbrook, *The State of Madison’s Vision of the State: A Public Choice Perspective*, 107 HARV. L. REV. 1328, 1331 (1994) (“Rational ignorance among voters . . . hinders achievement of the public interest under direct democracy.”). But see Michael S. King, *Democratizing Direct Democracy: Restoring Voter Competence Through Heuristic Cues and “Disclosure Plus,”* 50 UCLA L. REV. 1141, 1143 (2003) (“Despite their rational ignorance, voters can still make competent political choices. . . . Heuristic cues offer the best means of improving voter competence in direct democracy at low cost.”).

<sup>47</sup> Shane Goldmacher, *All the local ballot measures fit for a vote*, CAPITOL ALERT, SACRAMENTO BEE (Oct. 16, 2008), <http://perma.cc/PR2D-YSAL>.



guaranteed to strain the voters' capacity for adequate research and education. Voter confusion is likely partly responsible for the drop-off problem, with many voters deciding to simply forego voting on a ballot measure altogether. On other occasions, however, it may lead voters to vote contrary to their own desires. Sometimes such incorrect voting may be attributable to the wording of the proposition; for example, those *in favor* of same-sex marriage in California were required to vote *against* Proposition 8.<sup>48</sup> In sum, the weaknesses of direct democracy can result in uninformed and even mistaken voting. And even fully informed voters can still vote only yes or no, which may not fully represent their position on a given issue.

*B. Judicial review of direct democracy is necessary to protect against "the tyranny of the majority."*

I do not mean to suggest that every, or even most, exercises of direct democracy are inaccurate reflections of the desires of those who vote. But even if direct democracy has a superior ability to convey the majority's viewpoint, the fact that a viewpoint is widely held does not make it constitutional. To the contrary, the Framers specifically designed our structure of government to guard against bare majoritarianism.<sup>49</sup> The goal in designing the structure of government was to "simultaneously empower and disempower popular majorities, to ensure democratic governance but nevertheless place a check on unfettered democratic rule."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Framers chose a constitutional democracy over a pure democracy in order to place limits on the majority's power.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the Framers endorsed the separation of powers, in which the Constitution allocated the federal government's authority among three branches and, within Congress, divided the legislative power between two houses, each

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<sup>48</sup> *Voter Information Guide*, CA. SECRETARY OF STATE 128 (2008), available at <http://perma.cc/8VJS-JEFL>.

<sup>49</sup> See Sherry, *supra* note 9, at 7-8 ("In a constitutional democracy, the role of the judiciary is to enforce the constitutional limits, and to put the brakes on popular tyranny and popular passions.").

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

elected by and accountable to different constituencies. In the event that a majority faction dominated one house of Congress, bicameralism would hinder that faction from controlling the legislative process. Moreover, the executive branch retained the authority to veto legislation, though presidential vetoes are subject to possible override by Congress. Finally, the Framers viewed the Constitution's division of governmental authority between the federal government and the states as the final safeguard against majoritarian tyranny.

Most of these checks and balances are missing from the direct democracy process, and their absence is most acute when direct democracy measures target minority groups. Direct democracy presents a unique opportunity for a bare majority to exercise its will over the minority, a situation against which the Framers tried to guard. The National Conference of State Legislatures' database, which lists all state ballot measures since 1892,<sup>52</sup> illustrates the frequency with which proposals to amend state constitutions to ban affirmative action and same-sex marriage are placed on ballots and submitted to the voters. As demonstrated by Figure 1 and Figure 2, the results of such measures overwhelmingly disfavored the minority groups at issue (racial minorities and homosexuals, respectively):

FIGURE 1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BANS

PASSED	FAILED
Arizona (Proposition 107, 2010)	Colorado (Amendment 46, 2008)
California (Proposition 209, 1996)	
Michigan (Proposal 2, 2006)	
Nebraska (Initiative 424, 2008)	
Oklahoma (State Question 759, 2012)	
Washington (Initiative 200, 1998)	

<sup>52</sup> *Ballot Measure Database*, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, <http://perma.cc/4SD8-GG6P> (archived Feb. 8, 2014).

## THE CASE FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

FIGURE 2. SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BANS

PASSED	FAILED <sup>53</sup>
Alabama (Amendment 774, 2006)	Maine (Question 1, 2012)
Alaska (Ballot Measure 2, 1998)	Maryland (Question 6, 2012)
Arizona (Proposition 102, 2008)	Minnesota (Amendment 1, 2012)
Arkansas (Constitutional Amendment 3, 2006)	Washington (Referendum 74, 2012)
California (Proposition 8, 2008)	
Colorado (Amendment 43, 2006)	
Florida (Amendment 2, 2008)	
Georgia (Constitutional Amendment 1, 2004)	
Hawaii (Constitutional Amendment 2, 1998)	
Idaho (Amendment 2, 2006)	
Kansas (Proposed Amendment 1, 2005)	
Kentucky (Constitutional Amendment 1, 2004)	
Louisiana (Constitutional Amendment 1, 2004)	
Michigan (State Proposal 2, 2004)	
Mississippi (Amendment 1, 2004)	
Missouri (Constitutional Amendment 2, 2004)	
Montana (Initiative 96, 2004)	
Nebraska (Initiative Measure 416, 2000)	
Nevada (Question 2, 2002)	
North Carolina (Amendment 1, 2012)	
North Dakota (Constitutional Measure 1, 2004)	
Ohio (State Issue 1, 2004)	
Oklahoma (State Question 711, 2004)	
Oregon (Measure 36, 2004)	
South Carolina (Amendment 1, 2006)	
South Dakota (Amendment C, 2006)	
Tennessee (Amendment 1, 2006)	
Texas (Proposition 2, 2005)	
Utah (Constitutional Amendment 3, 2004)	
Virginia (Marshall-Newman Amendment, 2006)	
Wisconsin (Referendum 1, 2006)	

<sup>53</sup> The Maine, Maryland, and Washington ballot measures were not technically same-sex marriage *bans*, but rather, proposals to *allow* same-sex marriage that passed, which may be coincidence or may serve as evidence in support of the contention that the wording of such measures affects outcomes.

These data demonstrate the ease with which majorities can trump minority rights using direct democracy measures. And the examples do not stop there: other minority groups, including immigrants<sup>54</sup> and persons charged with crimes,<sup>55</sup> have consistently been disadvantaged by the direct democracy process as well. In this context, the courts are the only institutional check and the only protector of minority rights. Indeed, many initiatives and referenda have subsequently been declared unconstitutional by courts. For instance, in 2012, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Michigan's voter-approved ban on affirmative action on equal protection grounds, concluding that "Proposal 2 reorders the political process in Michigan to place special burdens on minority interests."<sup>56</sup> Additionally, in 2010, a federal district court ruled that California's Proposition 8 violated both the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> More than half of the states have passed measures to establish English as their official language or to require that all public schoolchildren be taught in English. *See, e.g.*, Ariz. Proposition 203 (2000) (limiting non-English instruction available in public schools); Ariz. Proposition 103 (2006) (establishing English as the official language of the state); Mass. Question 2 (2002) (requiring that all subjects be taught in English); Mo. Constitutional Amendment 1 (2008) (establishing English as the official language of the state); Okla. Question 751 (2010) (same); Utah Initiative A (2000) (same); *see also States with Official English Laws*, U.S. ENGLISH, <http://perma.cc/7UKF-C99V> (archived Feb. 8, 2014) (advocacy group's map of the thirty-one states with English-only laws). *But see* Colorado's Amendment 31 (2002) (failed amendment requiring English-only instruction in public schools); Oregon's Measure 58 (2008) (failed initiative that would have required "English immersion" in public schools).

<sup>55</sup> States have frequently passed measures to decrease the number of bailable offenses, *see, e.g.*, Texas's Proposition 13 (2007) (authorizing the denial of bail to a person who violates conditions of release in a felony or domestic violence case), and increased penalties for certain types of crimes, *see, e.g.*, Ariz. Proposition 301 (2006) (authorizing a prison term for a first-time offender of methamphetamine possession); Cal. Proposition 83 (2006) (increasing penalties and limiting early-release opportunities for sex offenders); Or. Measure 57 (2008) (increasing sentences for certain drug and property crimes). However, until recently, states have generally rejected measures to decriminalize the use and possession of small amounts of marijuana. *See* Alaska Ballot Measure 5 (2000); California's Proposition 19 (2010); S.D. Initiated Measure 1 (2008). *But see* Colo. Amendment 64 (2012); Wash. Initiative 502 (2012).

<sup>56</sup> *Coal. to Defend Affirmative Action v. Regents of the Univ. of Mich.*, 701 F.3d 466, 485 (6th Cir. 2012), *cert. granted sub nom. Schuette v. Coal. to Defend Affirmative Action*, 133 S. Ct. 1633 (2013).

<sup>57</sup> *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 704 F. Supp. 2d 921 (N.D. Cal. 2010), *aff'd sub nom. Perry v.*

IV.

