

Chapter 1

Constitutional Concerns in Family Law

A. Introduction

The 50 states of the United States each have their own laws governing marriage, divorce, the parent-child relationship, and all the other subjects encountered in a family law course and in a family law practice. These laws differ greatly from state to state. Some states recognize common law marriage, some do not. Some states recognize putative spouses, some do not. Alimony and child support provisions vary widely from state to state. Even when a state's law is based upon a uniform act, the individual state has usually "tweaked" it somehow. Given this wide variance, how does the United States Supreme Court become involved in cases dealing with marriage, parental rights, parental duties, child support, and child custody—all subjects addressed by the Texas Family Code and also by the laws of the other 49 states? Answer—when the laws of those states or opinions rendered by the courts of those states impinge upon certain basic constitutional rights!

In the study and practice of family law, one must never lose sight of the fact that the family—husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, children, and more distant relations—all have constitutionally protected rights and privileges. Likewise, the constitution can sometimes impose certain restraints upon these very individuals.

Often times one becomes so focused upon state law, statutory and common, in familial situations that the constitutional ramifications are overlooked. The first chapter of this text provides a constitutional backdrop for the Texas statutes and cases presented in later chapters; it does not and could not encompass all of the Supreme Court opinions which impact the practice of family law. Indeed, such a presentation would be a 3 hour course unto itself. This chapter is included to alert the student to the existence of constitutional issues within the family law context and with the hope that constitutional concerns will not be overlooked now or in future practice.

As noted in the Preface, of great interest are the "same sex" marriage cases that were recently decided by the United States Supreme Court, those being: *Hollingsworth v. Perry* ___ U.S. ___, 2013 WL 3196927 (June 26, 2013) and *United States v. Windsor*, ___ U.S. ___, 2013 WL 3196928 (June 26, 2013). These two cases have been added to this chapter, albeit in edited form. The United States Supreme Court also decided an adoption case of note which clarified the priority usually given to Native Americans under the Indian Child Welfare Act, *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl*, ___ U.S. ___, 2013 WL 3184627 (June 25, 2013); this case will be included in Chapter 8 which encompasses adoptions.

B. What is a Family?

MOORE
v.
CITY OF EAST CLEVELAND
431 U.S. 494
(1977)

POWELL, JUSTICE.

East Cleveland's housing ordinance, like many throughout the country, limits occupancy of a dwelling unit to members of a single family. Section 1351.02.¹ But the ordinance contains an unusual and complicated definitional section that recognizes as a "family" only a few categories of related individuals, § 1341.08.² Because her family, living together in her home, fits none of those categories, appellant stands convicted of a criminal offense. The question in this case is whether the ordinance violates the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Appellant, Mrs. Inez Moore, lives in her East Cleveland home together with her son, Dale Moore Sr., and her two grandsons, Dale, Jr., and John Moore, Jr. The two boys are first cousins rather than brothers; we are told that John came to live with his grandmother and with the elder and younger Dale Moores after his mother's death.⁴

In early 1973, Mrs. Moore received a notice of violation from the city, stating that John was an "illegal occupant" and directing her to comply with the ordinance. When she failed to remove him from her home, the city filed a criminal charge. Mrs. Moore moved to dismiss, claiming that the ordinance was constitutionally invalid on its face. Her motion was overruled, and upon

¹ All citations by section number refer to the Housing Code of the city of East Cleveland, Ohio.

² Section 1341.08 (1966) provides:

"Family" means a number of individuals related to the nominal head of the household or to the spouse of the nominal head of the household living as a single housekeeping unit in a single dwelling unit, but limited to the following:

(a) Husband or wife of the nominal head of the household.

(b) Unmarried children of the nominal head of the household or of the spouse of the nominal head of the household, provided, however, that such unmarried children have no children residing with them.

(c) Father or mother of the nominal head of the household or of the spouse of the nominal head of the household.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) hereof, a family may include not more than one dependent married or unmarried child of the nominal head of the household or of the spouse of the nominal head of the household and the spouse and dependent children of such dependent child. For the purpose of this subsection, a dependent person is one who has more than fifty percent of his total support furnished for him by the nominal head of the household and the spouse of the nominal head of the household.

(e) A family may consist of one individual.

⁴ Brief for Appellant 4, 25. John's father, John Moore, Sr., has apparently been living with the family at least since the time of trial. Whether he was living there when the citation was issued is in dispute. Under the ordinance his presence too probably would be a violation. But we take the case as the city has framed it. The citation that led to prosecution recited only that John Moore, Jr., was in the home in violation of the ordinance.

conviction she was sentenced to five days in jail and a \$25 fine. The Ohio Court of Appeals affirmed after giving full consideration to her constitutional claims,⁵ and the Ohio Supreme Court denied review. We noted probable jurisdiction of her appeal, 425 U.S. 949, 96 S.Ct. 1723, 48 L.Ed.2d 193 (1976).

II

The city argues that our decision in *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas*, 416 U.S. 1, 94 S.Ct. 1536, 39 L.Ed.2d 797 (1974), requires us to sustain the ordinance attacked here. Belle Terre, like East Cleveland, imposed limits on the types of groups that could occupy a single dwelling unit. Applying the constitutional standard announced in this Court's leading land-use case, *Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365, 47 S.Ct. 114, 71 L.Ed. 303 (1926),⁶ we sustained the Belle Terre ordinance on the ground that it bore a rational relationship to permissible state objectives.

But one overriding factor sets this case apart from Belle Terre. The ordinance there affected only unrelated individuals. It expressly allowed all who were related by "blood, adoption, or marriage" to live together, and in sustaining the ordinance we were careful to note that it promoted "family needs" and "family values." 416 U.S., at 9, 94 S.Ct., at 1541. East Cleveland, in contrast, has chosen to regulate the occupancy of its housing by slicing deeply into the family itself. This is no mere incidental result of the ordinance. On its face it selects certain categories of relatives who may live together and declares that others may not. In particular, it makes a crime of a grandmother's choice to live with her grandson in circumstances like those presented here.

When a city undertakes such intrusive regulation of the family, neither Belle Terre nor Euclid governs; the usual judicial deference to the legislature is inappropriate. "This Court has long recognized that freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." . . . Of course, the family is not beyond regulation. See *Prince v. Massachusetts*, *supra*, 321 U.S. at 166, 64 S.Ct. at 442. But when the government intrudes on choices concerning family living arrangements, this Court must examine carefully the importance of the governmental interests advanced and the extent to which they are served by the challenged regulation. See *Poe v. Ullman*, *supra*, 367 U.S., at 554, 81 S.Ct. at 1782 (HARLAN, J., dissenting).

When thus examined, this ordinance cannot survive. The city seeks to justify it as a means of preventing overcrowding, minimizing traffic and parking congestion, and avoiding an undue financial burden on East Cleveland's school system. Although these are legitimate goals, the ordinance before us serves them marginally, at best.⁷ For example, the ordinance permits any

⁵ [Footnote omitted.]

⁶ Euclid held that land-use regulations violate the Due Process Clause if they are "clearly arbitrary and unreasonable, having no substantial relation to the public health, safety, morals, or general welfare." 272 U.S., at 395, 47 S.Ct. at 121. See *Nectow v. Cambridge*, 277 U.S. 183, 188, 48 S.Ct. 447, 448, 72 L.Ed. 842 (1928). Later cases have emphasized that the general welfare is not to be narrowly understood; it embraces a broad range of governmental purposes. See *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26, 75 S.Ct. 98, 99 L.Ed. 27 (1954). But our cases have not departed from the requirement that the government's chosen means must rationally further some legitimate state purpose.

⁷ It is significant that East Cleveland has another ordinance specifically addressed to the problem of overcrowding. See *United States Dept. of Agriculture v. Moreno*, 413 U.S. 528, 536-537, 93 S.Ct. 2821, 2826-2827, 37 L.Ed.2d 782 (1973). Section 1351.03 limits population density directly, tying the maximum permissible occupancy of a dwelling to the habitable floor area. Even if John Jr., and his father both remain in Mrs. Moore's household, the family stays well within these limits.

family consisting only of husband, wife, and unmarried children to live together, even if the family contains a half dozen licensed drivers, each with his or her own car. At the same time it forbids an adult brother and sister to share a household, even if both faithfully use public transportation. The ordinance would permit a grandmother to live with a single dependent son and children, even if his school-age children number a dozen, yet it forces Mrs. Moore to find another dwelling for her grandson John, simply because of the presence of his uncle and cousin in the same household. We need not labor the point. Section 1341.08 has but a tenuous relation to alleviation of the conditions mentioned by the city.

III

The city would distinguish the cases based on *Meyer* and *Pierce*. It points out that none of them “gives grandmothers any fundamental rights with respect to grandsons,” Brief for Appellee 18, and suggests that any constitutional right to live together as a family extends only to the nuclear family essentially a couple and their dependent children.

To be sure, these cases did not expressly consider the family relationship presented here. They were immediately concerned with freedom of choice with respect to childbearing, *e.g.*, *LaFleur*, *Roe v. Wade*, *Griswold*, *supra*, or with the rights of parents to the custody and companionship of their own children, *Stanley v. Illinois*, *supra*, or with traditional parental authority in matters of child rearing and education. *Yoder*, *Ginsberg*, *Pierce*, *Meyer*, *supra*. But unless we close our eyes to the basic reasons why certain rights associated with the family have been accorded shelter under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause, we cannot avoid applying the force and rationale of these precedents to the family choice involved in this case.

Understanding those reasons requires careful attention to this Court’s function under the Due Process Clause. Mr. JUSTICE HARLAN described it eloquently:

Due process has not been reduced to any formula; its content cannot be determined by reference to any code. The best that can be said is that through the course of this Court’s decisions it has represented the balance which our Nation, built upon postulates of respect for the liberty of the individual, has struck between that liberty and the demands of organized society. If the supplying of content to this Constitutional concept has of necessity been a rational process, it certainly has not been one where judges have felt free to roam where unguided speculation might take them. The balance of which I speak is the balance struck by this country, having regard to what history teaches are the traditions from which it developed as well as the traditions from which it broke. That tradition is a living thing. A decision of this Court which radically departs from it could not long survive, while a decision which builds on what has survived is likely to be sound.⁸ No formula could serve as a substitute, in this area, for judgment and restraint.

* * * [T]he full scope of the liberty guaranteed by the Due Process Clause cannot be found in or limited by the precise terms of the specific guarantees elsewhere provided in the Constitution. This ‘liberty’ is not a series of isolated points pricked out in terms of the taking of property; the freedom of speech, press, and religion; the right to keep and bear arms; the freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures; and so on. It is a rational continuum which, broadly speaking, includes a freedom from all substantial arbitrary impositions and purposeless restraints,...and which also recognizes, what a reasonable

⁸ This explains why *Meyer* and *Pierce* have survived and enjoyed frequent reaffirmance, while other substantive due process cases of the same era have been repudiated including a number written, as were *Meyer* and *Pierce*, by Mr. Justice McReynolds.

and sensitive judgment must, that certain interests require particularly careful scrutiny of the state needs asserted to justify their abridgment.

Poe v. Ullman, supra, 367 U.S., at 542-543, 81 S.Ct., at 1776-1777 (dissenting opinion).

Substantive due process has at times been a treacherous field for this Court. There are risks when the judicial branch gives enhanced protection to certain substantive liberties without the guidance of the more specific provisions of the Bill of Rights. As the history of the *Lochner* era demonstrates, there is reason for concern lest the only limits to such judicial intervention become the predilections of those who happen at the time to be Members of this Court. That history counsels caution and restraint. But it does not counsel abandonment, nor does it require what the city urges here: cutting off any protection of family rights at the first convenient, if arbitrary boundary the boundary of the nuclear family.

Appropriate limits on substantive due process come not from drawing arbitrary lines but rather from careful “respect for the teachings of history (and), solid recognition of the basic values that underlie our society.”¹⁰ *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S., at 501, 85 S.Ct., at 1691 (Harlan, J., concurring).¹¹ See generally *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651, 672-674 and nn. 41, 42, 97 S.Ct. 1401, 1413-1414, 51 L.Ed.2d 711 (1977); *Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee v. McGrath*, 341 U.S. 123, 162-163, 71 S.Ct. 624, 643-644, 95 L.Ed. 817 (1951) (Frankfurter, J., concurring); *Lochner v. New York*, 198 U.S. 45, 76, 25 S.Ct. 539, 547, 49 L.Ed. 937 (1905) (Holmes, J., dissenting). Our decisions establish that the Constitution protects the sanctity of the family precisely because the institution of the family is deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and tradition.¹² It is through the family that we inculcate and pass down many of our most cherished values, moral and cultural.¹³

¹⁰ A similar restraint marks our approach to the questions whether an asserted substantive right is entitled to heightened solicitude under the Equal Protection Clause because it is “explicitly or implicitly guaranteed by the Constitution”, *San Antonio Independent School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1, 33-34, 93 S.Ct. 1278, 1297, 36 L.Ed.2d 16 (1973), and whether or to what extent a guarantee in the Bill of Rights should be “incorporated” in the Due Process Clause because it is “necessary to an Anglo-American regime of ordered liberty.” *Duncan v. Louisiana*, 391 U.S. 145, 149-150 n.14, 88 S.Ct. 1444, 1448, 20 L.Ed.2d 491 (1968); see *Johnson v. Louisiana*, 406 U.S. 356, 372 n. 9, 92 S.Ct. 1620, 1639, 32 L.Ed.2d 152 (1972) (opinion of Powell, J.).

¹¹ For a recent suggestion that the holding in *Griswold* is best understood in this fashion, see Pollak, *Comment*, 84 YALE L.J. 638, 650-653 (1975). “(I)n due course we will see *Griswold* as a reaffirmation of the Court’s continuing obligation to test the justifications offered by the state for state-imposed constraints which significantly hamper those modes of individual fulfillment which are at the heart of a free society.” *Id.*, at 653.

¹² In *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 92 S.Ct. 1526, 32 L.Ed.2d 15 (1972), the Court rested its holding in part on the constitutional right of parents to assume the primary role in decisions concerning the rearing of their children. That right is recognized because it reflects a “strong tradition” founded on “the history and culture of Western civilization,” and because the parental role “is now established beyond debate as an enduring American tradition.” *Id.*, at 232, 92 S.Ct., at 1541-42. In *Ginsberg v. New York*, 390 U.S. 629, 88 S.Ct. 1274, 20 L.Ed.2d 195 (1968), the Court spoke of the same right as “basic in the structure of our society.” *Id.*, at 639, 88 S.Ct., at 1280. *Griswold v. Connecticut, supra*, struck down Connecticut’s anticontraception statute. Three concurring Justices, relying on both the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments, emphasized that “the traditional relation of the family” is “a relation as old and as fundamental as our entire civilization”. 381 U.S., at 496, 85 S.Ct., at 1688 (Goldberg, J., joined by Warren, C. J., and Brennan, J., concurring). Speaking of the same statute as that involved in *Griswold*, Mr. Justice Harlan wrote, dissenting in *Poe v. Ullman*, 367 U.S. 497, 551-552, 81 S.Ct. 1752, 1781, 6 L.Ed.2d 989 (1961): “(H)ere we have not an intrusion into the home so much as on the life which characteristically has its place in the home. . . . The home derives its pre-eminence as the seat of family life. And the integrity of that life is something so fundamental that it has been found to draw to its protection the principles of more than one explicitly granted Constitutional right.”