CONCLUSION

Determining the will of the people is problematic whether articulated and implemented through the legislative process or through direct democracy. Additionally, unfettered majority rule has never been the goal of American democracy. To the contrary, our government has an obligation to all of its citizens, and the rights of individuals and minority groups must be protected against the actions of the majority. In the context of direct democracy, these protections can be enforced only by strong judicial review. Clearly, judicial resolution of constitutional issues will continue to generate controversy as judges interpret vague terms such as “due process” and “equal protection.” Yet the ability of courts to engage in this function is necessary to protect individual liberties from majority encroachments; thus, the supposed counter-majoritarian difficulty should not foreclose judicial review of direct democracy initiatives.

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Brown, 671 F.3d 1052 (9th Cir. 2012). The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that proponents of initiatives such as Proponent 8 did not possess legal standing in their own right to defend the resulting law in federal court. The appeal was dismissed, leaving the district court’s 2010 ruling in place and enabling same-sex marriages in California. *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, 133 S. Ct. 2652, 2661-63 (2013).

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# The Post

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## GOOD SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE INTERNET

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Anna Ivey, <i>Introduction</i> .....	67
Seth J. Chandler, <i>A roadmap for legal attacks on the employer mandate delay, ACA Death Spiral</i> , Feb. 12, 2014.....	69
Gabriel J. Chin, <i>Getting Law Review Fans Out of the Closet: Liptak on Jacobs and Waxman</i> , PrawfsBlawg, Oct. 21, 2013 .....	85
Eric Hague, <i>The Supreme Court Issues a 5-4 Decision on Where to Order Lunch</i> , McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Mar. 29, 2012 .....	87
Richard G. Kopf, <i>Happy New Year and farewell, Hercules and the Umpire</i> , Jan. 1, 2014.....	91
Adam J. Levitin, <i>A Lawyer and Partner, and Also Bankrupt . . . for reasons that have nothing to do with being a non-equity partner . . .</i> , Credit Slips, Jan. 24, 2014 .....	93
W. Bradley Wendel, <i>Stephen Glass, situational forces, and the Fundamental Attribution Error</i> , Legal Ethics Forum, Feb. 4, 2014.....	99

# The Post

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VOLUME 4 • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2014

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# INTRODUCTION

Anna Ivey<sup>†</sup>

“I don’t think you’ll be able to publish this in an academic journal,” someone said. He thought it was more like something you’d read in a magazine. Was that a compliment, a dismissal, or both? It’s hard to say.

– Joshua Rothman, *Why Is Academic Writing So Academic?*, The New Yorker, February 21, 2014<sup>1</sup>

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The most stinging dismissal of a point is to say: “That’s academic.” In other words, to be a scholar is, often, to be irrelevant.

– Nicholas Kristof, *Professors, We Need You!*, The New York Times, February 15, 2014<sup>2</sup>

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No editor of any ISA journal or member of any editorial team of an ISA journal can create or actively manage a blog unless it is an official blog of the editor’s journal or the editorial team’s journal.

– Proposal by the International Studies Association, since tabled<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> President, Ivey Consulting, Inc.

<sup>1</sup> [www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2014/02/why-is-academic-writing-so-academic.html](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2014/02/why-is-academic-writing-so-academic.html).

<sup>2</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html).

<sup>3</sup> [www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/29/international-studies-association-proposes-bar-editors-blogging](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/29/international-studies-association-proposes-bar-editors-blogging).

Some faculty members wondered if the proposal [was] a response to a controversy last summer on the blog *The Duck of Minerva*,<sup>4</sup> when contributor Brian Rathbun wrote that professional networking made him feel like “an ugly slut who no one even wanted to sleep with.” The blog was created by Georgetown University professor Daniel H. Nexon, who last fall became editor of *International Studies Quarterly*.

– Carl Straumsheim, *Is Blogging Unscholarly?*,  
Insider Higher Ed, January 29, 2014<sup>5</sup>

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Q: Chief Justice John Roberts, among others, has criticized law reviews for publishing articles on obscure subjects that offer little assistance to the bar and bench. I understand you agree – but have [you] found a substitute[?]

A: Professors are back in the act with the blogs. Orin Kerr, one of my former clerks, with criminal procedure [and] the internet area, Mike Dorf, Jack Goldsmith. So the professors within 72 hours have a comment on the court opinion, which is helpful, and they are beginning to comment on when the certs are granted. And I like that.

Q: So you’re reading blog posts after cert grants?

A: I have my clerks do it, especially with the ones when we’ve granted cert, to see how they think about what the issues are.

– Jess Bravin, *Justice Kennedy on Law School, Blogging, and Popular Culture*, The Wall Street Journal Law Blog, October 10, 2013<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [www.whiteoliphaunt.com/duckofminerva/](http://www.whiteoliphaunt.com/duckofminerva/).

<sup>5</sup> [www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/29/international-studies-association-proposes-bar-editors-blogging](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/29/international-studies-association-proposes-bar-editors-blogging).

<sup>6</sup> [blogs.wsj.com/law/2013/10/10/justice-kennedy-on-law-school-blogging-and-popular-culture/](http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2013/10/10/justice-kennedy-on-law-school-blogging-and-popular-culture/).

FROM: ACA DEATH SPIRAL

# A ROADMAP FOR LEGAL ATTACKS ON THE EMPLOYER MANDATE DELAY

*Seth J. Chandler*<sup>†</sup>

After going through notice and comment rulemaking, the Internal Revenue Service and the Department of the Treasury announced a “final rule” Monday that the employer mandate tax contained in the Affordable Care Act (26 U.S.C. § 4980H<sup>2</sup>) will not apply at all to large “bubble” employers with between 50 and 99 workers until after December 31, 2015, and that employers with 100 or more workers can avoid the § 4980H tax from December 31, 2014 to December 31, 2015, by offering compliant health insurance coverage to 70% of its employees. These provisions amend previous IRS rulings that the employer mandate tax would start for plan years beginning after December 31, 2014, and that a large employer would need to offer health insurance coverage to 95% of its employees before it would be exempt from the potentially steep taxes imposed by section 4980H. Both the new final regulations and the earlier ones contradict the language of the Affordable Care Act, which states that the tax kicks in for plans beginning after December 31, 2013, and that an employer must offer

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<sup>†</sup> Foundation Professor of Law, University of Houston Law Center. Original at [acadeathspiral.org/2014/02/12/a-roadmap-for-legal-attacks-on-the-employer-mandate-delay/](http://acadeathspiral.org/2014/02/12/a-roadmap-for-legal-attacks-on-the-employer-mandate-delay/) (Feb. 12, 2014; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). © 2014 Seth J. Chandler.

<sup>1</sup> [s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2014-03082.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2014-03082.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/4980H](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/4980H).

health insurance coverage to “all” of its employees, not 95% and certainly not 70%, before it could escape this form of taxation.

In this blog entry, I want to accomplish three goals. I want to educate on the legal issues created by the recent regulation. I want to suggest both a conventional path to challenge the regulation and an unconventional path. And, I want to advocate. I want to implore the readers of this blog who are predisposed to think highly of President Obama to really question the precedent they let be set by permitting an Executive to refuse to collect a tax for years in circumstances where it is crystal clear that Congress has directed that it be done. There is a serious risk that future leaders may not share the same priorities as President Obama or themselves. Immunizing non-collection decisions from judicial correction will lead to collapse of government programs those sympathetic to our current President believe are worthy. It could also lead subsequent Congresses to refuse to enact government programs that make sense only if payment for them can not be subverted by a recalcitrant executive branch. In short, the people who should be most disturbed about what the President has done are his many friends who support not just the now-gutted employer mandate but who believe that the federal government has a major role in, as with the ACA, redistributing wealth acquired through the market. I would be very impressed if they mustered the courage to stand up to their friends.<sup>3</sup>

## A CONVENTIONAL PATH TO CHALLENGE THE EMPLOYER MANDATE DELAY

Here are some plausible book moves in the legal chess game that likely lies ahead for the decision yesterday to modify the times and conditions under which the employer mandate will be enforced.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/quotes](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/quotes).

*Standing*

Opponents will hunt for a plaintiff. As *others*<sup>4</sup> have noted, due to a doctrine called “standing,” this will not be so easy. Under Supreme Court *precedent*,<sup>5</sup> the plaintiff is going to have to show (a) that the failure to enforce the employer mandate caused the plaintiff’s employer not to provide health insurance, (b) that the employer would provide the requisite form of health insurance if the tax were being enforced, and (c) that the plaintiff has actually been damaged by the failure of their employer to provide health insurance. If, for example, the employer says it is not sure what it would do if the tax were imposed, a case challenging the delay is likely to fail for lack of standing. Or if it could be shown that the failure of the employer to provide health insurance actually permitted the employee to purchase equally good and similarly priced health insurance on an individual Exchange, a case challenging the most recent IRS rules would likewise likely fail for lack of standing.

On the other hand, there may well be plaintiffs out there with standing to sue. There are about 18,000 firms with more than 50 employees in the United States. While some might make decisions on whether to provide health insurance that would be unaffected by the tax, if even 5% would admit to being affected by the tax – whose whole point, after all, is precisely to cause the result plaintiff will need to show – that would represent a universe of 900 potential businesses that almost surely employ more than 50,000 employees. It takes only one employee with standing to bring suit in order to challenge the legality of the President’s latest actions.

The best plaintiff would be an employee of a large corporation that has not provided “minimum essential coverage” (a/k/a/ health insurance) but which says, without equivocation, that it would do so if the employer mandate were in place. It would be best if the insurance the employer would have provided would cost the employee less than alternatives made available on the individual Exchanges.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/02/11/another-day-another-illegal-obamacare-delay/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/02/11/another-day-another-illegal-obamacare-delay/).

<sup>5</sup> [www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/504/555](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/504/555).

Perhaps, for example, the employee worked for an employer that had extraordinarily healthy employees – a large gymnasium chain filled with youthful, mostly male,<sup>6</sup> low-health-cost physical trainers, for example – and could thus provide even minimally acceptable coverage via self insurance for less than the amount the employee could obtain on an individual Exchange.

*Violation of the Administrative Procedures Act*

Plaintiff's argument

Once the standing hurdle is overcome, expect a challenge based on violation of section 702 of the Administrative Procedures Act (5 U.S.C. § 702<sup>7</sup>). This law states: "A person suffering legal wrong because of agency action, or adversely affected or aggrieved by agency action within the meaning of a relevant statute, is entitled to judicial review thereof." The plaintiff will argue that Congress has spoken with crystal clarity on the issue of when section 4980H was supposed to take effect: it was supposed to take effect for plan years beginning after December 31, 2013. There is nothing ambiguous about that date. There is nothing for the Supreme Court – let alone the Internal Revenue Service – to interpret.

Saying the year 2013 means the year 2015 is completely and totally absurd. The 2013 date chosen by Congress did not encompass the idea of "sometime in the kind of nearish future." Congress balanced many factors, including the difficulty of complying with the statute and the desirability of having the employer mandate coordinate with many other provisions of the ACA that take effect starting in 2014. Moreover, given the enormous costs of the ACA, even in the reduced form taken by original projections, the \$10 billion per year<sup>8</sup> in tax revenues the employer mandate was expected to generate, was another reason to call for adoption in 2013. Under these circumstances, Congress did not choose to give large employers 5 years and 9 months to figure out how to finance and acquire health insurance for their employees; Congress thought 3 years and 9 months of "transi-

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<sup>6</sup> [acadeathspiral.org/2014/01/25/gender-equity-and-the-affordable-care-act/](http://acadeathspiral.org/2014/01/25/gender-equity-and-the-affordable-care-act/).

<sup>7</sup> [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/702](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/702).

<sup>8</sup> [www.cbo.gov/publication/44465](http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44465).

tional relief” was perfectly adequate. Congress did not want the goal of reducing the number of uninsureds subverted by letting employers off the hook or, perhaps, the burdens on the subsidized Exchanges exacerbated by large employers not pulling their weight.

The situation is no better, plaintiffs will argue, for the Obama administration’s decision in the regulations to distinguish amongst different sorts of large employers, letting employers with between 50 and 99 employers off the hook in the year 2015 while compelling at least some employers with more than 100 employees to provide health insurance in the same year. The statute carefully defined large employers in this context to mean more than 50 employees and deliberately chose 50 as the point at which to balance the importance of employer-provided insurance against the administrative and financial burdens of forced provision. Congress did not choose, for example, to stage imposition of the employer mandate first on the biggest of the large employers and a year or so later on the smaller within that group.

Finally, even if there was some basis for staging imposition of the mandate, plaintiffs will argue, the Obama regulations have butchered the provision of 4980H that calls for imposition of a large tax unless the employer offers insurance to all eligible employees. Conceivably the agency could stretch the “all” concept to 95% as it did before. Perhaps 95% could be justified as a bright line proxy for the sort of honest mistakes that Congress would not have wanted to serve as a predicate for a hefty tax. But when the Executive branch goes from “all” to 70% it can not be said with a straight face that anyone is speaking about providing a safety zone against honest mistakes. Now we are talking an entirely different regulatory regime. The Administrative Procedures Act does not give the Executive branch the power to legislate; and if it did so, the APA would itself be unconstitutional.

#### The Chevron Deference rebuttal

Expect the defendants to fight back with something known in the law as “Chevron deference.”<sup>9</sup> This widely cited doctrine emerges

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<sup>9</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevron\\_U.S.A.,\\_Inc.\\_v.\\_Natural\\_Resources\\_Defense\\_Council,\\_Inc.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevron_U.S.A.,_Inc._v._Natural_Resources_Defense_Council,_Inc.)

from the observation that executive agencies actually have a lot of expertise in interpreting statutes in their area. Therefore, it should be assumed that Congress would have wanted the agency to have considerable leeway in interpreting statutes. So long as the agency follows the right procedures in developing its rules, such as the “notice and comment” rulemaking that preceded the recent pronouncement on the employer mandate, the rules developed by the agency are lawful and binding even if the court would itself not have interpreted the statute the way the agency does. The main caveat – and it is the big “Step 1” in the Chevron process – is that the agency’s interpretation has to be a reasonable interpretation of the statute, a “permissible construction.”

But, the plaintiff will argue – and I believe with great success – “Chevron deference” does not exist where the statute is really not subject to interpretation at all. As the Supreme Court said in Chevron, USA v. Natural Resources Defense Counsel, Inc.,<sup>10</sup> “If the intent of Congress is clear, that is the end of the matter; for the court, as well as the agency, must give effect to the unambiguously expressed intent of Congress.” And it is hard to imagine anything clearer than “December 31, 2013.” It is hard to imagine a construction of “all” – particularly in a context in which alternative taxes (4980H(b)) are placed on employers that offer compliant health insurance to at least some of their employees– that could mean 70%. It is just not a reasonable construction.

“But wait,” I hear some judge asking. “Are you saying that the IRS could not give a company a few extra weeks to get health insurance? Are you saying that the IRS could not give companies any leeway in obtaining health insurance and saying that if a single employee goes uninsured the company is subject to a \$2,000 per employee (minus 30) tax?” No, not quite. As to the few weeks grace period, I do not believe the IRS can interpret the statute to permit such to occur automatically. I understand giving a select company a few extra weeks if there were extraordinarily circumstances – a natural disaster, an unintentional failure of communications – but Congress (a) already

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<sup>10</sup> [www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/467/837](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/467/837).



gave the companies more than a three year grace period to get health insurance for their employees and (b) assesses the tax on a monthly basis, \$166.67 per employee per month, so that the company would not in fact be hit with a \$2,000 whammy. And as to whether the IRS could give companies some leeway, again, if there were a factual showing that it would be easy for a company to mess up on a small percentage of employees and that some accommodation was necessary in a particular case, I do not believe some leniency would subvert the intent of Congress. But I see no evidence from the IRS that a 30% mistake zone is necessary; instead, this appears to be a way of simply mellowing out a tax regime that the Executive branch now believes (perhaps rightly) is too harsh without, however, asking Congress, who might actually agree were the case respectfully put to them, to assist with a modification of the statute.

#### The Prosecutorial Discretion rebuttal

The better argument the Obama administration will muster goes under the name “prosecutorial discretion.” The idea, buttressed by many case, including the 1985 Supreme Court decision in Heckler v. Chaney,<sup>11</sup> is that the Executive branch needs lots of leeway in determining enforcement priorities and there is therefore a very strong presumption against judicial review of decisions not to prosecute and not to pursue agency enforcement actions. And while, to be sure, most of these cases arise where the government is less transparent about its enforcement priorities, surely the government should not be restricted in its otherwise existing discretion just because it sought notice and comment before deciding what to do and was transparent enough to publish the basis on which it would make decisions.

Here are some quotes from *Chaney* which the Obama administration’s attorneys are likely to throw in the face of any potential challenger to its regulations.

- “[A]n agency decision not to enforce often involves a complicated balancing of a number of factors which are peculiarly within its expertise. Thus, the agency must not only assess

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<sup>11</sup> [supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/470/821/case.html](http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/470/821/case.html).

whether a violation has occurred, but whether agency resources are best spent on this violation or another, whether the agency is likely to succeed if it acts, whether the particular enforcement action requested best fits the agency's overall policies, and, indeed, whether the agency has enough resources to undertake the action at all. An agency generally cannot act against each technical violation of the statute it is charged with enforcing. The agency is far better equipped than the courts to deal with the many variables involved."

- "In addition to these administrative concerns, we note that, when an agency refuses to act, it generally does not exercise its coercive power over an individual's liberty or property rights, and thus does not infringe upon areas that courts often are called upon to protect.
- "[A]n agency's refusal to institute proceedings shares to some extent the characteristics of the decision of a prosecutor in the Executive Branch not to indict — a decision which has long been regarded as the special province of the Executive Branch, inasmuch as it is the Executive who is charged by the Constitution to "take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed." U.S. Const., Art. II, § 3."
- "The danger that agencies may not carry out their delegated powers with sufficient vigor does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that courts are the most appropriate body to police this aspect of their performance."

Sounds bad for our plaintiff!