Ours is by no means a tradition limited to respect for the bonds uniting the members of the nuclear family. The tradition of uncles, aunts, cousins, and especially grandparents sharing a household along with parents and children has roots equally venerable and equally deserving of constitutional recognition.¹⁴ Over the years millions of our citizens have grown up in just such an environment, and most, surely, have profited from it. Even if conditions of modern society have brought about a decline in extended family households, they have not erased the accumulated wisdom of civilization, gained over the centuries and honored throughout our history, that supports a larger conception of the family. Out of choice, necessity, or a sense of family responsibility, it has been common for close relatives to draw together and participate in the duties and the satisfactions of a common home. Decisions concerning child rearing, which *Yoder*, *Meyer*, *Pierce* and other cases have recognized as entitled to constitutional protection, long have been shared with grandparents or other relatives who occupy the same household indeed who may take on major responsibility for the rearing of the children.¹⁵ Especially in times of adversity, such as the death of a spouse or economic need, the broader family has tended to come together for mutual sustenance and to maintain or rebuild a secure home life. This is apparently what happened here.¹⁶

Whether or not such a household is established because of personal tragedy, the choice of relatives in this degree of kinship to live together may not lightly be denied by the State. *Pierce* struck down an Oregon law requiring all children to attend the State's public schools, holding that the Constitution "excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only." 268 U.S., at 535, 45 S.Ct., at 573. By the same token the Constitution prevents East Cleveland from standardizing its children and its adults by forcing all to live in certain narrowly defined family patterns.

Reversed.

Although he agrees that the Due Process Clause has substantive content, Mr. Justice White in dissent expresses the fear that our recourse to history and tradition will "broaden enormously the horizons of the Clause". *Post*, at 1962. To the contrary, an approach grounded in history imposes limits on the judiciary that are more meaningful than any based on the abstract formula taken from *Palko v. Connecticut*, 302 U.S. 319, 58 S.Ct. 149, 82 L.Ed. 288 (1937), and apparently suggested as an alternative. *Cf. Duncan v. Louisiana*, *supra*, 391 U.S., at 149-150 n.14, 88 S.Ct., at 1447-1448 (rejecting the *Palko* formula as the basis for deciding what procedural protections are required of a State, in favor of a historical approach based on the Anglo-American legal tradition). Indeed, the passage cited in Mr. Justice White's dissent as "most accurately reflect(ing) the thrust of prior decisions" on substantive due process, *post*, at 1959, expressly points to history and tradition as the source for "supplying . . . content to this Constitutional concept". *Poe v. Ullman*, *supra*, 367 U.S., at 542, 81 S.Ct., at 1776 (Harlan, J., dissenting).

¹³ See generally Wilkinson & White, *Constitutional Protection for Personal Lifestyles*, 62 CORNELL L. REV. 563, 623-624 (1977).

¹⁴ See generally B. YORBURG, *THE CHANGING FAMILY* (1973); Bronfenbrenner, *The Calamitous Decline of the American Family*, WASHINGTON POST, Jan. 2, 1977, p. C1. Recent census reports bear out the importance of family patterns other than the prototypical nuclear family. In 1970, 26.5% of all families contained one or more members over 18 years of age, other than the head of household and spouse. U. S. Department of Commerce, 1970 Census of Population, vol. 1, pt. 1, Table 208. In 1960 the comparable figure was 26.1%. U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960 Census of Population, vol. 1, pt. 1, Table 187. Earlier data are not available.

¹⁵ *Cf. Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 64 S.Ct. 438, 88 L.Ed. 645 (1944), which spoke broadly of family authority as against the State, in a case where the child was being reared by her aunt, not her natural parents.

¹⁶ We are told that the mother of John Moore, Jr., died when he was less than one year old. He, like uncounted others who have suffered a similar tragedy, then came to live with the grandmother to provide the infant with a substitute for his mother's care and to establish a more normal home environment. Brief for Appellant 25.

Mr. JUSTICE BRENNAN, with whom Mr. JUSTICE MARSHALL joined, concurred.

Mr. JUSTICE STEVENS, concurred in the judgment.

Mr. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER, dissented.

Mr. JUSTICE STEWART, with whom Mr. JUSTICE REHNQUIST joined, dissented.

Mr. JUSTICE WHITE, dissented.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. After reading *Moore v. City of East Cleveland* has your perception of “family” been strengthened or changed in any way?
2. Based upon the holding in *Moore v. City of East Cleveland*, how would you define family?
3. Under Texas homestead law, a household or family for homestead purposes, is a relationship of status and is not necessary for the family to include both husband and wife; rather, it requires a legal or moral obligation on the head of the family to support the other member or members and there must be a corresponding dependence upon the part of such member or members for such support. *Central Life Assurance Society v. Gray*, 32 S.W.2d 259 (Tex. Civ. App.—Waco 1939, writ ref’d). It is interesting that this Texas definition of “Family” preceded *Moore v. City of East Cleveland* by nearly 40 years.

C. Who is a Parent?

STANLEY
v.
ILLINOIS
405 U.S. 645
(1972)

WHITE, JUSTICE.

Joan Stanley lived with Peter Stanley intermittently for 18 years, during which time they had three children.¹ When Joan Stanley died, Peter Stanley lost not only her but also his children. Under Illinois law, the children of unwed fathers become wards of the State upon the death of the mother. Accordingly, upon Joan Stanley’s death, in a dependency proceeding instituted by the State of Illinois, Stanley’s children² were declared wards of the State and placed with court-appointed guardians. Stanley appealed, claiming that he had never been shown to be an unfit parent and that since married fathers and unwed mothers could not be deprived of their children without such a showing, he had been deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed him by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Illinois Supreme Court accepted the fact that Stanley’s own unfitness had not been established but rejected the equal protection claim, holding that Stanley

¹ Uncontradicted testimony of Peter Stanley, App. 22.

² Only two children are involved in this litigation.

could properly be separated from his children upon proof of the single fact that he and the dead mother had not been married. Stanley's actual fitness as a father was irrelevant. *In re Stanley*, 45 Ill.2d 132, 256 N.E.2d 814 (1970).

Stanley presses his equal protection claim here. The State continues to respond that unwed fathers are presumed unfit to raise their children and that it is unnecessary to hold individualized hearings to determine whether particular fathers are in fact unfit parents before they are separated from their children. We granted certiorari, 400 U.S. 1020, 91 S.Ct. 584, 27 L.Ed.2d 631 (1971), to determine whether this method of procedure by presumption could be allowed to stand in light of the fact that Illinois allows married fathers—whether divorced, widowed, or separated—and mothers—even if unwed—the benefit of the presumption that they are fit to raise their children.

I.

At the outset we reject any suggestion that we need not consider the propriety of the dependency proceeding that separated the Stanleys because Stanley might be able to regain custody of his children as a guardian or through adoption proceedings. The suggestion is that if Stanley has been treated differently from other parents, the difference is immaterial and not legally cognizable for the purposes of the Fourteenth Amendment. This Court has not, however, embraced the general proposition that a wrong may be done if it can be undone. *Cf. Sniadach v. Family Finance Corp. of Bay View*, 395 U.S. 337, 89 S.Ct. 1820, 23 L.Ed.2d 349 (1969). Surely, in the case before us, if there is delay between the doing and the undoing petitioner suffers from the deprivation of his children, and the children suffer from uncertainty and dislocation.

It is clear, moreover, that Stanley does not have the means at hand promptly to erase the adverse consequences of the proceeding in the course of which his children were declared wards of the State. It is first urged that Stanley could act to adopt his children. But under Illinois law, Stanley is treated not as a parent but as a stranger to his children, and the dependency proceeding has gone forward on the presumption that he is unfit to exercise parental rights. Insofar as we are informed, Illinois law affords him no priority in adoption proceedings. It would be his burden to establish not only that he would be a suitable parent but also that he would be the most suitable of all who might want custody of the children. Neither can we ignore that in the proceedings from which this action developed, the “probation officer,” *see* App. 17, the assistant state’s attorney, *see id.*, at 29-30, and the judge charged with the case, *see id.*, at 16-18, 23, made it apparent that Stanley, unmarried and impecunious as he is, could not now expect to profit from adoption proceedings.³ The Illinois Supreme Court apparently recognized some or all of these considerations, because it did not suggest that Stanley’s case was undercut by his failure to petition for adoption.

Before us, the State focuses on Stanley’s failure to petition for “custody and control”—the second route by which, it is urged, he might regain authority for his children. Passing the obvious issue whether it would be futile or burdensome for an unmarried father—without funds and already once presumed unfit—to petition for custody, this suggestion overlooks the fact that legal custody is not parenthood or adoption. A person appointed guardian in an action for custody and control is subject to removal at any time without such cause as must be shown in a neglect proceeding against parent. ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, § 705-8. He may not take the children out of the

³ The Illinois Supreme Court’s opinion is not at all contrary to this conclusion. That court said: “(T)he trial court’s comments clearly indicate the court’s willingness to consider a future request by the father for custody and guardianship.” 45 Ill.2d 132, 135, 256 N.E.2d 814, 816. (Italics added.) See also the comment of Stanley’s counsel on oral argument: “If Peter Stanley could have adopted his children, we would not be here today.” TR. OF ORAL ARG. 7.

jurisdiction without the court's approval. He may be required to report to the court as to his disposition of the children's affairs. ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, § 705-8. Obviously then, even if Stanley were a mere step away from "custody and control," to give an unwed father only "custody and control" would still be to leave him seriously prejudiced by reason of his status.

We must therefore examine the question that Illinois would have us avoid: Is a presumption that distinguishes and burdens all unwed fathers constitutionally repugnant? We conclude that, as a matter of due process of law, Stanley was entitled to a hearing on his fitness as a parent before his children were taken from him and that, by denying him a hearing and extending it to all other parents whose custody of their children is challenged, the State denied Stanley the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

II.

Illinois has two principal methods of removing nondelinquent children from the homes of their parents. In a dependency proceeding it may demonstrate that the children are wards of the State because they have no surviving parent or guardian. ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, §§ 702-1, 702-5. In a neglect proceeding it may show that children should be wards of the State because the present parent(s) or guardian does not provide suitable care. ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, §§ 702-1, 702-4.

The State's right—indeed, duty—to protect minor children through a judicial determination of their interests in a neglect proceeding is not challenged here. Rather, we are faced with a dependency statute that empowers state officials to circumvent neglect proceedings on the theory that an unwed father is not a "parent" whose existing relationship with his children must be considered.⁴ "Parents," says the State, "means the father and mother of a legitimate child, or the survivor of them, or the natural mother of an illegitimate child, and includes any adoptive parent," Ill.Rev.Stat., c. 37, § 701-14, but the term does not include unwed fathers.

Under Illinois law, therefore, while the children of all parents can be taken from them in neglect proceedings, that is only after notice, hearing, and proof of such unfitness as a parent as amounts to neglect, an unwed father is uniquely subject to the more simplistic dependency proceeding. By use of this proceeding, the State, on showing that the father was not married to the mother, need not prove unfitness in fact, because it is presumed at law. Thus, the unwed father's claim of parental qualification is avoided as "irrelevant."

In considering this procedure under the Due Process Clause, we recognize, as we have in other cases, that due process of law does not require a hearing "in every conceivable case of government impairment of private interest." *Cafeteria and Restaurant Workers Union etc. v. McElroy*, 367 U.S. 886, 894, 81 S.Ct. 1743, 1748, 6 L.Ed.2d 1230 (1961). That case explained that "[t]he very nature of due process negates any concept of inflexible procedures universally applicable to every imaginable situation" and firmly established that "what procedures due process may require under any given set of circumstances must begin with a determination of the precise nature of the government function involved as well as of the private interest that has been affected by governmental action." *Id.*, at 895, 81 S.Ct., at 1748; *Goldberg v. Kelly*, 397 U.S. 254, 263, 90 S.Ct. 1011, 1018, 25 L.Ed.2d 287 (1970).

The private interest here, that of a man in the children he has sired and raised, undeniably warrants deference and, absent a powerful countervailing interest, protection. It is plain that the interest of a parent in the companionship, care, custody, and management of his or her children

⁴ Even while refusing to label him a "legal parent," the State does not deny that Stanley has a special interest in the outcome of these proceedings. It is undisputed that he is the father of these children, that he lived with the two children whose custody is challenged all their lives, and that he has supported them.

“come(s) to this Court with a momentum for respect lacking when appeal is made to liberties which derive merely from shifting economic arrangements.” *Kovacs v. Cooper*, 336 U.S. 77, 95, 69 S.Ct. 448, 458, 93 L.Ed. 513 (1949) (Frankfurter, J., concurring).

The Court has frequently emphasized the importance of the family. The rights to conceive and to raise one’s children have been deemed “essential,” *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399, 43 S.Ct. 625, 626, 67 L.Ed. 1042 (1923), “basic civil rights of man,” *Skinner v. Oklahoma*, 316 U.S. 535, 541, 62 S.Ct. 1110, 1113, 86 L.Ed. 1655 (1942), and “(r)ights far more precious . . . than property rights,” *May v. Anderson*, 345 U.S. 528, 533, 73 S.Ct. 840, 843, 97 L.Ed. 1221 (1953). “It is cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder.” *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166, 64 S.Ct. 438, 442, 88 L.Ed. 645 (1944). The integrity of the family unit has found protection in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Meyer v. Nebraska*, supra, 262 U.S. at 399, 43 S.Ct. at 626, the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Skinner v. Oklahoma*, supra, 316 U.S., at 541, 62 S.Ct., at 1113, and the Ninth Amendment, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 496, 85 S.Ct. 1678, 14 L.Ed.2d 510 (1965) (Goldberg, J., concurring).

Nor has the law refused to recognize those family relationships unlegitimized by a marriage ceremony. The Court has declared unconstitutional a state statute denying natural, but illegitimate, children a wrongful-death action for the death of their mother, emphasizing that such children cannot be denied the right of other children because familial bonds in such cases were often as warm, enduring, and important as those arising within a more formally organized family unit. *Levy v. Louisiana*, 391 U.S. 68, 71-72, 88 S.Ct. 1509, 1511, 20 L.Ed.2d 436 (1968). “To say that the test of equal protection should be the ‘legal’ rather than the biological relationship is to avoid the issue.

For the Equal Protection Clause necessarily limits the authority of a State to draw such ‘legal’ lines as it chooses.” *Glonn v. American Guarantee & Liability Ins. Co.*, 391 U.S. 73, 75-76, 88 S.Ct. 1515, 1516, 20 L.Ed.2d 441 (1968).

These authorities make it clear that, at the least, Stanley’s interest in retaining custody of his children is cognizable and substantial.

For its part, the State has made its interest quite plain: Illinois has declared that the aim of the Juvenile Court Act is to protect “the moral, emotional, mental, and physical welfare of the minor and the best interests of the community” and to “strengthen the minor’s family ties whenever possible, removing him from the custody of his parents only when his welfare or safety or the protection of the public cannot be adequately safeguarded without removal . . .” ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, § 701-2. These are legitimate interests, well within the power of the State to implement. We do not question the assertion that neglectful parents may be separated from their children.

But we are here not asked to evaluate the legitimacy of the state ends, rather, to determine whether the means used to achieve these ends are constitutionally defensible. What is the state interest in separating children from fathers without a hearing designed to determine whether the father is unfit in a particular disputed case? We observe that the State registers no gain towards its declared goals when it separates children from the custody of fit parents. Indeed, if Stanley is a fit father, the State spites its own articulated goals when it needlessly separates him from his family.