There is, however, the noteworthy footnote 4 in *Chaney* that should give plaintiffs some hope. After all, *Chaney* articulates the doctrine of agency discretion as a strong presumption, not an irrebutable one. Here is what Justice Rehnquist said:

*We do not have in this case a refusal by the agency to institute proceedings based solely on the belief that it lacks jurisdiction. Nor do we have a situation where it could justifiably be found that the agency has "consciously and expressly adopted a general policy" that is so extreme as to*

*amount to an abdication of its statutory responsibilities.” See, e.g., Adams v. Richardson, 156 U.S.App.D.C. 267, 480 F.2d 1159 (1977) (en banc). Although we express no opinion on whether such decisions would be unreviewable under § 701(a)(2), we note that, in those situations, the statute conferring authority on the agency might indicate that such decisions were not “committed to agency discretion.”*

In other words, plaintiffs may be able to argue that this is not a case where the agency is in fact making enforcement decisions based on budgetary priorities or the probability of success. Few if any of the reasons behind the discretion doctrine exist here; the doctrine of discretion should not exist for its own sake precisely because it derogates from popular sovereignty exercised via Congress. There should be enough of a paper trail for the plaintiff to show persuasively that, the agency is making an enforcement decision based on a sense that the statute is unfair or unwise or, if someone has left a smoking-gun email around, pure political considerations.

The facts of *Adams* bear some resemblance to the facts here. Just as here there is a statute calling on the IRS to levy a tax starting in 2014, in *Adams*, there was a statute that directed certain federal agencies to terminate or refuse to grant assistance to public schools that were still segregated. Just as here the agency in charge (the IRS) is apparently going to refuse to pursue that tax in 2014 (and 2015) as a matter of policy, in *Adams* the federal agency in charge (Health, Education and Welfare) effectively adopted a policy of refusing to stop funding segregated public schools. The fact that there was general non-enforcement as a matter of policy distinguished the case, in the view of the *Adams* court, from conventional prosecutorial discretion.

The other hope for plaintiffs would be to use the extreme example of this case as a way of infusing contemporary doctrine on review of agency inaction with some thoughts from Justice Thurgood Marshall in his concurring opinion in *Heckler v. Chaney*. Marshall’s thoughts might have particular appeal to Justice Elena Kagan, for example, who, in addition to being fair minded, was one of Marshall’s clerks close to the time *Chaney* was decided. Marshall, who perhaps unfortunately took an expansive view of the majority opinion in order to criticize it, and who appears to have drafted without

noting its cautionary footnote 4, wrote several quotations that might prove helpful if introduced gently.

“[T]his ‘presumption of unreviewability’ is fundamentally at odds with rule-of-law principles firmly embedded in our jurisprudence, because it seeks to truncate an emerging line of judicial authority subjecting enforcement discretion to rational and principled constraint, and because, in the end, the presumption may well be indecipherable, one can only hope that it will come to be understood as a relic of a particular factual setting in which the full implications of such a presumption were neither confronted nor understood.”

“But surely it is a far cry from asserting that agencies must be given substantial leeway in allocating enforcement resources among valid alternatives to suggesting that agency enforcement decisions are presumptively unreviewable *no matter what factor caused the agency to stay its hand*.” (emphasis in original)

Moreover, conceivably traction might be gained in an attack on the employer mandate regulations by limiting the theory of the case to agency failure to enforce a regulation as opposed to decisions of prosecutors not to pursue criminal charges. As Justice Marshall wrote:

“A request that a nuclear plant be operated safely or that protection be provided against unsafe drugs is quite different from a request that an individual be put in jail or his property confiscated as punishment for past violations of the criminal law. Unlike traditional exercises of prosecutorial discretion, “the decision to enforce – or not to enforce – may itself result in significant burdens on a . . . statutory beneficiary.” (citing *Marshall v. Jerrico, Inc.*, 446 U.S. 238,<sup>12</sup> 446 U.S. 249<sup>13</sup> (1980)).

Nonetheless, plaintiffs will have to contend with the fact that (a) Thurgood Marshall’s ideas on prosecutorial and agency discretion were not shared by the remainder of the court and (b) the extreme conditions found in *Adams* have not been found in other cases in which such “footnote 4” claims have been brought. The presumption established by *Heckler v. Chaney* has clearly remained a very strong one.

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<sup>12</sup> [supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/446/238/case.html](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/446/238/case.html).

<sup>13</sup> [supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/446/238/case.html#249](https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/446/238/case.html#249).

A Tax Whistleblower action:  
An unconventional path for challenging  
the employer mandate delay

The greatest difficulty for those disturbed by the Obama administration's regulatory subversion of its own law is the prosecutorial discretion argument discussed above. Almost everyone thinks there should be some degree of prosecutorial discretion and the case law strongly and pretty persuasively supports the idea that the judicial branch should at least seldom be able to force prosecutors or agencies to more forcefully enforce laws, particularly where Congress has the ability to coerce the Executive branch to do so through aggressive techniques such as appropriations or, I suppose, in the most egregious cases, impeachment. The tension will be whether and under what circumstances the Executive branch under the rubric of "prosecutorial discretion" can completely subvert the language and intent of a statute through a refusal to collect a tax.

So, might there be another path for attacking the regulation, one either already in existence or one created by Congress? Perhaps. There is a remedy on the books already that might at least make the Obama administration squirm. It would do so because it might make clear that what was going on was not an exercise in prosecutorial discretion at all, but rather an effort to rewrite the statute. The idea is to for anyone at all to be a whistleblower under 26 U.S.C. § 7623 and to advise the IRS via a Form 211<sup>14</sup> that a particular large employer, preferably one that had over 1030 employees and therefore could owe more than \$2,000,000 in 4980H taxes, had failed to provide health insurance to its employees and had failed to pay any of the taxes created in section 4980H. The whistleblower does not need to show fraud to file a Form 211. The whistleblower merely needs to show that there has been an underpayment of tax. Of course, to protect against claims of bad faith, the Form 211 should disclose that the claimant knows that the employer is relying on IRS regulations as a defense but that the claimant asserts that those regulations are unlawful.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f211.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f211.pdf).

SETH J. CHANDLER

<b>Form 211</b> (Rev. December 2007)	Department of the Treasury - Internal Revenue Service  <b>Application for Award for Original Information</b>	OMB No. 1545-0409 Date Claim Received: Claim No. (completed by IRS)						
1. Name of individual claimant  Principaled Liberal	2. Claimant's Date of Birth <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Month</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Day</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Year</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>4</td> <td>1980</td> </tr> </table>	Month	Day	Year	7	4	1980	3. Claimant's SSN or ITIN  XXX-XX-XXXX
Month	Day	Year						
7	4	1980						
4. Name of spouse (if applicable)	5. Spouse's Date of Birth <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Month</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Day</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Year</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Month	Day	Year				6. Spouse's SSN or ITIN
Month	Day	Year						
7. Address of claimant, including zip code, and telephone number  Main Street, USA xxxxxx xxx-xxx-xxxx								
8. Name & Title of IRS employee to whom violation was reported Any IRS Agent		9. Date violation reported: 1/1/2015						
10. Name of taxpayer (include aliases) and any related taxpayers who committed the violation: The Large Corporation		11. Taxpayer Identification Number(s) (e.g., SSN, ITIN, or EIN): xxx-xx-xxxx						
12. Taxpayer's address, including zip code:		13. Taxpayer's date of birth or approximate age:						
14. State the facts pertinent to the alleged violation. (Attach a detailed explanation and all supporting information in your possession and describe the availability and location of any additional supporting information not in your possession.) Explain why you believe the act described constitutes a violation of the tax laws.  This employer has more than 50 full time equivalent employees and did not offer health insurance to them. It did not pay the tax required by 26 USC 4980H. I know this because the company president admitted in news reports that it was grateful for an IRS ruling that it did not have to pay the tax. This IRS ruling, however, is unlawful because it is contrary to the express language of the Affordable Care Act.								
15. Describe how you learned about and/or obtained the information that supports this claim and describe your present or former relationship to the alleged noncompliant taxpayer(s). (Attach sheet if needed.)  I learned about this from public admissions by the taxpayer.								
16. Describe the amount owed by the taxpayer(s). Please provide a summary of the information you have that supports your claim as to the amount owed. (Attach sheet if needed.)  On information and belief, the employer has 1031 employees and therefore owes \$2,020,000 in taxes under 26 USC 4980H.								
<b>Declaration under Penalty of Perjury</b> I declare under penalty of perjury that I have examined this application, my accompanying statement, and supporting documentation and aver that such application is true, correct, and complete, to the best of my knowledge.								
17. Signature of Claimant		1/1/2015 18. Date						
<b>MAIL THE COMPLETED FORM TO THE ADDRESS SHOWN ON THE BACK</b>								
Form 211 (Rev. 12-2007)      Catalog Number 16571S      publish.no.irs.gov      Department of the Treasury-Internal Revenue Service								

Now, I would not expect the IRS to then take a customary next step of pursuing the non-paying large employer for the 4980H taxes. I would not expect the IRS to provide any award to the whistleblower that would be available if the IRS had actually collected any money as a result of the Form 211 filing. But it is this failure of the IRS to do anything or to pay anything that might trigger the right of

the Form 211 claimant to bring a legal action in which the legality of the Obama administration's delay of the employer mandate could be challenged. Section 7623(b)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code permits "any determination regarding an award" to be appealed to the Tax Court, which has jurisdiction over such appeals.

Again I would not expect the IRS to take such an appeal lying down. The IRS will claim that it has complete discretion over whether to pursue a taxpayer brought to its attention under Form 211. A decision to the contrary could create the potential for massive, expensive litigation. Moreover, the IRS will say, the appeal permitted by section 7623(b)(4) is one over the size of any award not over whether the IRS decides to proceed with any administrative or judicial action based on information contained in a Form 211.

These will be strong arguments. They may well persuade the Tax Court. They may well persuade a Circuit Court of the United States to which an adverse decision of the Tax Court can be appealed. But what they will expose is that the IRS does not regard the regulatory changes it has made as merely ones of prosecutorial discretion – deciding where and how to expend its resources detecting underpayments. Here, that work has already been done for them. Instead, they constitute a substantive rule on the circumstances – none for 2014 and few for 2015 – under which a large employer that fails to provide health insurance should be liable for taxes that Congress demanded be paid under section 4980H. Perhaps, therefore, the Tax Court, or, on appeal, an Article III appellate court or the Supreme Court might summon up the courage to say, kind of like the suggestion in footnote 4 in *Chaney*, that, although the IRS may have broad discretion, it does not have "discretion" to abdicate its statutory responsibilities. It can not fail to pursue obvious tax deficiencies brought to its attention by a third party when the only reason for so declining is an unlawful regulation promulgated by the IRS in a usurpation of legislative powers. Whatever one thinks of the merits of the employer mandate, such a decision, in my view, would be a healthy restoration in the balance of power among the federal branches of government.

One other note

It was suggested by a friend that Congress could overcome such exercises of prosecutorial discretion by an expanded use of “qui tam” lawsuits. This remedy, which dates back to the 13th Century and has seen a resurgence over the past 20 years in the United States, allow a private citizen to bring a civil action in the name of the government and collect some of the money otherwise owed to the government. Qui tam litigation is a broad and complex subject on which I do not pretend great expertise. But, as I understand it, qui tam lawsuits generally permit a private party to go forward only if the Executive branch either supports the private party’s efforts at supplemental enforcement of a regulatory norm or at least acquiesces to it. Under 31 U.S.C. 3730(c)(2)(A)<sup>15</sup> and case law<sup>16</sup> interpreting one of the major branches of qui tam actions, the government can basically kill a qui tam lawsuit to which it objects even if the underlying claim is meritorious. It would therefore take a special qui tam statute that expressly squelched this veto power in order for such action by Congress to permit an attack on the delay of the employer mandate. More fundamentally, however, the probability of a gridlocked Congress enlarging qui tam rights to facilitate judicial overturning of the Obama administration’s delay of the employer mandate and doing so over a presidential veto is about zero.

CAUTION

I’m forging some new ground here and laying out arguments without weeks of legal research in order to get them on the table. I am likely missing things or even, perchance, getting things wrong. My hope, however, is that what I’ve written is intelligent and helpful enough to get others to discuss further and potentially take action on the serious legal issues involved when a President decides not to collect taxes that Congress has clearly demanded be paid.

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<sup>15</sup> [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/31/3730](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/31/3730).

<sup>16</sup> [scholar.google.com/scholar\\_case?case=4486425499165060593&q=318+f.3d+250&hl=en&as\\_sdt=6,44](http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=4486425499165060593&q=318+f.3d+250&hl=en&as_sdt=6,44).



*Acknowledgement*

This blog post benefited greatly from a conversation with Professor Sapna Kumar,<sup>17</sup> an expert on administrative law. I, of course, am responsible solely for any mistakes made herein and I have no idea what Professor Kumar – whose main focus is the intersection of administrative law and intellectual property – thinks about the Affordable Care Act or its implementation. So, if you don't like the post or there is something wrong, don't blame her. //

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<sup>17</sup> [www.law.uh.edu/faculty/main.asp?PID=4715](http://www.law.uh.edu/faculty/main.asp?PID=4715).

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FROM: PRAWFSBLAWG

# GETTING LAW REVIEW FANS OUT OF THE CLOSET

LIPTAK ON JACOBS AND WAXMAN

*Gabriel J. Chin*<sup>†</sup>

In a column today,<sup>1</sup> Adam Liptak discusses some familiar criticisms of law reviews. I believe law review articles are often high quality, useful and influential, as is reflected by my recent series of interviews with authors<sup>2</sup> of articles cited in the U.S. Supreme Court. Liptak quotes Second Circuit Judge Dennis Jacobs as saying in 2007 “I haven’t opened up a law review in years. No one speaks of them. No one relies on them.” Former SG Seth Waxman is quoted as saying in 2002 that “Only a true naïf would blunder to mention one at oral argument.” Do not believe either of them for a second; the record suggests that these cynics are closet idealists who regularly enjoy a good law review article.

As for Judge Jacobs, a Westlaw search shows he has cited law reviews dozens of times in his years on the bench. In 2005, he cited a law review article for a point of sentencing law, and then as an “accord,” cited a Stevens and Souter dissent. *See* *Guzman v. United States*, 404 F.3d 139, 143 (2d Cir. 2005). That is, Judge Jacobs cites the views of two U.S. Supreme Court justices to buttress the conclusions of a law review article. The next year, in *At Home Corp. v. Cox*

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<sup>†</sup> Professor of Law, UC Davis School of Law. Original at [prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2013/10/getting-law-review-fans-out-of-the-closet-liptak-on-jacobs-and-waxman.html](http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2013/10/getting-law-review-fans-out-of-the-closet-liptak-on-jacobs-and-waxman.html) (Oct. 21, 2013; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). © 2013 Gabriel J. Chin.

<sup>1</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2013/10/22/us/law-scholarships-lackluster-reviews.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/22/us/law-scholarships-lackluster-reviews.html?hp&_r=0).

<sup>2</sup> [prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/scholarship-in-the-courts/](http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/scholarship-in-the-courts/).

*Communications*, 446 F.3d 403, 409-10 (2d Cir. 2006), he string-cited three law review articles to explain the realities of leveraged buyouts.

In truth, Judge Jacobs obviously – *obviously* – loves law review articles. How can we tell? He likes to cite articles raising interesting legal wrinkles, but which were not raised or precisely presented by the facts. *See* *Briscoe v. City of New Haven*, 654 F.3d 200, 208 n.13 (2d Cir. 2011) (citing article offering novel reading of a recent Title VII case); *Carvajal v. Artus*, 633 F.3d 95, 109 n.10 (2d Cir. 2011) (citing article raising novel reading of full faith and credit clause); *Pescatore v. Pan Am*, 97 F.3d 1, 13 (2d Cir. 1996) (citing articles dealing with “decades-old controversy over choice of law doctrine”). He also likes empirical work. *See, e.g.,* *United States v. Whitten*, 610 F.3d 168, 201 n.25 (2d Cir. 2010).

Judge Jacobs has cited articles written by students, judges and scholars, century-old chestnuts and brand new work, he cites celebrities like Akhil Amar and William Stuntz writing in the *Harvard Law Review* and the *Yale Law Journal*, and lesser-known scholars writing in less fancy venues. In short, the record shows that he relies on law review articles when he concludes their research and analysis makes them worth relying on, which is exactly what judges should do.

As for Seth Waxman, of course it would be extremely rare for an advocate to mention an article in oral argument, just as it would generally be silly to waste much time emphasizing the fact that a unanimous state supreme court or en banc circuit court agreed with your position. He is quite right if his point is that by the time the case is in the Supreme Court, naked appeals to authority (other than binding Supreme Court decisions) are unlikely to help. And yet, a search of the Supreme Court brief database on Westlaw shows that Waxman authored 149 briefs citing law review articles, and 423 briefs in total. So more than a third of the time, he concluded that citation of a law review article would be more persuasive than simply incorporating the article’s cases and argument in the brief (which would be fair game – briefs and opinions need not be original). His choice to rely on articles is the clearest possible vote of confidence in the utility of scholarly research. On behalf of the legal academy, I say to Mr. Waxman: “You’re welcome.” //

FROM: MCSWEENEY'S INTERNET TENDENCY

# THE SUPREME COURT ISSUES A 5-4 DECISION ON WHERE TO ORDER LUNCH

*Eric Hague*<sup>†</sup>

JUSTICE GINSBURG

DELIVERS THE OPINION OF THE COURT

From time to time, this Court must preside over controversies so divisive and so morally ambiguous that we Justices – nine mortal men and women – feel somewhat ill-equipped to discern the issues' deeper truths and mete out justice accordingly. Never is this concern more palpable, and never is our duty as jurists more daunting, than when we have to stand around and figure out which restaurant we're going to order lunch from.

It is therefore with great solemnity that we hand down the majority opinion in the case of *Domino's v. That One Greek Place Over on N Street*.

There are meritorious arguments for both proposals. Pizza, as some members of the Court have contended, is a lunch cuisine with deep foundations in the history of the United States Supreme Court's break room kitchenette. Further, our unanimous opinion in *Domino's v. Sbarro*, 540 U.S. 891 (2003), stands for the proposition that Domino's never skimps on the toppings, and that their Cinna Stix are pretty good too, especially if you eat them when they're still warm.