In *Bell v. Burson*, 402 U.S. 535, 91 S.Ct. 1586, 29 L.Ed.2d 90 (1971), we found a scheme repugnant to the Due Process Clause because it deprived a driver of his license without reference to the very factor (there fault in driving, here fitness as a parent) that the State itself deemed fundamental to its statutory scheme. Illinois would avoid the self-contradiction that rendered the

Georgia license suspension system invalid by arguing that Stanley and all other unmarried fathers can reasonably be presumed to be unqualified to raise their children.⁵

It may be, as the State insists, that most unmarried fathers are unsuitable and neglectful parents.⁶ It may also be that Stanley is such a parent and that his children should be placed in other hands. But all unmarried fathers are not in this category; some are wholly suited to have custody of their children.⁷ This much the State readily concedes, and nothing in this record indicates that Stanley is or has been a neglectful father who has not cared for his children. Given the opportunity to make his case, Stanley may have been seen to be deserving of custody of his

⁵ Illinois says in its brief, at 21-23,

[T]he only relevant consideration in determining the propriety of governmental intervention in the raising of children is whether the best interests of the child are served by such intervention.

In effect, Illinois has imposed a statutory presumption that the best interests of a particular group of children necessitates some governmental supervision in certain clearly defined situations. The group of children who are illegitimate are distinguishable from legitimate children not so much by their status at birth as by the factual differences in their upbringing. While a legitimate child usually is raised by both parents with the attendant familial relationships and a firm concept of home and identity, the illegitimate child normally knows only one parent—the mother. . . .

. . . The petitioner has premised his argument upon particular factual circumstances—a lengthy relationship with the mother . . . a familial relationship with the two children, and a general assumption that this relationship approximates that in which the natural parents are married to each other.

. . . Even if this characterization were accurate (the record is insufficient to support it) it would not affect the validity of the statutory definition of parent. . . . The petitioner does not deny that the children are illegitimate. The record reflects their natural mother’s death. Given these two factors, grounds exist for the State’s intervention to ensure adequate care and protection for these children. This is true whether or not this particular petitioner assimilates all or none of the normal characteristics common to the classification of fathers who are not married to the mothers of their children.

See also Illinois’ Brief 23 (“The comparison of married and putative fathers involves exclusively factual differences. The most significant of these are the presence or absence of the father from the home on a day-to-day basis and the responsibility imposed upon the relationship”), *id.*, at 24 (to the same effect), *id.*, at 31 (quoted below in n. 6), *id.*, at 24-26 (physiological and other studies are cited in support of the proposition that men are not naturally inclined to childrearing), and TR. OF ORAL ARG. 31 (“We submit that both based on history or (sic) culture the very real differences . . . between the married father and the unmarried father, in terms of their interests in children and their legal responsibility for their children, that the statute here fulfills the compelling governmental objective of protecting children . . .”).

⁶ The State speaks of “the general disinterest of putative fathers in their illegitimate children” (Brief 8) and opines that “(i)n most instances the natural father is a stranger to his children.” Brief 31.

⁷ *See In re T.*, 8 Mich.App. 122, 154 N.W.2d 27 (1967). There a panel of the Michigan Court of Appeals in unanimously affirming a circuit court’s determination that the father of an illegitimate son was best suited to raise the boy, said:

The appellants’ presentation in this case proceeds on the assumption that placing Mark for adoption is inherently preferable to rearing by his father, that uprooting him from the family which he knew from birth until he was a year and a half old, secretly institutionalizing him and later transferring him to strangers is so incontrovertibly better that no court has the power even to consider the matter. Hardly anyone would even suggest such a proposition if we were talking about a child born in wedlock.

We are not aware of any sociological data justifying the assumption that an illegitimate child reared by his natural father is less likely to receive a proper upbringing than one reared by his natural father who was at one time married to his mother, or that the stigma of illegitimacy is so pervasive it requires adoption by strangers and permanent termination of a subsisting relationship with the child’s father. *Id.*, at 146, 154 N.W.2d, at 39.

offspring. Had this been so, the State's statutory policy would have been furthered by leaving custody in him.

Carrington v. Rash, 380 U.S. 89, 85 S.Ct. 775, 13 L.Ed.2d 675 (1965), dealt with a similar situation. There we recognized that Texas had a powerful interest in restricting its electorate to bona fide residents. It was not disputed that most servicemen stationed in Texas had no intention of remaining in the State; most therefore could be deprived of a vote in state affairs. But we refused to tolerate a blanket exclusion depriving all servicemen of the vote, when some servicemen clearly were bona fide residents and when "more precise tests," *id.*, at 95, 85 S.Ct., at 779, were available to distinguish members of this latter group. "By forbidding a soldier ever to controvert the presumption of nonresidence," *id.*, at 96, 85 S.Ct., at 780, the State, we said, unjustifiably effected a substantial deprivation. It viewed people one-dimensionally (as servicemen) when a finer perception could readily have been achieved by assessing a serviceman's claim to residency on an individualized basis.

We recognize that special problems may be involved in determining whether servicemen have actually acquired a new domicile in a State for franchise purposes. We emphasize that Texas is free to take reasonable and adequate steps, as have other States, to see that all applicants for the vote actually fulfill the requirements of bona fide residence. But (the challenged) provision goes beyond such rules. "(T)he presumption here created is . . . definitely conclusive-incapable of being overcome by proof of the most positive character." *Id.*, at 96, 85 S.Ct., at 780.

"All servicemen not residents of Texas before induction," we concluded, "come within the provision's sweep. Not one of them can ever vote in Texas, no matter" what their individual qualifications. *Ibid.* We found such a situation repugnant to the Equal Protection Clause.

Despite *Bell* and *Carrington*, it may be argued that unmarried fathers are so seldom fit that Illinois need not undergo the administrative inconvenience of inquiry in any case, including Stanley's. The establishment of prompt efficacious procedures to achieve legitimate state ends is a proper state interest worthy of cognizance in constitutional adjudication. But the Constitution recognizes higher values than speed and efficiency.⁸ Indeed, one might fairly say of the Bill of Rights in general, and the Due Process Clause in particular, that they were designed to protect the fragile values of a vulnerable citizenry from the overbearing concern for efficiency and efficacy that may characterize praiseworthy government officials no less, and perhaps more, than mediocre ones.

Procedure by presumption is always cheaper and easier than individualized determination. But when, as here, the procedure forecloses the determinative issues of competence and care, when it explicitly disdains present realities in deference to past formalities, it needlessly risks

⁸ *Cf. Reed v. Reed*, 404 U.S. 71, 76, 92 S.Ct. 251, 254, 30 L.Ed.2d 225 (1971). "Clearly the objective of reducing the workload on probate courts by eliminating one class of contests is not without some legitimacy. . . . [But to] give a mandatory preference to members of either sex over members of the other, merely to accomplish the elimination of hearings on the merits, is to make the very kind of arbitrary legislative choice forbidden by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." *Carrington v. Rash*, 380 U.S. 89, 96, 85 S.Ct. 775, 780 (1965), teaches the same lesson. ". . . States may not casually deprive a class of individuals of the vote because of some remote administrative benefit to the State. *Oyama v. California*, 332 U.S. 633, 68 S.Ct. 269, 92 L.Ed. 249. By forbidding a soldier ever to controvert the presumption of nonresidence, the Texas Constitution imposes an invidious discrimination in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment."

running roughshod over the important interests of both parent and child. It therefore cannot stand.⁹

Bell v. Burson held that the State could not, while purporting to be concerned with fault in suspending a driver's license, deprive a citizen of his license without a hearing that would assess fault. Absent fault, the State's declared interest was so attenuated that administrative convenience was insufficient to excuse a hearing where evidence of fault could be considered. That drivers involved in accidents, as a statistical matter, might be very likely to have been wholly or partially at fault did not foreclose hearing and proof in specific cases before licenses were suspended.

We think the Due Process Clause mandates a similar result here. The State's interest in caring for Stanley's children is *de minimis* if Stanley is shown to be a fit father. It insists on presuming rather than proving Stanley's unfitness solely because it is more convenient to presume than to prove. Under the Due Process Clause that advantage is insufficient to justify refusing a father a hearing when the issue at stake is the dismemberment of his family.

III.

The State of Illinois assumes custody of the children of married parents, divorced parents, and unmarried mothers only after a hearing and proof of neglect. The children of unmarried fathers, however, are declared dependent children without a hearing on parental fitness and without proof of neglect. Stanley's claim in the state courts and here is that failure to afford him a hearing on his parental qualifications while extending it to other parents denied him equal protection of the laws. We have concluded that all Illinois parents are constitutionally entitled to a hearing on their fitness before their children are removed from their custody. It follows that denying such a hearing to Stanley and those like him while granting it to other Illinois parents is inescapably contrary to the Equal Protection Clause.¹⁰

The judgment of the Supreme Court of Illinois is reversed and the case is remanded to that court for proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion. It is so ordered.

⁹ We note in passing that the incremental cost of offering unwed fathers an opportunity for individualized hearings on fitness appears to be minimal. If unwed fathers, in the main, do not care about the disposition of their children, they will not appear to demand hearings. If they do care, under the scheme here held invalid, Illinois would admittedly at some later time have to afford them a properly focused hearing in a custody or adoption proceeding.

Extending opportunity for hearing to unwed fathers who desire and claim competence to care for their children creates no constitutional or procedural obstacle to foreclosing those unwed fathers who are not so inclined. The Illinois law governing procedure in juvenile cases. ILL. REV. STAT., c. 37, § 704-1 et seq., provides for personal service, notice by certified mail, or for notice by publication when personal or certified mail service cannot be had or when notice is directed to unknown respondents under the style of 'All whom it may Concern.' Unwed fathers who do not promptly respond cannot complain if their children are declared wards of the State. Those who do respond retain the burden of proving their fatherhood.

¹⁰ Predicating a finding of constitutional invalidity under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment on the observation that a State has accorded bedrock procedural rights to some, but not to all similarly situated, is not contradictory to our holding in *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 92 S.Ct. 509, 30 L.Ed.2d 438 (1971). In that case a due process, rather than an equal protection, claim was raised in the state courts. The federal courts were, in our opinion, barred from reversing the state conviction on grounds of contravention of the Equal Protection Clause when that clause had not been referred to for consideration by the state authorities. Here, in contrast, we dispose of the case on the constitutional premise raised below, reaching the result by a method of analysis readily available to the state court.

For the same reason the strictures of *Cardinale v. Louisiana*, 394 U.S. 437, 89 S.Ct. 1161, 22 L.Ed.2d 398 (1969), and *Hill v. California*, 401 U.S. 797, 91 S.Ct. 1106, 28 L.Ed.2d 484 (1971), have been fully observed.

Reversed and remanded.

Mr. JUSTICE POWELL and Mr. JUSTICE REHNQUIST took no part in the consideration or decision of this case.

Mr. JUSTICE DOUGLAS joins in Parts I and II of this opinion.

Mr. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER, with whom Mr. JUSTICE BLACKMUN concurs, dissenting [omitted].

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. In *Stanley v. Illinois*, the Court provides examples of their previous rulings which have respected the sanctity of the family and the rights of parents. List them.
2. In light of the current trend which seems to glamorize the birth of children out of wedlock—followed by marriage or not—does the need for an opinion such as this seem shocking?
3. Under the Texas Family Code, what are the rights, duties, and powers of a parent?

D. Constitutional Rights of Grandparents—Do Such Exist?

TROXEL
v.
GRANVILLE
530 U.S. 57
(2000)

O’CONNOR, JUSTICE.

Section 26.10.160(3) of the Revised Code of Washington permits “[a]ny person” to petition a superior court for visitation rights “at any time,” and authorizes that court to grant such visitation rights whenever “visitation may serve the best interest of the child.” Petitioners Jenifer and Gary Troxel petitioned a Washington Superior Court for the right to visit their grandchildren, Isabelle and Natalie Troxel. Respondent Tommie Granville, the mother of Isabelle and Natalie, opposed the petition. The case ultimately reached the Washington Supreme Court, which held that § 26.10.160(3) unconstitutionally interferes with the fundamental right of parents to rear their children.

I

Tommie Granville and Brad Troxel shared a relationship that ended in June 1991. The two never married, but they had two daughters, Isabelle and Natalie. Jenifer and Gary Troxel are Brad’s parents, and thus the paternal grandparents of Isabelle and Natalie. After Tommie and Brad separated in 1991, Brad lived with his parents and regularly brought his daughters to his parents’ home for weekend visitation. Brad committed suicide in May 1993. Although the Troxels at first continued to see Isabelle and Natalie on a regular basis after their son’s death, Tommie Granville informed the Troxels in October 1993 that she wished to limit their visitation

with her daughters to one short visit per month. *In re Smith*, 137 Wash.2d 1, 6, 969 P.2d 21, 23-24 (1998); *In re Troxel*, 87 Wash. App. 131, 133, 940 P.2d 698, 698-99 (1997).

In December 1993, the Troxels commenced the present action by filing, in the Washington Superior Court for Skagit County, a petition to obtain visitation rights with Isabelle and Natalie. The Troxels filed their petition under two Washington statutes, WASH. REV. CODE §§ 26.09.240 and 26.10.160(3) (1994). Only the latter statute is at issue in this case. Section 26.10.160(3) provides:

Any person may petition the court for visitation rights at any time including, but not limited to, custody proceedings. The court may order visitation rights for any person when visitation may serve the best interest of the child whether or not there has been any change of circumstances.

At trial, the Troxels requested two weekends of overnight visitation per month and two weeks of visitation each summer. Granville did not oppose visitation altogether, but instead asked the court to order one day of visitation per month with no overnight stay. 87 Wash. App., at 133-34, 940 P.2d, at 699. In 1995, the Superior Court issued an oral ruling and entered a visitation decree ordering visitation one weekend per month, one week during the summer, and four hours on both of the petitioning grandparents' birthdays. 137 Wash.2d, at 6, 969 P.2d, at 23; App. to Pet. for Cert. 76a-78a.

Granville appealed, during which time she married Kelly Wynn. Before addressing the merits of Granville's appeal, the Washington Court of Appeals remanded the case to the Superior Court for entry of written findings of fact and conclusions of law. 137 Wash.2d, at 6, 969 P.2d, at 23. On remand, the Superior Court found that visitation was in Isabelle's and Natalie's best interests:

The Petitioners [the Troxels] are part of a large, central, loving family, all located in this area, and the Petitioners can provide opportunities for the children in the areas of cousins and music.

* * * The court took into consideration all factors regarding the best interest of the children and considered all the testimony before it. The children would be benefited from spending quality time with the Petitioners, provided that that time is balanced with time with the childrens' [sic] nuclear family. The court finds that the childrens' [sic] best interests are served by spending time with their mother and stepfather's other six children.

App. 70a.

Approximately nine months after the Superior Court entered its order on remand, Granville's husband formally adopted Isabelle and Natalie. *Id.* at 60a-67a.

The Washington Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's visitation order and dismissed the Troxels' petition for visitation, holding that nonparents lack standing to seek visitation under § 26.10.160(3) unless a custody action is pending. In the Court of Appeals' view, that limitation on nonparental visitation actions was "consistent with the constitutional restrictions on state interference with parents' fundamental liberty interest in the care, custody, and management of their children." 87 Wash. App., at 135, 940 P.2d, at 700 (internal quotation marks omitted). Having resolved the case on the statutory ground, however, the Court of Appeals did not expressly pass on Granville's constitutional challenge to the visitation statute. *Id.*, at 138, 940 P.2d, at 701.

The Washington Supreme Court granted the Troxels' petition for review and, after consolidating their case with two other visitation cases, affirmed. The court disagreed with the Court of Appeals' decision on the statutory issue and found that the plain language of

§ 26.10.160(3) gave the Troxels standing to seek visitation, irrespective of whether a custody action was pending. 137 Wash.2d, at 12, 969 P.2d, at 26-27. The Washington Supreme Court nevertheless agreed with the Court of Appeals' ultimate conclusion that the Troxels could not obtain visitation of Isabelle and Natalie pursuant to § 26.10.160(3). The court rested its decision on the Federal Constitution, holding that § 26.10.160(3) unconstitutionally infringes on the fundamental right of parents to rear their children. In the court's view, there were at least two problems with the nonparental visitation statute. First, according to the Washington Supreme Court, the Constitution permits a State to interfere with the right of parents to rear their children only to prevent harm or potential harm to a child. Section 26.10.160(3) fails that standard because it requires no threshold showing of harm. *Id.* at 15-20, 969 P.2d, at 28-30. Second, by allowing "any person" to petition for forced visitation of a child at "any time" with the only requirement being that the visitation serve the best interest of the child," the Washington visitation statute sweeps too broadly. *Id.* at 20, 969 P.2d, at 30. "It is not within the province of the state to make significant decisions concerning the custody of children merely because it could make a 'better' decision." *Ibid.*, 969 P.2d, at 31. The Washington Supreme Court held that "[p]arents have a right to limit visitation of their children with third persons," and that between parents and judges, "the parents should be the ones to choose whether to expose their children to certain people or ideas." *Id.*, at 21, 969 P.2d, at 31. Four justices dissented from the Washington Supreme Court's holding on the constitutionality of the statute. *Id.* at 23-43, 969 P.2d 21, 969 P.2d, at 32-42.

We granted certiorari, 527 U.S. 1069, 120 S.Ct. 11, 144 L.Ed.2d 842 (1999), and now affirm the judgment.

II

The demographic changes of the past century make it difficult to speak of an average American family. The composition of families varies greatly from household to household. While many children may have two married parents and grandparents who visit regularly, many other children are raised in single-parent households. In 1996, children living with only one parent accounted for 28 percent of all children under age 18 in the United States. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, 1997 Population Profile of the United States 27 (1998). Understandably, in these single-parent households, persons outside the nuclear family are called upon with increasing frequency to assist in the everyday tasks of child rearing. In many cases, grandparents play an important role. For example, in 1998, approximately 4 million children—or 5.6 percent of all children under age 18—lived in the household of their grandparents. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1998 (Update), p. I (1998).

The nationwide enactment of nonparental visitation statutes is assuredly due, in some part, to the States' recognition of these changing realities of the American family. Because grandparents and other relatives undertake duties of a parental nature in many households, States have sought to ensure the welfare of the children therein by protecting the relationships those children form with such third parties. The States' nonparental visitation statutes are further supported by a recognition, which varies from State to State, that children should have the opportunity to benefit from relationships with statutorily specified persons—for example, their grandparents. The extension of statutory rights in this area to persons other than a child's parents, however, comes with an obvious cost. For example, the State's recognition of an independent third-party interest in a child can place a substantial burden on the traditional parent-child relationship. Contrary to Justice STEVENS' accusation, our description of state nonparental visitation statutes in these terms, of course, is not meant to suggest that "children are so much chattel." *Post*, at 2072 (dissenting opinion). Rather, our terminology is intended to highlight the fact that these statutes

can present questions of constitutional import. In this case, we are presented with just such a question. Specifically, we are asked to decide whether § 26.10.160(3), as applied to Tommie Granville and her family, violates the Federal Constitution.

The Fourteenth Amendment provides that no State shall “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” We have long recognized that the Amendment’s Due Process Clause, like its Fifth Amendment counterpart, “guarantees more than fair process.” *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 719, 117 S.Ct. 2258 (1997). The Clause also includes a substantive component that “provides heightened protection against government interference with certain fundamental rights and liberty interests.” *Id.* at 720, 117 S.Ct. 2258; *see also Reno v. Flores*, 507 U.S. 292, 301-02, 113 S.Ct. 1439, 123 L.Ed.2d 1 (1993).

The liberty interest at issue in this case—the interest of parents in the care, custody, and control of their children—is perhaps the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests recognized by this Court. More than 75 years ago, in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399, 401, 43 S.Ct. 625, 67 L.Ed. 1042 (1923), we held that the “liberty” protected by the Due Process Clause includes the right of parents to “establish a home and bring up children” and “to control the education of their own.” Two years later, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534-35, 45 S.Ct. 571, 69 L.Ed. 1070 (1925), we again held that the “liberty of parents and guardians” includes the right “to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control.” We explained in *Pierce* that “[t]he child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.” *Id.*, at 535, 45 S.Ct. 571. We returned to the subject in *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 64 S.Ct. 438, 88 L.Ed. 645 (1944), and again confirmed that there is a constitutional dimension to the right of parents to direct the upbringing of their children. “It is cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder.” *Id.*, at 166, 64 S.Ct. 438.

In subsequent cases also, we have recognized the fundamental right of parents to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children. *See, e.g., Stanley v. Illinois*, 405 U.S. 645, 651, 92 S.Ct. 1208, 31 L.Ed.2d 551 (1972) (“It is plain that the interest of a parent in the companionship, care, custody, and management of his or her children ‘come[s] to this Court with a momentum for respect lacking when appeal is made to liberties which derive merely from shifting economic arrangements’ ” (citation omitted)); *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 232, 92 S.Ct. 1526, 32 L.Ed.2d 15 (1972) (“The history and culture of Western civilization reflect a strong tradition of parental concern for the nurture and upbringing of their children. This primary role of the parents in the upbringing of their children is now established beyond debate as an enduring American tradition”); *Quilloin v. Walcott*, 434 U.S. 246, 255, 98 S.Ct. 549, 54 L.Ed.2d 511 (1978) (“We have recognized on numerous occasions that the relationship between parent and child is constitutionally protected”); *Parham v. J. R.*, 442 U.S. 584, 602, 99 S.Ct. 2493, 61 L.Ed.2d 101 (1979) (“Our jurisprudence historically has reflected Western civilization concepts of the family as a unit with broad parental authority over minor children. Our cases have consistently followed that course”); *Santosky v. Kramer*, 455 U.S. 745, 753, 102 S.Ct. 1388, 71 L.Ed.2d 599 (1982) (discussing “[t]he fundamental liberty interest of natural parents in the care, custody, and management of their child”); *Glucksberg, supra*, at 720, 117 S.Ct. 2258 (“In a long line of cases, we have held that, in addition to the specific freedoms protected by the Bill of Rights, the ‘liberty’ specially protected by the Due Process Clause includes the righ[t] . . . to direct the education and upbringing of one’s children” (citing *Meyer* and *Pierce*)). In light of this extensive precedent, it cannot now be doubted that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects the

fundamental right of parents to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children.

Section 26.10.160(3), as applied to Granville and her family in this case, unconstitutionally infringes on that fundamental parental right. The Washington nonparental visitation statute is breathtakingly broad. According to the statute's text, "[a]ny person may petition the court for visitation rights at any time," and the court may grant such visitation rights whenever "visitation may serve the best interest of the child." § 26.10.160(3) (emphases added). That language effectively permits any third party seeking visitation to subject any decision by a parent concerning visitation of the parent's children to state-court review. Once the visitation petition has been filed in court and the matter is placed before a judge, a parent's decision that visitation would not be in the child's best interest is accorded no deference. Section 26.10.160(3) contains no requirement that a court accord the parent's decision any presumption of validity or any weight whatsoever. Instead, the Washington statute places the best-interest determination solely in the hands of the judge. Should the judge disagree with the parent's estimation of the child's best interests, the judge's view necessarily prevails. Thus, in practical effect, in the State of Washington a court can disregard and overturn any decision by a fit custodial parent concerning visitation whenever a third party affected by the decision files a visitation petition, based solely on the judge's determination of the child's best interests. The Washington Supreme Court had the opportunity to give § 26.10.160(3) a narrower reading, but it declined to do so. *See, e.g.*, 137 Wash.2d, at 5, 969 P.2d, at 23 ("[The statute] allow[s] any person, at any time, to petition for visitation without regard to relationship to the child, without regard to changed circumstances, and without regard to harm"); *id.*, at 20, 969 P.2d, at 30 ("[The statute] allow[s] 'any person' to petition for forced visitation of a child at 'any time' with the only requirement being that the visitation serve the best interest of the child").

Turning to the facts of this case, the record reveals that the Superior Court's order was based on precisely the type of mere disagreement we have just described and nothing more. The Superior Court's order was not founded on any special factors that might justify the State's interference with Granville's fundamental right to make decisions concerning the rearing of her two daughters. To be sure, this case involves a visitation petition filed by grandparents soon after the death of their son—the father of Isabelle and Natalie—but the combination of several factors here compels our conclusion that § 26.10.160(3), as applied, exceeded the bounds of the Due Process Clause.

First, the Troxels did not allege, and no court has found, that Granville was an unfit parent. That aspect of the case is important, for there is a presumption that fit parents act in the best interests of their children. As this Court explained in *Parham*:

[O]ur constitutional system long ago rejected any notion that a child is the mere creature of the State and, on the contrary, asserted that parents generally have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare [their children] for additional obligations. * * * The law's concept of the family rests on a presumption that parents possess what a child lacks in maturity, experience, and capacity for judgment required for making life's difficult decisions. More important, historically it has recognized that natural bonds of affection lead parents to act in the best interests of their children.

442 U.S., at 602, 99 S.Ct. 2493 (alteration in original) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted).

Accordingly, so long as a parent adequately cares for his or her children (i.e., is fit), there will normally be no reason for the State to inject itself into the private realm of the family to further

question the ability of that parent to make the best decisions concerning the rearing of that parent's children. *See, e.g., Flores*, 507 U.S., at 304, 113 S.Ct. 1439.

The problem here is not that the Washington Superior Court intervened, but that when it did so, it gave no special weight at all to Granville's determination of her daughters' best interests. More importantly, it appears that the Superior Court applied exactly the opposite presumption. In reciting its oral ruling after the conclusion of closing arguments, the Superior Court judge explained:

The burden is to show that it is in the best interest of the children to have some visitation and some quality time with their grandparents. I think in most situations a commonsensical approach [is that] it is normally in the best interest of the children to spend quality time with the grandparent, unless the grandparent, [sic] there are some issues or problems involved wherein the grandparents, their lifestyles are going to impact adversely upon the children. That certainly isn't the case here from what I can tell. Verbatim Report of Proceedings in *In re Troxel*, No. 93-3-00650-7 (Wash. Super. Ct., Dec. 14, 19, 1994), p. 213 (hereinafter Verbatim Report).

The judge's comments suggest that he presumed the grandparents' request should be granted unless the children would be "impact[ed] adversely." In effect, the judge placed on Granville, the fit custodial parent, the burden of disproving that visitation would be in the best interest of her daughters. The judge reiterated moments later: "I think [visitation with the Troxels] would be in the best interest of the children and I haven't been shown it is not in [the] best interest of the children." *Id.*, at 214, 113 S.Ct. 1439.

The decisional framework employed by the Superior Court directly contravened the traditional presumption that a fit parent will act in the best interest of his or her child. *See Parham, supra*, at 602, 99 S.Ct. 2493. In that respect, the court's presumption failed to provide any protection for Granville's fundamental constitutional right to make decisions concerning the rearing of her own daughters. *Cf., e.g., CAL. FAM. CODE ANN.* § 3104(e) (West 1994) (rebuttable presumption that grandparent visitation is not in child's best interest if parents agree that visitation rights should not be granted); *ME. REV. STAT. ANN.*, tit. 19A, § 1803(3) (1998) (court may award grandparent visitation if in best interest of child and "would not significantly interfere with any parent-child relationship or with the parent's rightful authority over the child"); *MINN. STAT.* § 257.022(2)(a)(2) (1998) (court may award grandparent visitation if in best interest of child and "such visitation would not interfere with the parent-child relationship"); *NEB. REV. STAT.* § 43-1802(2) (1998) (court must find "by clear and convincing evidence" that grandparent visitation "will not adversely interfere with the parent-child relationship"); *R.I. Gen. Laws* § 15-5-24.3(a)(2)(v) (Supp.1999) (grandparent must rebut, by clear and convincing evidence, presumption that parent's decision to refuse grandparent visitation was reasonable); *UTAH CODE ANN.* § 30-5-2(2)(e) (1998) (same); *Hoff v. Berg*, 595 N.W.2d 285, 291-292 (N.D.1999) (holding North Dakota grandparent visitation statute unconstitutional because State has no "compelling interest in presuming visitation rights of grandparents to an unmarried minor are in the child's best interests and forcing parents to accede to court-ordered grandparental visitation unless the parents are first able to prove such visitation is not in the best interests of their minor child"). In an ideal world, parents might always seek to cultivate the bonds between grandparents and their grandchildren. Needless to say, however, our world is far from perfect, and in it the decision whether such an intergenerational relationship would be beneficial in any specific case is for the parent to make in the first instance. And, if a fit parent's decision of the kind at issue here becomes subject to judicial review, the court must accord at least some special weight to the parent's own determination.

Finally, we note that there is no allegation that Granville ever sought to cut off visitation entirely. Rather, the present dispute originated when Granville informed the Troxels that she would prefer to restrict their visitation with Isabelle and Natalie to one short visit per month and special holidays. *See* 87 Wash. App., at 133, 940 P.2d, at 699; Verbatim Report 12. In the Superior Court proceedings Granville did not oppose visitation but instead asked that the duration of any visitation order be shorter than that requested by the Troxels. While the Troxels requested two weekends per month and two full weeks in the summer, Granville asked the Superior Court to order only one day of visitation per month (with no overnight stay) and participation in the Granville family's holiday celebrations. *See* 87 Wash. App., at 133, 940 P.2d, at 699; Verbatim Report 9 (“Right off the bat we’d like to say that our position is that grandparent visitation is in the best interest of the children. It is a matter of how much and how it is going to be structured”) (opening statement by Granville’s attorney). The Superior Court gave no weight to Granville’s having assented to visitation even before the filing of any visitation petition or subsequent court intervention. The court instead rejected Granville’s proposal and settled on a middle ground, ordering one weekend of visitation per month, one week in the summer, and time on both of the petitioning grandparents’ birthdays. *See* 87 Wash. App., at 133-34, 940 P.2d, at 699; Verbatim Report 216-21. Significantly, many other States expressly provide by statute that courts may not award visitation unless a parent has denied (or unreasonably denied) visitation to the concerned third party. *See, e.g.*, MISS. CODE ANN. § 93-16-3(2)(a) (1994) (court must find that “the parent or custodian of the child unreasonably denied the grandparent visitation rights with the child”); OR. REV. STAT. § 109.121(1)(a)(B) (1997) (court may award visitation if the “custodian of the child has denied the grandparent reasonable opportunity to visit the child”); R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 15-5-24.3(a)(2)(iii)-(iv) (Supp.1999) (court must find that parents prevented grandparent from visiting grandchild and that “there is no other way the petitioner is able to visit his or her grandchild without court intervention”).