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<sup>†</sup> Eric Hague is a writer living in Philadelphia. He has also written satire for the *New Yorker* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Original at [www.mcsweeney.net/articles/the-supreme-court-issues-a-5-4-decision-on-where-to-order-lunch](http://www.mcsweeney.net/articles/the-supreme-court-issues-a-5-4-decision-on-where-to-order-lunch) (Mar. 29, 2012; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). © 2012 Eric Hague.

While those Justices in favor of that Greek joint have argued that Gyros are, in many respects, way tastier than pizza (see Scalia, J., dissenting, *infra*), they have failed to cite to any relevant Federal Statutes or Law Review articles for support. As another matter, the Court isn't even sure whether the Greek place will deliver all the way to the Supreme Court Building – and Breyer is the only Justice with a car, and he doesn't really feel like driving.

Several Justices have also noted that we ordered Pizza last Thursday. We reject this argument, however, since last Thursday was oral arguments for that dicey affirmative action case, and a bunch of us had to recuse ourselves and so couldn't partake in the pizzas. Additionally, secondhand testimony that there are still a couple of leftover slices in the fridge is inadmissible as hearsay under the Federal Rules of Evidence.

We therefore rule that the Court will have Domino's. We remand only for further fact-finding as to whether everyone is cool if we get extra cheese.

It is so ordered. (Or will be, anyway, when one of our clerks calls it in.)

SCALIA, J.,  
WITH WHOM THE CHIEF JUSTICE AND JUSTICES  
ALITO AND THOMAS JOIN, DISSENTING

Our decision today flies in the face of more than a quarter century of the Court's lunchtime jurisprudence. The majority thoughtlessly dismisses the notion that Mediterranean food is extremely yummy, despite a persuasive amicus brief from Professor Richard Posner, and even though everyone seemed to enjoy the shawarmas we got from that Lebanese food truck a few weeks back.

Moreover, this decision represents a disturbing affirmation of the kind of majoritarian tyranny the Court has sought to abrogate in the years since it handed down its controversial opinion *In re Burger King*, 474 U.S. 1352 (1985), in which the Court voted 8-1 to strike down Justice Stevens's preference for BK fries.

Therefore, I respectfully dissent from the Court's judgement – and no, I am not cool with extra cheese.

KENNEDY, J.,  
CONCURRING IN PART, DISSENTING IN PART,  
HUNGRY IN FULL

As Chief Justice John Marshall very nearly wrote in his opinion in *Marbury v. Madison*, “It is emphatically the province of the Judicial Branch to say [where we order our lunch from].”

But neither that seminal decision nor our mandate in Article III, Section I of the Constitution prescribes the specific processes by which we should determine where we get our takeout. In truth, the Court’s longstanding requirement that all the Justices order food from the same restaurant is as artificial as our policy of not tipping the delivery guy if he takes more than 30 minutes.

So while I join the majority in their conclusion that a couple of pizzas would really hit the spot right now, I fully support the prerogative of the dissenters to go ahead and separately order their pitas or whatever – even though this would mean the Court can’t use its coupon for three large, one-topping pizzas and thus get a free two-liter of Mountain Dew.

The Supreme Court stands for nothing if not the democratic principle of ideological compromise. If we can put this matter behind us, we’ll be able to turn our attention to vastly less controversial matters, like that healthcare case we’ve got this afternoon. That’s something we’ll all be able to agree on, right? //

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FROM: HERCULES AND THE UMPIRE

# HAPPY NEW YEAR AND FAREWELL

*Richard G. Kopf<sup>f</sup>*

**T**his blog started in February of 2013. It is now January 1, 2014. During this time, I have written 416 posts and there have been about 425,000 page views by readers. Roughly 3,700 comments have been made.

Yesterday, the *Wall Street Journal* published a very interesting article in which this blog was prominently mentioned. See Joe Palazzolo, *Jurist Prudence? Candid Judges Speak Out*,<sup>1</sup> *Wall Street Journal* (December 31, 2013.) That in turn generated a thoughtful post by my friend, Pat Borchers, the former dean of Creighton Law School. See “*Talking judges*”<sup>2</sup> on *The Way I see it*, posted by Patrick J. Borchers at 12:12 PM on December 31, 2013. This attention generated over 4,400 pages views of *Hercules and the umpire* just yesterday.

In short, *Hercules and the umpire* has exceeded my wildest expectations. And so – it is time to kill it. In this forum, I have written all that I want to write and then some. It is that simple. My decision is final.

Before I conclude this last post, I wish to make several points:

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<sup>f</sup> Judge, U.S. District Court, District of Nebraska. Original at [herculesandtheumpire.com/2014/01/01/happy-new-year-and-farewell/](http://herculesandtheumpire.com/2014/01/01/happy-new-year-and-farewell/) (Jan. 1, 2014; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). I *don't* claim a copyright on any of the stuff I have written or will write in the future on this blog. If (for reasons that I cannot fathom) you want to reprint, republish or re-anything-else any of my thoughts posted on this blog, feel free to do so.

<sup>1</sup> [stream.wsj.com/story/latest-headlines/SS-2-63399/SS-2-415839/](http://stream.wsj.com/story/latest-headlines/SS-2-63399/SS-2-415839/).

<sup>2</sup> [patrickborchers.blogspot.com/2013/12/talking-judges.html](http://patrickborchers.blogspot.com/2013/12/talking-judges.html).

- I am not quitting because of ethics concerns. Such problems are real, but vastly overblown. A thoughtful judge has about the same chance of violating the Code of Conduct when writing a book, giving a speech, authoring a law review article or writing a blog post.
- Conspiracy buffs need not fret and anti-judge nuts need not cheer. No one has given me the slightest trouble about expressing myself here. I am quitting voluntarily and without a nudge from anyone.
- Although I am truly worn out, I am OK. I am not quitting because of health reasons.
- This is a powerful medium for, among other things, making federal trial judging transparent and for trying to wrap one's arms around the conundrum of judicial role. I hope some other federal trial judge takes up that hard but enormously satisfying labor.
- I look forward to commenting on other blogs now that I am out of the biz.
- To my astonishment, I have made several, perhaps many, friends along the way. I will maintain the e-mail address for the site, and I welcome hearing from these kind, smart (Oxford comma coming but just for fun), and thoughtful people. But, I don't promise to respond as quickly as before. The foregoing said, you and each of you have my sincere thanks. Readers have taught me many valuable lessons about how to become a better judge and human being.
- I will keep the blog "alive" for archival purposes, but nothing more. I will shut down the comment section in a week or so.
- The photo below is how I picture myself today. That is, I am one lucky, old dog.

All the best.

*The end.*

FROM: CREDIT SLIPS

# A LAWYER AND PARTNER, AND ALSO BANKRUPT . . .

FOR REASONS THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH  
BEING A NON-EQUITY PARTNER . . .

*Adam J. Levitin*<sup>†</sup>

It's all the rage these days to beat up on law school as a bad investment and to moan about the economic travails of the legal profession. There are some reasonable critiques that can be leveled at the shape of legal education and its costs and there are clearly important changes going on in the economics of the legal profession. But in a NY Times column, James Stewart has tried to connect these important issues with the sad story of the bankruptcy of Gregory Owens,<sup>1</sup> a former equity partner in Dewey LeBoeuf who is now a non-equity service partner at White & Case.

Owens has filed for bankruptcy and for Stewart, Owen's case is informative about "why law school applications are plunging and [why] there's widespread malaise in many big law firms". There's just one problem. Owen's case has no connection with either of these things. Owens' story is one of the expenses of divorce. It is not a tale of legal education debt. And it is only a story of the chang-

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<sup>†</sup> Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center. Original at [www.creditslips.org/creditslips/2014/01/a-lawyer-and-partner-and-also-bankruptfor-reasons-that-have-nothing-to-do-with-being-a-non-equity-pa.html](http://www.creditslips.org/creditslips/2014/01/a-lawyer-and-partner-and-also-bankruptfor-reasons-that-have-nothing-to-do-with-being-a-non-equity-pa.html) (Jan. 24, 2014; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). © 2014 Adam J. Levitin.

<sup>1</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/business/partner-in-a-prestigious-law-firm-and-bankrupt.html?hpw&rref=business&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/business/partner-in-a-prestigious-law-firm-and-bankrupt.html?hpw&rref=business&_r=0).

es in the legal economy to the extent that Owens' problem is that he's earning only \$375,000, not \$3.75 million. If Stewart weren't so eager to get his licks in on the law school economy, he might see that there's a very different story here.

I want to be clear: nothing I write here is meant to reflect a judgment of Mr. Owens. I do not normally comment on the finances of real individuals, in part because I know that there are so many complicated details that I am unlikely to know. I don't know Mr. Owens' circumstances beyond the Stewart article and a glance at Mr. Owens' chapter 7 petition. I also feel frankly uncomfortable discussing the finances of a real named individual on this blog. Had Stewart not cast Owens into the public light, I would not be commenting on him. Instead, my point is that the information that Stewart provides (and which one can get from Owens' bankruptcy petition<sup>2</sup>) does not support Stewart's story. Tell the story of the changes in the legal profession. Tell the story of the challenges facing legal education. But tell them properly. A more detailed analysis is below.