Considered together with the Superior Court’s reasons for awarding visitation to the Troxels, the combination of these factors demonstrates that the visitation order in this case was an unconstitutional infringement on Granville’s fundamental right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of her two daughters. The Washington Superior Court failed to accord the determination of Granville, a fit custodial parent, any material weight. In fact, the Superior Court made only two formal findings in support of its visitation order. First, the Troxels “are part of a large, central, loving family, all located in this area, and the [Troxels] can provide opportunities for the children in the areas of cousins and music.” App. 70a. Second, “[t]he children would be benefitted from spending quality time with the [Troxels], provided that that time is balanced with time with the childrens’ [sic] nuclear family.” *Ibid.* These slender findings, in combination with the court’s announced presumption in favor of grandparent visitation and its failure to accord significant weight to Granville’s already having offered meaningful visitation to the Troxels, show that this case involves nothing more than a simple disagreement between the Washington Superior Court and Granville concerning her children’s best interests. The Superior Court’s announced reason for ordering one week of visitation in the summer demonstrates our conclusion well: “I look back on some personal experiences. . . . We always spen[t] as kids a week with one set of grandparents and another set of grandparents, [and] it happened to work out in our family that [it] turned out to be an enjoyable experience. Maybe that can, in this family, if that is how it works out.” Verbatim Report 220-21. As we have explained, the Due Process Clause does not permit a State to infringe on the fundamental right of parents to make child rearing decisions simply because a state judge believes a “better” decision could be made. Neither the Washington nonparental visitation statute generally—which places no limits on either the persons who may petition for visitation or the circumstances in which such a petition may be

granted—nor the Superior Court in this specific case required anything more. Accordingly, we hold that § 26.10.160(3), as applied in this case, is unconstitutional.

Because we rest our decision on the sweeping breadth of § 26.10.160(3) and the application of that broad, unlimited power in this case, we do not consider the primary constitutional question passed on by the Washington Supreme Court—whether the Due Process Clause requires all nonparental visitation statutes to include a showing of harm or potential harm to the child as a condition precedent to granting visitation. We do not, and need not, define today the precise scope of the parental due process right in the visitation context. In this respect, we agree with JUSTICE KENNEDY that the constitutionality of any standard for awarding visitation turns on the specific manner in which that standard is applied and that the constitutional protections in this area are best “elaborated with care.” *Post*, at 2079 (dissenting opinion). Because much state-court adjudication in this context occurs on a case-by-case basis, we would be hesitant to hold that specific nonparental visitation statutes violate the Due Process Clause as a per se matter. *See, e.g., Fairbanks v. McCarter*, 330 Md. 39, 49-50, 622 A.2d 121, 126-27 (1993) (interpreting best-interest standard in grandparent visitation statute normally to require court’s consideration of certain factors); *Williams v. Williams*, 256 Va. 19, 501 S.E.2d 417, 418 (1998) (interpreting Virginia nonparental visitation statute to require finding of harm as condition precedent to awarding visitation).

* * *

There is thus no reason to remand the case for further proceedings in the Washington Supreme Court. As JUSTICE KENNEDY recognizes, the burden of litigating a domestic relations proceeding can itself be “so disruptive of the parent-child relationship that the constitutional right of a custodial parent to make certain basic determinations for the child’s welfare becomes implicated.” *Post*, at 2079. In this case, the litigation costs incurred by Granville on her trip through the Washington court system and to this Court are without a doubt already substantial. As we have explained, it is apparent that the entry of the visitation order in this case violated the Constitution. We should say so now, without forcing the parties into additional litigation that would further burden Granville’s parental right. We therefore hold that the application of § 26.10.160(3) to Granville and her family violated her due process right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of her daughters.

Accordingly, the judgment of the Washington Supreme Court is affirmed.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. What presumption should be used to resolve custody battles between a parent and non-parent?
2. Is this, or should this be, a rebuttable presumption?
3. Who might try to intervene in a custody dispute?
4. Should grandparents be treated differently than other possible intervenors?
5. What was the primary problem with the Washington Superior Court’s handling of *Troxel*?
6. What were the *Troxel*’s petitioning for and how was this significant in the handling of the case?
7. What was the problem with WASH. REV. CODE § 26.10.160(3)?
8. Is there a comparable Texas statute?

9. Texas cases focusing upon the rights of grandparents are presented in Chapter 10. Keep *Troxel v. Granville* in mind as you read those cases.

10. Not only do parental rights supersede grandparents' rights, parental rights have often superseded the rights of the state in matters of education. For example, in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390 (1923) the Court determined that mandating only English to be taught in school infringed on the parents' choice of education. Also, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925), an Oregon law prohibiting private education, was found to be outweighed by the parents' interest in educating their children.

11. In *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972), because Amish children traditionally remained in the community and embraced the culture of the community, the Court found they had already learned everything they needed to be self-sufficient in the Amish community. The parent's interest in shared religious and moral values prevailed over the requirement that all students in Wisconsin must attend school until they are sixteen years of age. The Court found the Amish community a "successful social unit." How is it determined that a community is a "successful social unit"?

E. Polygamy vs. Religious Freedom

REYNOLDS
v.
UNITED STATES
98 U.S. 145
(1878)

[Summary by Reporter] This is an indictment found in the District Court for the third judicial district of the Territory of Utah, charging George Reynolds with bigamy, in violation of sect. 5352 of the Revised Statutes, which, omitting its exceptions, is as follows:—

“Every person having a husband or wife living, who marries another, whether married or single, in a Territory, or other place over which the United States have exclusive jurisdiction, is guilty of bigamy, and shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$500, and by imprisonment for a term of not more than five years.”

* * *

The court, in summing up to the jury, declined to instruct them, as requested by the prisoner, that if they found that he had married in pursuance of and conformity with what he believed at the time to be a religious duty, their verdict should be “not guilty,” but instructed them that if he, under the influence of a religious belief that it was right, had “deliberately married a second time, having a first wife living, the want of consciousness of evil intent—the want of understanding on his part that he was committing crime—did not excuse him, but the law inexorably, in such cases, implies criminal intent.”

The court also said: “I think it not improper, in the discharge of your duties in this case, that you should consider what are to be the consequences to the innocent victims of this delusion. As this contest goes on, they multiply, and there are pure-minded women and there are innocent children,—innocent in a sense even beyond the degree of the innocence of childhood itself. These are to be the sufferers; and as jurors fail to do their duty, and as these cases come up in the Territory, just so do these victims multiply and spread themselves over the land.”

To the refusal of the court to charge as requested, and to the charge as given, the prisoner excepted. The jury found him guilty, as charged in the indictment; and the judgment that he be imprisoned at hard labor for a term of two years, and pay a fine of \$500, rendered by the District Court, having been affirmed by the Supreme Court of the Territory, he sued out this writ of error.

* * *

WAITE, CHIEF JUSTICE.

The assignments of error, when grouped, present the following questions:—

* * *

5. Should the accused have been acquitted if he married the second time, because he believed it to be his religious duty?

6. Did the court err in that part of the charge which directed the attention of the jury to the consequences of polygamy?

5. As to the defense of religious belief or duty.

On the trial, the plaintiff in error, the accused, proved that at the time of his alleged second marriage he was, and for many years before had been, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, commonly called the Mormon Church, and a believer in its doctrines; that it was an accepted doctrine of that church “that it was the duty of male members of said church, circumstances permitting, to practice polygamy; . . . that this duty was enjoined by different books which the members of said church believed to be of divine origin, and among others the Holy Bible, and also that the members of the church believed that the practice of polygamy was directly enjoined upon the male members thereof by the Almighty God, in a revelation to Joseph Smith, the founder and prophet of said church; that the failing or refusing to practice polygamy by such male members of said church, when circumstances would admit, would be punished, and that the penalty for such failure and refusal would be damnation in the life to come.” He also proved “that he had received permission from the recognized authorities in said church to enter into polygamous marriage; . . . that Daniel H. Wells, one having authority in said church to perform the marriage ceremony, married the said defendant on or about the time the crime is alleged to have been committed, to some woman by the name of Schofield, and that such marriage ceremony was performed under and pursuant to the doctrines of said church.”

Upon this proof he asked the court to instruct the jury that if they found from the evidence that he “was married as charged—if he was married—in pursuance of and in conformity with what he believed at the time to be a religious duty, that the verdict must be “not guilty.” This request was refused, and the court did charge “that there must have been a criminal intent, but that if the defendant, under the influence of a religious belief that it was right,—under an inspiration, if you please, that it was right,—deliberately married a second time, having a first wife living, the want of consciousness of evil intent—the want of understanding on his part that he was committing a crime did not excuse him; but the law inexorably in such case implies the criminal intent.”

Upon this charge and refusal to charge the question is raised, whether religious belief can be accepted as a justification of an overt act made criminal by the law of the land. The inquiry is not

as to the power of Congress to prescribe criminal laws for the Territories, but as to the guilt of one who knowingly violates a law which has been properly enacted, if he entertains a religious belief that the law is wrong.

Congress cannot pass a law for the government of the Territories which shall prohibit the free exercise of religion. The first amendment to the Constitution expressly forbids such legislation. Religious freedom is guaranteed everywhere throughout the United States, so far as congressional interference is concerned. The question to be determined is, whether the law now under consideration comes within this prohibition.

The word “religion” is not defined in the Constitution. We must go elsewhere, therefore, to ascertain its meaning, and nowhere more appropriately, we think, than to the history of the times in the midst of which the provision was adopted. The precise point of the inquiry is, what is the religious freedom which has been guaranteed.

Before the adoption of the Constitution, attempts were made in some of the colonies and States to legislate not only in respect to the establishment of religion, but in respect to its doctrines and precepts as well. The people were taxed, against their will, for the support of religion, and sometimes for the support of particular sects to whose tenets they could not and did not subscribe. Punishments were prescribed for a failure to attend upon public worship, and sometimes for entertaining heretical opinions. The controversy upon this general subject was animated in many of the States, but seemed at last to culminate in Virginia. In 1784, the House of Delegates of that State having under consideration “a bill establishing provision for teachers of the Christian religion,” postponed it until the next session, and directed that the bill should be published and distributed, and that the people be requested “to signify their opinion respecting the adoption of such a bill at the next session of assembly.”

This brought out a determined opposition. Amongst others, Mr. Madison prepared a “Memorial and Remonstrance,” which was widely circulated and signed, and in which he demonstrated “that religion, or the duty we owe the Creator,” was not within the cognizance of civil government. Semple’s Virginia Baptists, Appendix. At the next session the proposed bill was not only defeated, but another, “for establishing religious freedom,” drafted by Mr. Jefferson, was passed. 1 JEFF. WORKS, 45; 2 HOWISON, HIST. OF VA. 298. In the preamble of this act (12 HENING’S STAT. 84) religious freedom is defined; and after a recital “that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy which at once destroys all religious liberty,” it is declared “that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order.” In these two sentences is found the true distinction between what properly belongs to the church and what to the State.

In a little more than a year after the passage of this statute the convention met which prepared the Constitution of the United States.” Of this convention Mr. Jefferson was not a member, he being then absent as minister to France. As soon as he saw the draft of the Constitution proposed for adoption, he, in a letter to a friend, expressed his disappointment at the absence of an express declaration insuring the freedom of religion (2 JEFF. WORKS, 355), but was willing to accept it as it was, trusting that the good sense and honest intentions of the people would bring about the necessary alterations. 1 JEFF. WORKS, 79. Five of the States, while adopting the Constitution, proposed amendments. Three—New Hampshire, New York, and Virginia—included in one form or another a declaration of religious freedom in the changes they desired to have made, as did also North Carolina, where the convention at first declined to ratify the Constitution until the proposed

amendments were acted upon. Accordingly, at the first session of the first Congress the amendment now under consideration was proposed with others by Mr. Madison. It met the views of the advocates of religious freedom, and was adopted. Mr. Jefferson afterwards, in reply to an address to him by a committee of the Danbury Baptist Association (8 *id.* 113), took occasion to say:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions,—I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore man to all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.”

Coming as this does from an acknowledged leader of the advocates of the measure, it may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment thus secured. Congress was deprived of all legislative power over mere opinion, but was left free to reach actions which were in violation of social duties or subversive of good order.

Polygamy has always been odious among the northern and western nations of Europe, and, until the establishment of the Mormon Church, was almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people. At common law, the second marriage was always void (2 Kent, Com. 79), and from the earliest history of England polygamy has been treated as an offence against society. After the establishment of the ecclesiastical courts, and until the time of James I., it was punished through the instrumentality of those tribunals, not merely because ecclesiastical rights had been violated, but because upon the separation of the ecclesiastical courts from the civil the ecclesiastical were supposed to be the most appropriate for the trial of matrimonial causes and offences against the rights of marriage, just as they were for testamentary causes and the settlement of the estates of deceased persons.

By the statute of 1 James I.(c)(11), the offence, if committed in England or Wales, was made punishable in the civil courts, and the penalty was death. As this statute was limited in its operation to England and Wales, it was at a very early period re-enacted, generally with some modifications, in all the colonies. In connection with the case we are now considering, it is a significant fact that on the 8th of December, 1788, after the passage of the act establishing religious freedom, and after the convention of Virginia had recommended as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States the declaration in a bill of rights that “all men have an equal, natural, and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience,” the legislature of that State substantially enacted the statute of James I., death penalty included, because, as recited in the preamble, “it hath been doubted whether bigamy or polygamy be punishable by the laws of this Commonwealth.” 12 HENING’S STAT. 691. From that day to this we think it may safely be said there never has been a time in any State of the Union when polygamy has not been an offence against society, cognizable by the civil courts and punishable with more or less severity. In the face of all this evidence, it is impossible to believe that the constitutional guaranty of religious freedom was intended to prohibit legislation in respect to this most important feature of social life. Marriage, while from its very nature a sacred obligation, is nevertheless, in most civilized nations, a civil contract, and usually regulated by law. Upon it society may be said to be built, and out of its fruits spring social relations and social

obligations and duties, with which government is necessarily required to deal. In fact, according as monogamous or polygamous marriages are allowed, do we find the principles on which the government of the people, to a greater or less extent, rests. Professor Lieber says, polygamy leads to the patriarchal principle, and which, when applied to large communities, fetters the people in stationary despotism, while that principle cannot long exist in connection with monogamy. Chancellor Kent observes that this remark is equally striking and profound. 2 KENT, COM. 81, note (e). An exceptional colony of polygamists under an exceptional leadership may sometimes exist for a time without appearing to disturb the social condition of the people who surround it; but there cannot be a doubt that, unless restricted by some form of constitution, it is within the legitimate scope of the power of every civil government to determine whether polygamy or monogamy shall be the law of social life under its dominion.

In our opinion, the statute immediately under consideration is within the legislative power of Congress. It is constitutional and valid as prescribing a rule of action for all those residing in the Territories, and in places over which the United States have exclusive control. This being so, the only question which remains is, whether those who make polygamy a part of their religion are excepted from the operation of the statute. If they are, then those who do not make polygamy a part of their religious belief may be found guilty and punished, while those who do, must be acquitted and go free. This would be introducing a new element into criminal law. Laws are made for the government of actions, and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinions, they may with practices. Suppose one believed that human sacrifices were a necessary part of religious worship, would it be seriously contended that the civil government under which he lived could not interfere to prevent a sacrifice? Or if a wife religiously believed it was her duty to burn herself upon the funeral pile of her dead husband, would it be beyond the power of the civil government to prevent her carrying her belief into practice?

So here, as a law of the organization of society under the exclusive dominion of the United States, it is provided that plural marriages shall not be allowed. Can a man excuse his practices to the contrary because of his religious belief? To permit this would be to make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself. Government could exist only in name under such circumstances.

A criminal intent is generally an element of crime, but every man is presumed to intend the necessary and legitimate consequences of what he knowingly does. Here the accused knew he had been once married, and that his first wife was living. He also knew that his second marriage was forbidden by law. When, therefore, he married the second time, he is presumed to have intended to break the law. And the breaking of the law is the crime. Every act necessary to constitute the crime was knowingly done, and the crime was therefore knowingly committed. Ignorance of a fact may sometimes be taken as evidence of a want of criminal intent, but not ignorance of the law. The only defense of the accused in this case is his belief that the law ought not to have been enacted. It matters not that his belief was a part of his professed religion: it was still belief, and belief only.

In *Regina v. Wagstaff* (10 Cox Crim. Cases, 531), the parents of a sick child, who omitted to call in medical attendance because of their religious belief that what they did for its cure would be effective, were held not to be guilty of manslaughter, while it was said the contrary would have been the result if the child had actually been starved to death by the parents, under the notion that it was their religious duty to abstain from giving it food. But when the offence consists of a positive act which is knowingly done, it would be dangerous to hold that the offender might escape punishment because he religiously believed the law which he had broken ought never to have been made. No case, we believe, can be found that has gone so far.

6. As to that part of the charge which directed the attention of the jury to the consequences of polygamy.

The passage complained of is as follows: “I think it not improper, in the discharge of your duties in this case, that you should consider what are to be the consequences to the innocent victims of this delusion. As this contest goes on, they multiply, and there are pure-minded women and there are innocent children,—innocent in a sense even beyond the degree of the innocence of childhood itself. These are to be the sufferers; and as jurors fail to do their duty, and as these cases come up in the Territory of Utah, just so do these victims multiply and spread themselves over the land.”

While every appeal by the court to the passions or the prejudices of a jury should be promptly rebuked, and while it is the imperative duty of a reviewing court to take care that wrong is not done in this way, we see no just cause for complaint in this case. Congress, in 1862 (12 Stat. 501), saw fit to make bigamy a crime in the Territories. This was done because of the evil consequences that were supposed to flow from plural marriages. All the court did was to call the attention of the jury to the peculiar character of the crime for which the accused was on trial, and to remind them of the duty they had to perform. There was no appeal to the passions, no instigation of prejudice. Upon the showing made by the accused himself, he was guilty of a violation of the law under which he had been indicted: and the effort of the court seems to have been not to withdraw the minds of the jury from the issue to be tried, but to bring them to it; not to make them partial, but to keep them impartial.

Upon a careful consideration of the whole case, we are satisfied that no error was committed by the court below.

Judgment affirmed.

[Mr. Justice Field concurred with the majority of the court on the several points decided except one,—which does not relate to the religious freedom issue, but rather to the admission of the testimony.]

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. Why is there a prohibition against polygamy?
 2. Are there any arguments in favor of allowing polygamy?
 3. The State of Texas has passed statutes in hopes of curtailing the establishment of polygamous sects within the state. Can you identify those statutes?
 4. Have the statutes so passed served their purpose?
 5. Is the state’s interest enough to overcome the First Amendment rights of a person whose religion supports the practice of polygamy?
 6. In *Reynolds*, the Court distinguished between religious acts, which can be regulated, and religious beliefs, which cannot. Can you explain the difference?
-

F. Interracial Marriage Constitutionally Protected

LOVING
v.
VIRGINIA
388 U.S. 1
(1967)

WARREN, CHIEF JUSTICE.

This case presents a constitutional question never addressed by this Court: whether a statutory scheme adopted by the State of Virginia to prevent marriages between persons solely on the basis of racial classifications violates the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.¹ For reasons which seem to us to reflect the central meaning of those constitutional commands, we conclude that these statutes cannot stand consistently with the Fourteenth Amendment.

In June 1958, two residents of Virginia, Mildred Jeter, a Negro woman, and Richard Loving, a white man, were married in the District of Columbia pursuant to its laws. Shortly after their marriage, the Lovings returned to Virginia and established their marital abode in Caroline County. At the October Term, 1958, of the Circuit Court of Caroline County, a grand jury issued an indictment charging the Lovings with violating Virginia's ban on interracial marriages. On January 6, 1959, the Lovings pleaded guilty to the charge and were sentenced to one year in jail; however, the trial judge suspended the sentence for a period of 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave the State and not return to Virginia together for 25 years. He stated in an opinion that:

Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.

After their convictions, the Lovings took up residence in the District of Columbia. On November 6, 1963, they filed a motion in the state trial court to vacate the judgment and set aside the sentence on the ground that the statutes which they had violated were repugnant to the Fourteenth Amendment. The motion not having been decided by October 28, 1964, the Lovings instituted a class action in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia requesting that a three-judge court be convened to declare the Virginia antimiscegenation statutes unconstitutional and to enjoin state officials from enforcing their convictions. On January 22, 1965, the state trial judge denied the motion to vacate the sentences, and the Lovings perfected an appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia. On February 11, 1965, the three-judge District Court continued the case to allow the Lovings to present their constitutional claims to the highest state court.

¹ Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment provides:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

The Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the constitutionality of the antimiscegenation statutes and, after modifying the sentence, affirmed the convictions.² The Lovings appealed this decision, and we noted probable jurisdiction on December 12, 1966, 385 U.S. 986, 87 S.Ct. 595, 17 L.Ed.2d 448.

The two statutes under which appellants were convicted and sentenced are part of a comprehensive statutory scheme aimed at prohibiting and punishing interracial marriages. The Lovings were convicted of violating §§ 20-58 of the Virginia Code:

Leaving State to Evade Law.—If any white person and colored person shall go out of this State, for the purpose of being married, and with the intention of returning, and be married out of it, and afterwards return to and reside in it, cohabiting as man and wife, they shall be punished as provided in §§ 20-59, and the marriage shall be governed by the same law as if it had been solemnized in this State. The fact of their cohabitation here as man and wife shall be evidence of their marriage.

Section 20-59, which defines the penalty for miscegenation, provides:

Punishment for Marriage.—If any white person intermarry with a colored person, or any colored person intermarry with a white person, he shall be guilty of a felony and shall be punished by confinement in the penitentiary for not less than one nor more than five years.

* * *

I.

In upholding the constitutionality of these provisions in the decision below, the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia referred to its 1955 decision in *Naim v. Naim*, 197 Va. 80, 87 S.E.2d 749, as stating the reasons supporting the validity of these laws. In *Naim*, the state court concluded that the State's legitimate purposes were "to preserve the racial integrity of its citizens," and to prevent "the corruption of blood," "a mongrel breed of citizens," and "the obliteration of racial pride," obviously an endorsement of the doctrine of White Supremacy. *Id.*, at 90, 87 S.E.2d, at 756. The court also reasoned that marriage has traditionally been subject to state regulation without federal intervention, and, consequently, the regulation of marriage should be left to exclusive state control by the Tenth Amendment.

* * *

There can be no question but that Virginia's miscegenation statutes rest solely upon distinctions drawn according to race. The statutes proscribe generally accepted conduct if engaged in by members of different races. Over the years, this Court has consistently repudiated "(d)istinctions between citizens solely because of their ancestry" as being "odious to a free people whose institutions are founded upon the doctrine of equality." *Hirabayashi v. United States*, 320 U.S. 81, 100, 63 S.Ct. 1375, 1385, 87 L.Ed. 1774 (1943). At the very least, the Equal Protection Clause demands that racial classifications, especially suspect in criminal statutes, be subjected to the "most rigid scrutiny," *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214, 216, 65 S.Ct. 193, 194, 89 L.Ed. 194 (1944), and, if they are ever to be upheld, they must be shown to be necessary to the accomplishment of some permissible state objective, independent of the racial discrimination which it was the object of the Fourteenth Amendment to eliminate. Indeed, two members of this Court have already stated that they "cannot conceive of a valid legislative purpose . . . which makes the color of a person's skin the test of whether his conduct is a criminal offense."

² 206 Va. 924, 147 S.E.2d 78 (1966).

McLaughlin v. Florida, supra, 379 U.S. at 198, 85 S.Ct. at 292, (Stewart, J., joined by Douglas, J., concurring).

There is patently no legitimate overriding purpose independent of invidious racial discrimination which justifies this classification. The fact that Virginia prohibits only interracial marriages involving white persons demonstrates that the racial classifications must stand on their own justification, as measures designed to maintain White Supremacy.¹¹ We have consistently denied the constitutionality of measures which restrict the rights of citizens on account of race. There can be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry solely because of racial classifications violates the central meaning of the Equal Protection Clause.

II.

These statutes also deprive the Lovings of liberty without due process of law in violation of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men.

Marriage is one of the “basic civil rights of man,” fundamental to our very existence and survival. *Skinner v. State of Oklahoma*, 316 U.S. 535, 541, 62 S.Ct. 1110, 1113, 86 L.Ed. 1655 (1942). *See also Maynard v. Hill*, 125 U.S. 190, 8 S.Ct. 723, 31 L.Ed. 654 (1888). To deny this fundamental freedom on so unsupportable a basis as the racial classifications embodied in these statutes, classifications so directly subversive of the principle of equality at the heart of the Fourteenth Amendment, is surely to deprive all the State’s citizens of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual and cannot be infringed by the State.

These convictions must be reversed. It is so ordered.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. What was Virginia’s purpose in barring interracial marriage?
2. Does the Court’s reasoning in *Loving* support same-sex marriages?
3. The Lovings were legally married in Washington, D.C; how could and why did Virginia refuse to acknowledge the valid marriage from another jurisdiction?

¹¹ Appellants point out that the State’s concern in these statutes, as expressed in the words of the 1924 Act’s title, “An Act to Preserve Racial Integrity,” extends only to the integrity of the white race. While Virginia prohibits whites from marrying any nonwhite (subject to the exception for the descendants of Pocahontas), Negroes, Orientals, and any other racial class may intermarry without statutory interference. Appellants contend that this distinction renders Virginia’s miscegenation statutes arbitrary and unreasonable even assuming the constitutional validity of an official purpose to preserve “racial integrity.” We need not reach this contention because we find the racial classifications in these statutes repugnant to the Fourteenth Amendment, even assuming an even-handed state purpose to protect the “integrity” of all races.

G. Can Marriage be Barred by Support Obligation?

ZABLOCKI
v.
REDHAIL
434 U.S. 374
(1978)

MARSHALL, JUSTICE.

At issue in this case is the constitutionality of a Wisconsin statute, WIS. STAT. §§ 245.10(1), (4), (5) (1973), which provides that members of a certain class of Wisconsin residents may not marry, within the State or elsewhere, without first obtaining a court order granting permission to marry. The class is defined by the statute to include any “Wisconsin resident having minor issue not in his custody and which he is under obligation to support by any court order or judgment.” The statute specifies that court permission cannot be granted unless the marriage applicant submits proof of compliance with the support obligation and, in addition, demonstrates that the children covered by the support order “are not then and are not likely thereafter to become public charges.” No marriage license may lawfully be issued in Wisconsin to a person covered by the statute, except upon court order; any marriage entered into without compliance with § 245.10 is declared void; and persons acquiring marriage licenses in violation of the section are subject to criminal penalties.¹

¹ Wisconsin Stat. § 245.10 provides in pertinent part:

(1) No Wisconsin resident having minor issue not in his custody and which he is under obligation to support by any court order or judgment, may marry in this state or elsewhere, without the order of either the court of this state which granted such judgment or support order, or the court having divorce jurisdiction in the county of this state where such minor issue resides or where the marriage license application is made. No marriage license shall be issued to any such person except upon court order. The court, within 5 days after such permission is sought by verified petition in a special proceeding, shall direct a court hearing to be held in the matter to allow said person to submit proof of his compliance with such prior court obligation. No such order shall be granted, or hearing held, unless both parties to the intended marriage appear, and unless the person, agency, institution, welfare department or other entity having the legal or actual custody of such minor issue is given notice of such proceeding by personal service of a copy of the petition at least 5 days prior to the hearing, except that such appearance or notice may be waived by the court upon good cause shown, and, if the minor issue were of a prior marriage, unless a 5-day notice thereof is given to the family court commissioner of the county where such permission is sought, who shall attend such hearing, and to the family court commissioner of the court which granted such divorce judgment. If the divorce judgment was granted in a foreign court, service shall be made on the clerk of that court. Upon the hearing, if said person submits such proof and makes a showing that such children are not then and are not likely thereafter to become public charges, the court shall grant such order, a copy of which shall be filed in any prior proceeding . . . or divorce action of such person in this state affected thereby; otherwise permission for a license shall be withheld until such proof is submitted and such showing is made, but any court order withholding such permission is an appealable order. Any hearing under this section may be waived by the court if the court is satisfied from an examination of the court records in the case and the family support records in the office of the clerk of court as well as from disclosure by said person of his financial resources that the latter has complied with prior court orders of judgments affecting his minor children, and also has shown that such children are not then and are not likely thereafter to become public charges. No county

After being denied a marriage license because of his failure to comply with § 245.10, appellee brought this class action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, challenging the statute as violative of the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment and seeking declaratory and injunctive relief. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin held the statute unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause and enjoined its enforcement. 418 F. Supp. 1061 (1976). We noted probable jurisdiction, 429 U.S. 1089, 97 S.Ct. 1096, 51 L.Ed.2d 534 (1977), and we now affirm.

I.

Appellee Redhail is a Wisconsin resident who, under the terms of § 245.10, is unable to enter into a lawful marriage in Wisconsin or elsewhere so long as he maintains his Wisconsin residency. The facts, according to the stipulation filed by the parties in the District Court, are as follows. In January 1972, when appellee was a minor and a high school student, a paternity action was instituted against him in Milwaukee County Court, alleging that he was the father of a baby girl born out of wedlock on July 5, 1971. After he appeared and admitted that he was the child's father, the court entered an order on May 12, 1972, adjudging appellee the father and ordering him to pay \$109 per month as support for the child until she reached 18 years of age. From May 1972 until August 1974, appellee was unemployed and indigent, and consequently was unable to make any support payments.²

On September 27, 1974, appellee filed an application for a marriage license with appellant Zablocki, the County Clerk of Milwaukee County, and a few days later the application was denied on the sole ground that appellee had not obtained a court order granting him permission to marry, as required by § 245.10. Although appellee did not petition a state court thereafter, it is stipulated that he would not have been able to satisfy either of the statutory prerequisites for an order granting permission to marry. First, he had not satisfied his support obligations to his illegitimate child, and as of December 1974 there was an arrearage in excess of \$3,700. Second, the child had been a public charge since her birth, receiving benefits under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. It is stipulated that the child's benefit payments were such that she would have been a public charge even if appellee had been current in his support payments.

clerk in this state shall issue such license to any person required to comply with this section unless a certified copy of a court order permitting such marriage is filed with said county clerk.

* * *

(4) If a Wisconsin resident having such support obligations of a minor, as stated in sub. (1), wishes to marry in another state, he must, prior to such marriage, obtain permission of the court under sub. (1), except that in a hearing ordered or held by the court, the other party to the proposed marriage, if domiciled in another state, need not be present at the hearing. If such other party is not present at the hearing, the judge shall within 5 days send a copy of the order of permission to marry, stating the obligations of support, to such party not present.

(5) This section shall have extraterritorial effect outside the state; and s. 245.04(1) and (2) [providing that out-of-state marriages to circumvent Wisconsin law are void] are applicable hereto. Any marriage contracted without compliance with this section, where such compliance is required, shall be void, whether entered into in this state or elsewhere.

The criminal penalties for violation of § 245.10 are set forth in WIS. STAT. § 245.30(1)(f) (1973). See *State v. Mueller*, 44 Wis.2d 387, 171 N.W.2d 414 (1969) (upholding criminal prosecution for failure to comply with § 245.10).