## (1) WHY IS OWEN HAVING TROUBLE MAKING ENDS MEET?

The simple answer is divorce, not legal education expenses or anything to do with the profitability of the legal profession.

Owen's pulling in about \$375k annually. That's not huge for NYC, but it's not nothing either. From a quick glance at Owens' budget as Stewart presents it, there are two big problems. The first is that Owen is paying \$10,517/month in child support. Divorce is expensive. But it has nothing to do with the profitability of the legal profession. Perhaps the child support decree was set at the peak of Owens' earnings a few years back when he was making \$500k/year. If so, there's a tenuous link to the fate of the legal profession – but the real issue isn't the income level on which the child support decree was based, but that there is a child support decree. Put another

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<sup>2</sup> [www.scribd.com/doc/200129951/Gregory-Owens-Chapter-7-Bankruptcy-Petition](http://www.scribd.com/doc/200129951/Gregory-Owens-Chapter-7-Bankruptcy-Petition).

way, Owens' financial problem isn't that he's a non-equity partner. It's that he got divorced.

Relatedly, one might also question why Owens' transportation expenses are \$550/month. He lives in a city with amazing public transit options and can probably bill a client for a car service home most weekdays. My point isn't to nickel and dime his expenses, but to wonder whether some of Owens' transportation expenses might relate to visitation of his son. If so, that underscores the divorce expense problem.

A second problem is that Owen is making a huge monthly contribution (\$5,900) to his retirement plan. Stewart characterizes it as a "mandatory" contribution. There's not enough detail to really understand what this means, but it's unlikely that Owens is required to participate in a 401(k). It's just that if he doesn't, he won't get an employer match. (I leave open the possibility that there is some requirement as part of his partnership agreement, but if so, that's not a generic problem of the economy of law firms. Instead, that's a problem with the particular partnership agreement Owens' signed.)

Note that between the child care and the mandatory retirement savings, that's nearly \$200,000 a year from Owens' \$375,000 pre-tax income. With another \$90,000 in taxes, he's got \$85,000 to spend on rent, transportation, food, insurance, etc. Manhattan's expensive, but based on my own finances as an associate supporting a family of three with education debt and significantly higher rent, I'm a bit surprised that this is strapping a single person who living in a not particularly fancy area. Remember that the median *household* income in the US is around \$51,000.

Critically, Owens is not paying any education debt. But for his divorce expenses, Owens would be doing pretty well. He might be spending a roughly equivalent amount on his child, but he might also be in a two-income household, which would really improve his financial picture. Nothing in Owens' story indicates that going to law school was his mistake or that his financial problem stems from being de-equitized.

## (2) WHY IS OWENS FILING FOR BANKRUPTCY?

Curiously, Stewart never tells us. People don't just file for bankruptcy because they're having trouble making ends meet. Most people in financial distress *don't* file for bankruptcy. Instead, people usually file for bankruptcy because something spurs them to act or because the dunning calls, etc. get too much and they have managed to save up for bankruptcy.<sup>3</sup> This filing cost Owens nearly \$5,000. He had to have a reason to spend that. Put another way, what is Owens hoping to gain from filing for bankruptcy?

As far as I can tell, the only thing that bankruptcy will help Owens with are his business debts relating to his liability in the Dewey LeBoeuf bankruptcy. There are no personal debts scheduled – no credit card debt, no back rent, no mortgage, no car payments, no student loans, no medical debt. (Because it's business debt, Owens isn't means tested out of Chapter 7 . . .) One can point to the Dewey debt as evidence of trouble with the BigLaw business model, but Dewey is one of a handful of big law firms to collapse. Most have not, in part because they have deequitized partners, deleveraged on associates, etc. But is Owens really the way to tell that story?

Owens doesn't seem to have any assets that his Dewey creditors are likely to be able to grab. At most, then it would seem he is protecting his wages from garnishment by his Dewey creditors, but there's no indication that his wages are being garnished yet. Critically, Owen is not going to be able to get out of most of his obligations, including his child support obligation. What this means is that if Owen gets a bankruptcy discharge, he will still have the very same financial problems he had when he filed: living expenses plus child support obligations that are greater than his income. All bankruptcy is likely to do is to prevent some additional claims on his income, but Owens' finances are still a problem.

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<sup>3</sup> [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1540216](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1540216).

(3) OWENS REDUCED INCOME HURTS,  
BUT HE'S STILL MAKING GOOD MONEY.

Obviously, if Owens were earning more, he'd be in a better position. And Stewart is right to point out the growth of the second-class citizens of non-equity partners (he could add to this the expansion of "counsel" positions and the lengthening of the associate track at many firms). But this doesn't really seem to be Owens' problem. Owens still has a job and one that pays quite well, even if it isn't paying him like a top equity partner. Only in a world of 1 percenters is \$375,000 annual income cause for pity. If the deal being offered to prospective law students was paying \$150,000 over three years to have a future annual income of \$375,000, law school would be a no-brainer decision for lots of people. The law school investment paying off doesn't depend on earning millions annually.

All of which is to say: James Stewart, what does Gregory Owens story actually have to do with plunging law school applications and malaise in big law firms?

*P.S. It occurs to me that my demotion to an "Occasional," is a form of de-equitization. Apparently I wasn't earning my keep on the Slips. //*

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FROM: LEGAL ETHICS FORUM

# STEPHEN GLASS, SITUATIONAL FORCES, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

*W. Bradley Wendel*<sup>†</sup>

Two Stephen Glasses appeared before a California State Bar Court hearing judge. One was a serial liar – a fabulist, to appropriate the title of his *roman à clef* – who made up dozens of articles for *The New Republic* and other magazines out of whole cloth, in what the Newseum in Washington, D.C. called one of the worst examples of misconduct in the history of journalism. The other Stephen Glass was a young person trying to cope with intense pressure from his family to achieve professional success, who embarked on a pattern of deception that led to his disgrace, and has slowly but steadily turned his life around with the help of therapists, friends, and a new career aspiration as a lawyer. Which of these characters is the real Stephen Glass, and what can we infer about what that person will do in the future? The trouble is, we have no idea. Given the complex interaction between character and situational factors, at this point in time we can do no better than guesswork if we try to predict whether admitting Glass to practice law is likely to result in harm to clients.

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<sup>†</sup> Professor of Law, Cornell University Law School. Original at [www.legalethicsforum.com/blog/2014/02/brad-wendel-stephen-glass-situational-forces-and-the-fundamental-attribution-error.html](http://www.legalethicsforum.com/blog/2014/02/brad-wendel-stephen-glass-situational-forces-and-the-fundamental-attribution-error.html) (Feb. 4, 2014; vis. Mar. 4, 2014). © 2014 W. Bradley Wendel.

One of the central findings of behavioral psychology is that situational forces are much more significant determinants of behavior than personality or character. The Milgram Experiments on obedience to authority and the Stanford Prison Experiments famously showed that ordinary people will do terrible things given the right group dynamics and social forces. The explanation of why people do bad things is often *not* that they are bad people but that they are ordinary people in situations that are productive of wrongdoing. However, another well documented feature of human psychology is the fundamental attribution error (FAE) – we tend to attribute the explanation of wrongdoing to character traits or dispositions, not features of the situation. Asked to explain the Milgram results, people will often say the subjects must have been sadists. The same effect can be observed outside the laboratory. Ask people for an explanation of the decision to launch the space shuttle *Challenger*, the collapse of Enron, the Abu Ghraib abuses, or the failure of the ratings agencies or the risky financial transactions leading up to the 2007 financial crisis, and you will probably hear an explanation in terms of the greed, dishonesty, or cruelty of key players – the “bad apples” account. It turns out, however, that the vast majority of participants are not bad apples, but are ordinary people whose ethical decision-making is subtly influenced by group dynamics such as in-group favoritism, pluralistic ignorance, induction effects that evaluate conduct in terms of previous similar actions, and subtle influences on the way people construe unfamiliar or ambiguous circumstances.

This is not to deny that people react to situations differently. In his book, *Eat What You Kill*, Mitt Regan gives an explanation of the decision of a bankruptcy partner at a major New York law firm to falsify a disclosure of the firm’s representation of another party in a Chapter 11 proceeding. His story is rich and nuanced, but a reader may ask (as I did in a review of the book) why it was only John Gellene who lied to the court. Other lawyers, including a litigation partner who urged disclosure, did the right thing in the case. Social psychologists do not deny that people have personality traits. The claim, rather, is that “people [do not] typically have highly general personality traits that effect behavior manifesting a high degree of

cross-situational consistency.” John M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (2002), p. 39. The determinants of behavior include both character traits and situational factors, but people commit the FAE when they overestimate the predictive value of character traits. We tend to have a significantly higher degree of confidence than is warranted in our attribution of dispositions (e.g. saying Stephen Glass is a liar) and our predictive judgments (e.g. estimating that it is likely that Glass will commit dishonest acts in the future). It is difficult to overcome the tendency to explain behavior in trait terms, leading to the FAE, because it appears to be a product of unconscious coding and confirmation bias.

John Gellene might have been more predisposed than other lawyers to falsify the document, but before he started working on the case, there would have been no way to know with any significant degree of reliability. *Ex post* we feel confident in our judgment that “John Gellene is dishonest” is the best explanation of the act of falsifying the document. Research shows, however, that this is nothing more than hindsight bias – that is, the tendency to significantly overestimate the *ex ante* likelihood of an event. (See Jeffrey J. Rachlinski, *A Positive Psychological Theory of Judging in Hindsight*, 65 U. Chi. L. Rev. 571 (1998) for the details.) As a torts teacher, I am constantly reminding students not to assume that just because an accident occurred, it was the result of the defendant’s failure to use reasonable care. Humans are unfortunately just not very good at making predictive judgments about risk in general, and when that deficiency is combined with the FAE, the result is gross overconfidence in the reliability of our judgments about when a person’s past acts are predictive of future behavior.

I get the general reaction to Stephen Glass. I have subscribed to *The New Republic* since my undergrad days, and felt betrayed when I learned that the articles of his I had enjoyed were fabrications. My off-the-cuff assessment of him would be “sleazeball” or “liar.” I understand this kind of evaluation from a reader comment<sup>1</sup> on Andrew Sullivan’s blog:

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<sup>1</sup> [dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/01/29/can-you-repair-a-shattered-glass-ctd/](http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/01/29/can-you-repair-a-shattered-glass-ctd/).

This is a person who has demonstrated, time and time again, that *he is morally and ethically challenged* – much more so than a person who has committed petty offenses or who has a drug conviction, in my opinion, but someone who literally cannot be trusted to tell the truth.

(Emphasis added.) The FAE is an ingrained tendency, and it is a deeply counterintuitive claim that past wrongdoing does not reliably support an inference to character traits, the existence of which enables one to make reliable predictions of future behavior. But the same is true of many of the findings of cognitive psychology. I love the story of the “hot hand” study by Tom Gilovich (of the Cornell psychology department), which disproved the folk wisdom of basketball fans that players sometimes tended to get on a hot streak and make a series of field goals or foul shots with unusual success. When hundreds of hours of game films were studied, however, it turned out that the sequence of made and missed shots were within the range of random distribution. But this didn’t satisfy former Boston Celtics head coach Red Auerbach, whose reaction to the study was “Who is this guy? So he makes a study. I couldn’t care less.” As Daniel Kahneman puts it: “The hot hand is a massive and widespread cognitive illusion. . . . The tendency to see patterns in randomness is overwhelming – certainly more impressive than a guy making a study.” Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), p. 117.

While the stakes are obviously much higher, an analogous problem is the use of expert testimony to predict future dangerousness for the purposes of capital sentencing. The American Psychiatric Association has stated in amicus curiae briefs<sup>2</sup> that psychiatrists should not testify as an expert that a defendant has a long-term likelihood of committing future acts of serious violence, because there is simply no scientifically reliable method for making this prediction. (See, e.g.,) The familiar “reasonable degree of medical certainty” standard for expert testimony accordingly cannot be satisfied. Faced with this evidence, however, prosecutors sound like Red Au-

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<sup>2</sup> [www.apa.org/about/offices/ogc/amicus/fields.aspx](http://www.apa.org/about/offices/ogc/amicus/fields.aspx).

erbach responding to the hot hand study. The ABA Journal<sup>3</sup> quotes one district attorney who said, “common sense and 23 years of experience as a lawyer have convinced him that such predictions can reliably be made.” Who needs scientific evidence when you’ve got common sense and 23 years of experience? So some guy made a study – so what?

The California Supreme Court held that Glass had not carried his burden of demonstrating his fitness to practice, in part because of his lack of candor in the admission process, both in California and, earlier, in New York. Any evasiveness, partial disclosure, or game-playing with the process is the kiss of death in the character and fitness evaluation. I always advise students this is not the place to try out Bill Clinton’s techniques for avoiding answering hard questions. One gets the sense, however, that the result would have been the same if Glass had disclosed each and every instance of fictionalizing articles. Some commentators on the case have argued that the California court’s decision is justified by the allocation of the risk of error: On the one hand, false positive – i.e. an erroneous prediction that Glass will offend in the future – will affect only Glass; on the other hand, a false negative may result in harm to clients. Isn’t it better that the risk be borne by the concededly sleazy Glass than by an innocent client? Stated in this form, the argument is a version of the precautionary principle, which is, when in doubt, avoid doing anything that will create a risk of harm. Or, in cases of doubt, better safe than sorry. Problems with the precautionary principle are well known, however. For one thing, it considers only harms on one side of the equation. While courts have repeatedly stated that admission to the bar is a privilege not a right (and thus Glass has no *Mathews v. Eldridge*-type claim to be judged on the more competent evidence), there still seems to be a moral right on Glass’s part to have his application considered fairly, given the significant investment he has made in his legal training. “In real-world controversies, a failure to regulate will run afoul of the precautionary principle because potential risks are involved. But regulation itself will cause potential risks,

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<sup>3</sup> [www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/a\\_dangerous\\_assessment/](http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/a_dangerous_assessment/).

and hence run afoul of the precautionary principle too.” Cass R. Sunstein, *Risk and Reason: Safety, Law and the Environment* (2002), p. 103.

Maybe observers aren’t particularly sympathetic to the risk posed to someone like Glass. If you’re a lying sleazeball, you risk not being admitted to the bar – too bad for you. This, of course, depends on our confidence that we can determine that someone is, in fact, a lying sleazeball. What if the truth of the matter is that the real Stephen Glass is the second character described above, who screwed up royally, realized it, and has spent the last ten years trying to make it right. It’s a long, unsteady process, and maybe he didn’t do everything someone else would have done as part of a process of rehabilitation, but do we not believe in the possibility of redemption? It’s at least conceivable that the character of the real Stephen Glass is that of someone who made a big mistake but has since turned his life around. My view of the psychological evidence is that we simply do not know enough about the character of *either* Stephen Glass – either the serial liar or the rehabilitated person – and its cross-situational stability to justify making a predictive judgment of his future dangerousness. But for those who are less persuaded by Milgram, Darley, Batson, Zimbardo, Nisbett, Ross, and the rest of the social psychologists who believe that situational factors are more important than character as determinants of behavior, what makes you so inclined to believe that Glass isn’t on the right road at this point in his life? Presumably the answer is that he fudged the truth on his New York application. I’ll grant that is a very bad fact indeed. But I still get the feeling the California court would have denied his admission anyway, and that’s troubling for someone who believes in the possibility that anyone can make a new beginning.

If the character and fitness requirement is justified primarily as a prophylactic means of protecting the future clients of a lawyer like Stephen Glass, I think it has to be abandoned. As Deborah Rhode showed in her classic article, the bar tends to articulate a public protection rationale for the character and fitness screening process. As one bar spokesperson rather colorfully put it, the objective is “eliminating the diseased dogs before they inflict their first bite.” Deborah L. Rhode, *Moral Character as a Professional Credential*, 94 Yale L.J.

491, 509 (1985). (Rhode's article, pp. 555-59, provides an overview of the behavioral psychology literature summarized above.) The theory for denying Glass's application for admission is that he is a diseased dog. But the situationalist critique of the FAE shows that we are all *potentially* diseased dogs. A better approach to regulation would be to aim at mitigating the situational factors that tend to produce unethical behavior. The Gellene case is a good example. Bankruptcy Rule 2014 requires disclosure of any connection with a creditor or other party in interest; it does not employ language similar to that of Model Rule 1.7(a)(2), requiring action only where the concurrent client relationship is a material limitation on the representation. The bankruptcy rule therefore avoids the judgment calls that lawyers must make in evaluating conventional conflicts of interest and makes it less likely that these judgments will be influenced by self-serving cognitive biases. There might have been an argument that the firm's concurrent representation of a principal in an investment firm that was a creditor in the Bucyrus-Erie restructuring proceeding was not a material limitation on the representation of the debtor (although I think that would be a pretty dubious argument), but there was no argument that there was no connection. By providing less latitude for judgment, the bankruptcy rule is less vulnerable to abuse by lawyers who may feel a great deal of pressure to keep clients, or other lawyers in the firm, happy by not disclosing a concurrent representation.

I understand the symbolic and signaling function of the character and fitness requirement. As one of the comments on Andrew Sullivan's post noted, a student just beginning law school usually hears at orientation that he or she is entering a profession with high ethical standards, which makes demands above and beyond simply complying with law and expects its practitioners to satisfy demanding requirements of honesty and trustworthiness. Without the character and fitness process, would the law become, or at least seem to be, just another trade or business? (As I've written elsewhere, I'm a bit uncomfortable with this tacit dissing of the ethics of businesspeople, not only because it sounds sanctimonious by lawyers, but also because it tends to reinforce the attitude that business ethics is nothing

more than the morals of the marketplace + maximizing shareholder value.) I'm all in favor of symbolically reaffirming our profession's commitment to ethics, but it is more than merely symbolic when someone who has invested three years and probably in excess of \$150,000 in tuition and living expenses to become a lawyer is denied admission because of prior acts of dishonesty. If we're going to deny someone access to a valuable privilege (n.b. not saying it's a right), we had better be confident in the reliability of our decision-making process. //