² The record does not indicate whether appellee obtained employment subsequent to August 1974.

On December 24, 1974, appellee filed his complaint in the District Court, on behalf of himself and the class of all Wisconsin residents who had been refused a marriage license pursuant to § 245.10(1) by one of the county clerks in Wisconsin. Zablocki was named as the defendant, individually and as representative of a class consisting of all county clerks in the State. The complaint alleged, among other things, that appellee and the woman he desired to marry were expecting a child in March 1975 and wished to be lawfully married before that time. The statute was attacked on the grounds that it deprived appellee, and the class he sought to represent of equal protection and due process rights secured by the First, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

II.

In evaluating §§ 245.10(1), (4), (5) under the Equal Protection Clause, “we must first determine what burden of justification the classification created thereby must meet, by looking to the nature of the classification and the individual interests affected.” *Memorial Hospital v. Maricopa County*, 415 U.S. 250, 253, 94 S.Ct. 1076, 1079, 1080, 39 L.Ed.2d 306 (1974). Since our past decisions make clear that the right to marry is of fundamental importance, and since the classification at issue here significantly interferes with the exercise of that right, we believe that “critical examination” of the state interests advanced in support of the classification is required. *Massachusetts Board of Retirement v. Murgia*, 427 U.S. 307, 312, 314, 96 S.Ct. 2562, 2566, 2567, 49 L.Ed.2d 520 (1976); see, e.g., *San Antonio Independent School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1, 17, 93 S.Ct. 1278, 1288, 36 L.Ed.2d 16 (1973).

The leading decision of this Court on the right to marry is *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 87 S.Ct. 1817, 18 L.Ed.2d 1010 (1967). In that case, an interracial couple who had been convicted of violating Virginia’s miscegenation laws challenged the statutory scheme on both equal protection and due process grounds. The Court’s opinion could have rested solely on the ground that the statutes discriminated on the basis of race in violation of the Equal Protection Clause. *Id.* at 11-12, 87 S.Ct., at 1823-1824. But the Court went on to hold that the laws arbitrarily deprived the couple of a fundamental liberty protected by the Due Process Clause, the freedom to marry. The Court’s language on the latter point bears repeating:

The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men.

Marriage is one of the ‘basic civil rights of man,’ fundamental to our very existence and survival. *Id.*, at 12, 87 S.Ct., at 1824, quoting *Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel. Williamson*, 316 U.S. 535, 541, 62 S.Ct. 1110, 1113, 86 L.Ed. 1655 (1942).

Although *Loving* arose in the context of racial discrimination, prior and subsequent decisions of this Court confirm that the right to marry is of fundamental importance for all individuals. Long ago, in *Maynard v. Hill*, 125 U.S. 190, 8 S.Ct. 723, 31 L.Ed. 654 (1888), the Court characterized marriage as “the most important relation in life,” *id.*, at 205, 8 S.Ct., at 726, and as “the foundation of the family and of society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress,” *id.*, at 211, 8 S.Ct., at 729. In *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 43 S.Ct. 625, 67 L.Ed. 1042 (1923), the Court recognized that the right “to marry, establish a home and bring up children” is a central part of the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause, *id.*, at 399, 43 S.Ct., at 626, and in *Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel. Williamson*, *supra*, 316 U.S. 535, 62 S.Ct. 1110, 86 L.Ed. 1655 (1942), marriage was described as “fundamental to the very existence and survival of the race,” 316 U.S., at 541, 62 S.Ct., at 1113.

More recent decisions have established that the right to marry is part of the fundamental “right of privacy” implicit in the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause. In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 85 S.Ct. 1678, 14 L.Ed.2d 510 (1965), the Court observed:

We deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights—older than our political parties, older than our school system. Marriage is a coming together for better or for worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred. It is an association that promotes a way of life, not causes; a harmony in living, not political faiths; a bilateral loyalty, not commercial or social projects. Yet it is an association for as noble a purpose as any involved in our prior decisions. *Id.* at 486, 85 S.Ct., at 1682.

See also *id.*, at 495, 85 S.Ct., at 1687 (Goldberg, J., concurring); *id.* at 502-503, 85 S.Ct., at 1691-92 (White, J., concurring in judgment).

Cases subsequent to *Griswold* and *Loving* have routinely categorized the decision to marry as among the personal decisions protected by the right of privacy. See generally *Whalen v. Roe*, 429 U.S. 589, 598-600, and nn. 23-26, 97 S.Ct. 869, 876-877, 51 L.Ed.2d 64 (1977). . . .

It is not surprising that the decision to marry has been placed on the same level of importance as decisions relating to procreation, childbirth, child rearing, and family relationships. As the facts of this case illustrate, it would make little sense to recognize a right of privacy with respect to other matters of family life and not with respect to the decision to enter the relationship that is the foundation of the family in our society. The woman whom appellee desired to marry had a fundamental right to seek an abortion of their expected child, see *Roe v. Wade*, *supra*, or to bring the child into life to suffer the myriad social, if not economic, disabilities that the status of illegitimacy brings, see *Trimble v. Gordon*, 430 U.S. 762, 768-70, and n. 13, 97 S.Ct. 1459, 1464-65 (1977); *Weber v. Aetna Casualty & Surety Co.*, 406 U.S. 164, 175-76, 92 S.Ct. 1400, 1406-07, 31 L.Ed.2d 768 (1972). Surely, a decision to marry and raise the child in a traditional family setting must receive equivalent protection. And, if appellee’s right to procreate means anything at all, it must imply some right to enter the only relationship in which the State of Wisconsin allows sexual relations legally to take place.¹¹

By reaffirming the fundamental character of the right to marry, we do not mean to suggest that every state regulation which relates in any way to the incidents of or prerequisites for marriage must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny. To the contrary, reasonable regulations that do not significantly interfere with decisions to enter into the marital relationship may legitimately be imposed. See *Califano v. Jobst*, 434 U.S. 47, 98 S.Ct. 95, 54 L.Ed.2d 228, n.12, *infra*. The statutory classification at issue here, however, clearly does interfere directly and substantially with the right to marry.

Under the challenged statute, no Wisconsin resident in the affected class may marry in Wisconsin or elsewhere without a court order, and marriages contracted in violation of the statute are both void and punishable as criminal offenses. Some of those in the affected class, like appellee, will never be able to obtain the necessary court order, because they either lack the financial means to meet their support obligations or cannot prove that their children will not become public charges. These persons are absolutely prevented from getting married. Many others, able in theory to satisfy the statute’s requirements, will be sufficiently burdened by having

¹¹ Wisconsin punishes fornication as a criminal offense:

Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person not his spouse may be fined not more than \$200 or imprisoned not more than 6 months or both. WIS. STAT. § 944.15 (1973).

to do so that they will in effect be coerced into forgoing their right to marry. And even those who can be persuaded to meet the statute's requirements suffer a serious intrusion into their freedom of choice in an area in which we have held such freedom to be fundamental.¹²

III.

When a statutory classification significantly interferes with the exercise of a fundamental right, it cannot be upheld unless it is supported by sufficiently important state interests and is closely tailored to effectuate only those interests. *See, e.g., Carey v. Population Services International*, 431 U.S., at 686, 97 S.Ct., at 2017; *Memorial Hospital v. Maricopa County*, 415 U.S., at 262-63, 94 S.Ct., at 1084-85; *San Antonio Independent School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S., at 16-17, 93 S.Ct., at 1287-88; *Bullock v. Carter*, 405 U.S. 134, 144, 92 S.Ct. 849, 856, 31 L.Ed.2d 92 (1972). Appellant asserts that two interests are served by the challenged statute: the permission-to-marry proceeding furnishes an opportunity to counsel the applicant as to the necessity of fulfilling his prior support obligations; and the welfare of the out-of-custody children is protected. We may accept for present purposes that these are legitimate and substantial interests, but, since the means selected by the State for achieving these interests unnecessarily impinge on the right to marry, the statute cannot be sustained.

There is evidence that the challenged statute, as originally introduced in the Wisconsin Legislature, was intended merely to establish a mechanism whereby persons with support obligations to children from prior marriages could be counseled before they entered into new marital relationships and incurred further support obligations. Court permission to marry was to be required, but apparently permission was automatically to be granted after counseling was completed. The statute actually enacted, however, does not expressly require or provide for any counseling whatsoever, nor for any automatic granting of permission to marry by the court, and thus it can hardly be justified as a means for ensuring counseling of the persons within its coverage. Even assuming that counseling does take place—a fact as to which there is no evidence in the record—this interest obviously cannot support the withholding of court permission to marry once counseling is completed.

With regard to safeguarding the welfare of the out-of-custody children, appellant's brief does not make clear the connection between the State's interest and the statute's requirements. At argument, appellant's counsel suggested that, since permission to marry cannot be granted unless the applicant shows that he has satisfied his court-determined support obligations to the prior children and that those children will not become public charges, the statute provides incentive for the applicant to make support payments to his children. TR. OF ORAL ARG. 17-20. This "collection device" rationale cannot justify the statute's broad infringement on the right to marry.

¹² The directness and substantiality of the interference with the freedom to marry distinguish the instant case from *Califano v. Jobst*, 434 U.S. 47, 98 S.Ct. 95, 54 L.Ed.2d 228. In *Jobst*, we upheld sections of the Social Security Act providing, *inter alia*, for termination of a dependent child's benefits upon marriage to an individual not entitled to benefits under the Act. As the opinion for the Court expressly noted, the rule terminating benefits upon marriage was not "an attempt to interfere with the individual's freedom to make a decision as important as marriage." 434 U.S., at 54, 98 S.Ct., at 99. The Social Security provisions placed no direct legal obstacle in the path of persons desiring to get married, and—notwithstanding our Brother REHNQUIST'S imaginative recasting of the case, *see* dissenting opinion, *post*, at 692—there was no evidence that the laws significantly discouraged, let alone made "practically impossible," any marriages. Indeed, the provisions had not deterred the individual who challenged the statute from getting married, even though he and his wife were both disabled. *See Califano v. Jobst*, 434 U.S., at 48, 98 S.Ct., at 96. *See also* 434 U.S., at 57, n. 17, 98 S.Ct., at 101 (because of availability of other federal benefits, total payments to the Jobsts after marriage were only \$20 per month less than they would have been had Mr. Jobst's child benefits not been terminated).

First, with respect to individuals who are unable to meet the statutory requirements, the statute merely prevents the applicant from getting married, without delivering any money at all into the hands of the applicant's prior children. More importantly, regardless of the applicant's ability or willingness to meet the statutory requirements, the State already has numerous other means for exacting compliance with support obligations, means that are at least as effective as the instant statute's and yet do not impinge upon the right to marry. Under Wisconsin law, whether the children are from a prior marriage or were born out of wedlock, court-determined support obligations may be enforced directly via wage assignments, civil contempt proceedings, and criminal penalties. And, if the State believes that parents of children out of their custody should be responsible for ensuring that those children do not become public charges, this interest can be achieved by adjusting the criteria used for determining the amounts to be paid under their support orders.

There is also some suggestion that § 245.10 protects the ability of marriage applicants to meet support obligations to prior children by preventing the applicants from incurring new support obligations. But the challenged provisions of § 245.10 are grossly under inclusive with respect to this purpose, since they do not limit in any way new financial commitments by the applicant other than those arising out of the contemplated marriage. The statutory classification is substantially over inclusive as well: Given the possibility that the new spouse will actually better the applicant's financial situation, by contributing income from a job or otherwise, the statute in many cases may prevent affected individuals from improving their ability to satisfy their prior support obligations. And, although it is true that the applicant will incur support obligations to any children born during the contemplated marriage, preventing the marriage may only result in the children being born out of wedlock, as in fact occurred in appellee's case. Since the support obligation is the same whether the child is born in or out of wedlock, the net result of preventing the marriage is simply more illegitimate children.

The statutory classification created by §§ 245.10(1), (4), (5) thus cannot be justified by the interests advanced in support of it. The judgment of the District Court is, accordingly,

Affirmed.

Mr. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER filed a concurring opinion.

Mr. JUSTICE STEWART and Mr. JUSTICE POWELL filed opinions concurring in the judgment.

Mr. JUSTICE REHNQUIST filed a dissenting opinion.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. What was Wisconsin's original intent in passing the statute at issue in *Zablocki*?
 2. Are there legitimate limitations that can be imposed upon those desiring to marry?
 3. How might Wisconsin have structured the statute so that it might have passed review?
 4. Is there a similar Texas statute?
-

H. Homosexuality Protected From Criminal Prosecution

LAWRENCE

v.

TEXAS

539 U.S. 558

(2003)

KENNEDY, JUSTICE.

Liberty protects the person from unwarranted government intrusions into a dwelling or other private places. In our tradition the State is not omnipresent in the home. And there are other spheres of our lives and existence, outside the home, where the State should not be a dominant presence. Freedom extends beyond spatial bounds. Liberty presumes an autonomy of self that includes freedom of thought, belief, expression, and certain intimate conduct. The instant case involves liberty of the person both in its spatial and more transcendent dimensions.

I

The question before the Court is the validity of a Texas statute making it a crime for two persons of the same sex to engage in certain intimate sexual conduct.

In Houston, Texas, officers of the Harris County Police Department were dispatched to a private residence in response to a reported weapons disturbance. They entered an apartment where one of the petitioners, John Geddes Lawrence, resided. The right of the police to enter does not seem to have been questioned. The officers observed Lawrence and another man, Tyron Garner, engaging in a sexual act. The two petitioners were arrested, held in custody over night, and charged and convicted before a Justice of the Peace.

The complaints described their crime as “deviate sexual intercourse, namely anal sex, with a member of the same sex (man).” App. to Pet. for Cert. 127a, 139a. The applicable state law is TEX. PENAL CODE ANN. § 21.06(a) (2003). It provides: “A person commits an offense if he engages in deviate sexual intercourse with another individual of the same sex.” The statute defines “[d]eviate sexual intercourse” as follows:

- (A) any contact between any part of the genitals of one person and the mouth or anus of another person; or
 - (B) the penetration of the genitals or the anus of another person with an object.
- § 21.01(1).

The petitioners exercised their right to a trial de novo in Harris County Criminal Court. They challenged the statute as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and of a like provision of the Texas Constitution. TEX. CONST., Art. 1, § 3a. Those contentions were rejected. The petitioners, having entered a plea of nolo contendere, were each fined \$200 and assessed court costs of \$141.25. App. to Pet. for Cert. 107a-110a.

The Court of Appeals for the Texas Fourteenth District considered the petitioners’ federal constitutional arguments under both the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. After hearing the case en banc the court, in a divided opinion, rejected the constitutional arguments and affirmed the convictions. 41 S.W.3d 349 (Tex. App. 2001). The

majority opinion indicates that the Court of Appeals considered our decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186, 106 S.Ct. 2841, 92 L.Ed.2d 140 (1986), to be controlling on the federal due process aspect of the case. *Bowers* then being authoritative, this was proper.

We granted certiorari, 537 U.S. 1044, 123 S.Ct. 661, 154 L.Ed.2d 514 (2002), to consider three questions:

1. Whether Petitioners' criminal convictions under the Texas "Homosexual Conduct" law—which criminalizes sexual intimacy by same-sex couples, but not identical behavior by different-sex couples—violate the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection of laws?
2. Whether Petitioners' criminal convictions for adult consensual sexual intimacy in the home violate their vital interests in liberty and privacy protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment?
3. Whether *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186, 106 S.Ct. 2841, 92 L.Ed.2d 140 (1986), should be overruled?

Pet. for Cert. I.

The petitioners were adults at the time of the alleged offense. Their conduct was in private and consensual.

II

We conclude the case should be resolved by determining whether the petitioners were free as adults to engage in the private conduct in the exercise of their liberty under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. For this inquiry we deem it necessary to reconsider the Court's holding in *Bowers*.

There are broad statements of the substantive reach of liberty under the Due Process Clause in earlier cases, including *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 45 S.Ct. 571, 69 L.Ed. 1070 (1925), and *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 43 S.Ct. 625, 67 L.Ed. 1042 (1923); but the most pertinent beginning point is our decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 85 S.Ct. 1678, 14 L.Ed.2d 510 (1965).

In *Griswold* the Court invalidated a state law prohibiting the use of drugs or devices of contraception and counseling or aiding and abetting the use of contraceptives. The Court described the protected interest as a right to privacy and placed emphasis on the marriage relation and the protected space of the marital bedroom. *Id.* at 485, 85 S.Ct. 1678.

After *Griswold* it was established that the right to make certain decisions regarding sexual conduct extends beyond the marital relationship. In *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 405 U.S. 438, 92 S.Ct. 1029, 31 L.Ed.2d 349 (1972), the Court invalidated a law prohibiting the distribution of contraceptives to unmarried persons. The case was decided under the Equal Protection Clause, *id.* at 454, 92 S.Ct. 1029; but with respect to unmarried persons, the Court went on to state the fundamental proposition that the law impaired the exercise of their personal rights, *ibid.* It quoted from the statement of the Court of Appeals finding the law to be in conflict with fundamental human rights, and it followed with this statement of its own:

It is true that in *Griswold* the right of privacy in question inhered in the marital relationship. . . . If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child.

Id. at 453, 92 S.Ct. 1029.

The opinions in *Griswold* and *Eisenstadt* were part of the background for the decision in *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 93 S.Ct. 705, 35 L.Ed.2d 147 (1973). As is well known, the case involved a challenge to the Texas law prohibiting abortions, but the laws of other States were affected as well. Although the Court held the woman's rights were not absolute, her right to elect an abortion did have real and substantial protection as an exercise of her liberty under the Due Process Clause. The Court cited cases that protect spatial freedom and cases that go well beyond it. *Roe* recognized the right of a woman to make certain fundamental decisions affecting her destiny and confirmed once more that the protection of liberty under the Due Process Clause has a substantive dimension of fundamental significance in defining the rights of the person.

In *Carey v. Population Services Int'l*, 431 U.S. 678, 97 S.Ct. 2010, 52 L.Ed.2d 675 (1977), the Court confronted a New York law forbidding sale or distribution of contraceptive devices to persons under 16 years of age. Although there was no single opinion for the Court, the law was invalidated. Both *Eisenstadt* and *Carey*, as well as the holding and rationale in *Roe*, confirmed that the reasoning of *Griswold* could not be confined to the protection of rights of married adults. This was the state of the law with respect to some of the most relevant cases when the Court considered *Bowers v. Hardwick*.

The facts in *Bowers* had some similarities to the instant case. A police officer, whose right to enter seems not to have been in question, observed *Hardwick*, in his own bedroom, engaging in intimate sexual conduct with another adult male. The conduct was in violation of a Georgia statute making it a criminal offense to engage in sodomy. One difference between the two cases is that the Georgia statute prohibited the conduct whether or not the participants were of the same sex, while the Texas statute, as we have seen, applies only to participants of the same sex. *Hardwick* was not prosecuted, but he brought an action in federal court to declare the state statute invalid. He alleged he was a practicing homosexual and that the criminal prohibition violated rights guaranteed to him by the Constitution. The Court, in an opinion by JUSTICE WHITE, sustained the Georgia law. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER and JUSTICE POWELL joined the opinion of the Court and filed separate, concurring opinions. Four Justices dissented. 478 U.S., at 199, 106 S.Ct. 2841 (opinion of Blackmun, J., joined by Brennan, Marshall, and Stevens, JJ.); *id.*, at 214, 106 S.Ct. 2841 (opinion of Stevens, J., joined by Brennan and Marshall, JJ.).

The Court began its substantive discussion in *Bowers* as follows: "The issue presented is whether the Federal Constitution confers a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy and hence invalidates the laws of the many States that still make such conduct illegal and have done so for a very long time." *Id.* at 190, 106 S.Ct. 2841. That statement, we now conclude, discloses the Court's own failure to appreciate the extent of the liberty at stake. To say that the issue in *Bowers* was simply the right to engage in certain sexual conduct demeans the claim the individual put forward, just as it would demean a married couple were it to be said marriage is simply about the right to have sexual intercourse. The laws involved in *Bowers* and here are, to be sure, statutes that purport to do no more than prohibit a particular sexual act. Their penalties and purposes, though, have more far-reaching consequences, touching upon the most private human conduct, sexual behavior, and in the most private of places, the home. The statutes do seek to control a personal relationship that, whether or not entitled to formal recognition in the law, is within the liberty of persons to choose without being punished as criminals.

This, as a general rule, should counsel against attempts by the State, or a court, to define the meaning of the relationship or to set its boundaries absent injury to a person or abuse of an institution the law protects. It suffices for us to acknowledge that adults may choose to enter upon this relationship in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons. When sexuality finds overt expression in intimate conduct with another

person, the conduct can be but one element in a personal bond that is more enduring. The liberty protected by the Constitution allows homosexual persons the right to make this choice.

Having misapprehended the claim of liberty there presented to it, and thus stating the claim to be whether there is a fundamental right to engage in consensual sodomy, the *Bowers* Court said: “Proscriptions against that conduct have ancient roots.” *Id.* at 192, 106 S.Ct. 2841. In academic writings, and in many of the scholarly amicus briefs filed to assist the Court in this case, there are fundamental criticisms of the historical premises relied upon by the majority and concurring opinions in *Bowers*. Brief for Cato Institute as Amicus Curiae 16-17; Brief for American Civil Liberties Union et al. as Amici Curiae 15-21; Brief for Professors of History et al. as Amici Curiae 3-10. We need not enter this debate in the attempt to reach a definitive historical judgment, but the following considerations counsel against adopting the definitive conclusions upon which *Bowers* placed such reliance.

* * *

The policy of punishing consenting adults for private acts was not much discussed in the early legal literature. We can infer that one reason for this was the very private nature of the conduct. Despite the absence of prosecutions, there may have been periods in which there was public criticism of homosexuals as such and an insistence that the criminal laws be enforced to discourage their practices. But far from possessing “ancient roots,” *Bowers*, 478 U.S., at 192, 106 S.Ct. 2841, American laws targeting same-sex couples did not develop until the last third of the 20th century. The reported decisions concerning the prosecution of consensual, homosexual sodomy between adults for the years 1880-1995 are not always clear in the details, but a significant number involved conduct in a public place. See Brief for American Civil Liberties Union et al. as Amici Curiae 14-15, and n.18.

It was not until the 1970’s that any State singled out same-sex relations for criminal prosecution, and only nine States have done so. See 1977 Ark. Gen. Acts no. 828; 1983 Kan. Sess. Laws p. 652; 1974 Ky. Acts p. 847; 1977 Mo. Laws p. 687; 1973 Mont. Laws p. 1339; 1977 Nev. Stats. p. 1632; 1989 Tenn. Pub. Acts ch. 591; 1973 Tex. Gen. Laws ch. 399; see also *Post v. State*, 715 P.2d 1105 (Okla.Crim.App. 1986) (sodomy law invalidated as applied to different-sex couples). Post-*Bowers* even some of these States did not adhere to the policy of suppressing homosexual conduct. Over the course of the last decades, States with same-sex prohibitions have moved toward abolishing them. See, e.g., *Jegley v. Picado*, 349 Ark. 600, 80 S.W.3d 332 (2002); *Gryczan v. State*, 283 Mont. 433, 942 P.2d 112 (1997); *Campbell v. Sundquist*, 926 S.W.2d 250 (Tenn. App.1996); *Commonwealth v. Wasson*, 842 S.W.2d 487 (Ky.1992); see also 1993 Nev. Stats. p. 518 (repealing NEV. REV. STAT. § 201.193).

In summary, the historical grounds relied upon in *Bowers* are more complex than the majority opinion and the concurring opinion by CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER indicate. Their historical premises are not without doubt and, at the very least, are overstated.

It must be acknowledged, of course, that the Court in *Bowers* was making the broader point that for centuries there have been powerful voices to condemn homosexual conduct as immoral. The condemnation has been shaped by religious beliefs, conceptions of right and acceptable behavior, and respect for the traditional family. For many persons these are not trivial concerns but profound and deep convictions accepted as ethical and moral principles to which they aspire and which thus determine the course of their lives. These considerations do not answer the question before us, however. The issue is whether the majority may use the power of the State to enforce these views on the whole society through operation of the criminal law. “Our obligation

is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate our own moral code.” *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 850, 112 S.Ct. 2791, 120 L.Ed.2d 674 (1992).

CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER joined the opinion for the Court in *Bowers* and further explained his views as follows: “Decisions of individuals relating to homosexual conduct have been subject to state intervention throughout the history of Western civilization. Condemnation of those practices is firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian [sic] moral and ethical standards.” 478 U.S., at 196, 106 S.Ct. 2841. As with JUSTICE WHITE’S assumptions about history, scholarship casts some doubt on the sweeping nature of the statement by CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER as it pertains to private homosexual conduct between consenting adults. See, e.g., Eskridge, *Hardwick and Historiography*, 1999 U. ILL. L. REV. 631, 656. In all events we think that our laws and traditions in the past half century are of most relevance here. These references show an emerging awareness that liberty gives substantial protection to adult persons in deciding how to conduct their private lives in matters pertaining to sex. “[H]istory and tradition are the starting point but not in all cases the ending point of the substantive due process inquiry.” *County of Sacramento v. Lewis*, 523 U.S. 833, 857, 118 S.Ct. 1708, 140 L.Ed.2d 1043 (1998) (Kennedy, J., concurring).

This emerging recognition should have been apparent when *Bowers* was decided. In 1955 the American Law Institute promulgated the Model Penal Code and made clear that it did not recommend or provide for “criminal penalties for consensual sexual relations conducted in private.” ALI, Model Penal Code § 213.2, Comment 2, p. 372 (1980). It justified its decision on three grounds: (1) The prohibitions undermined respect for the law by penalizing conduct many people engaged in; (2) the statutes regulated private conduct not harmful to others; and (3) the laws were arbitrarily enforced and thus invited the danger of blackmail. ALI, Model Penal Code, Commentary 277-280 (Tent. Draft No. 4, 1955). In 1961 Illinois changed its laws to conform to the Model Penal Code. Other States soon followed. Brief for Cato Institute as Amicus Curiae 15-16.

In *Bowers* the Court referred to the fact that before 1961 all 50 States had outlawed sodomy, and that at the time of the Court’s decision 24 States and the District of Columbia had sodomy laws. 478 U.S. at 192-93, 106 S.Ct. 2841. JUSTICE POWELL pointed out that these prohibitions often were being ignored, however. Georgia, for instance, had not sought to enforce its law for decades. *Id.* at 197-98 n.2, 106 S.Ct. 2841 (“The history of nonenforcement suggests the moribund character today of laws criminalizing this type of private, consensual conduct.”).

The sweeping references by CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER to the history of Western civilization and to Judeo-Christian moral and ethical standards did not take account of other authorities pointing in an opposite direction. A committee advising the British Parliament recommended in 1957 repeal of laws punishing homosexual conduct. The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution (1963). Parliament enacted the substance of those recommendations 10 years later. Sexual Offences Act 1967, § 1.

Of even more importance, almost five years before *Bowers* was decided the European Court of Human Rights considered a case with parallels to *Bowers* and to today’s case. An adult male resident in Northern Ireland alleged he was a practicing homosexual who desired to engage in consensual homosexual conduct. The laws of Northern Ireland forbade him that right. He alleged that he had been questioned, his home had been searched, and he feared criminal prosecution. The court held that the laws proscribing the conduct were invalid under the European Convention on Human Rights. *Dudgeon v. United Kingdom*, 45 Eur. Ct. H.R. (1981) & ¶ 52. Authoritative in all countries that are members of the Council of Europe (21 nations then, 45 nations now), the

decision is at odds with the premise in *Bowers* that the claim put forward was insubstantial in our Western civilization.

In our own constitutional system the deficiencies in *Bowers* became even more apparent in the years following its announcement. The 25 States with laws prohibiting the relevant conduct referenced in the *Bowers* decision are reduced now to 13, of which 4 enforce their laws only against homosexual conduct. In those States where sodomy is still proscribed, whether for same-sex or heterosexual conduct, there is a pattern of nonenforcement with respect to consenting adults acting in private. The State of Texas admitted in 1994 that as of that date it had not prosecuted anyone under those circumstances. *State v. Morales*, 869 S.W.2d 941, 943.

Two principal cases decided after *Bowers* cast its holding into even more doubt. In *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 112 S.Ct. 2791, 120 L.Ed.2d 674 (1992), the Court reaffirmed the substantive force of the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause. The *Casey* decision again confirmed that our laws and tradition afford constitutional protection to personal decisions relating to marriage, procreation, contraception, family relationships, child rearing, and education. *Id.* at 851, 112 S.Ct. 2791. In explaining the respect the Constitution demands for the autonomy of the person in making these choices, we stated as follows:

These matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the State.

Ibid. Persons in a homosexual relationship may seek autonomy for these purposes, just as heterosexual persons do. The decision in *Bowers* would deny them this right.

The second post-*Bowers* case of principal relevance is *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 116 S.Ct. 1620, 134 L.Ed.2d 855 (1996). There the Court struck down class-based legislation directed at homosexuals as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause. *Romer* invalidated an amendment to Colorado's constitution which named as a solitary class persons who were homosexuals, lesbians, or bisexual either by "orientation, conduct, practices or relationships," *id.* at 624, 116 S.Ct. 1620 (internal quotation marks omitted), and deprived them of protection under state antidiscrimination laws. We concluded that the provision was "born of animosity toward the class of persons affected" and further that it had no rational relation to a legitimate governmental purpose. *Id.* at 634, 116 S.Ct. 1620.

As an alternative argument in this case, counsel for the petitioners and some amici contend that *Romer* provides the basis for declaring the Texas statute invalid under the Equal Protection Clause. That is a tenable argument, but we conclude the instant case requires us to address whether *Bowers* itself has continuing validity. Were we to hold the statute invalid under the Equal Protection Clause some might question whether a prohibition would be valid if drawn differently, say, to prohibit the conduct both between same-sex and different-sex participants.

Equality of treatment and the due process right to demand respect for conduct protected by the substantive guarantee of liberty are linked in important respects, and a decision on the latter point advances both interests. If protected conduct is made criminal and the law which does so remains unexamined for its substantive validity, its stigma might remain even if it were not enforceable as drawn for equal protection reasons. When homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres. The central holding of *Bowers* has

been brought in question by this case, and it should be addressed. Its continuance as precedent demeans the lives of homosexual persons.

The stigma this criminal statute imposes, moreover, is not trivial. The offense, to be sure, is but a class C misdemeanor, a minor offense in the Texas legal system. Still, it remains a criminal offense with all that imports for the dignity of the persons charged. The petitioners will bear on their record the history of their criminal convictions. Just this Term we rejected various challenges to state laws requiring the registration of sex offenders. *Smith v. Doe*, 538 U.S. 84, 123 S.Ct. 1140, 155 L.Ed.2d 164 (2003); *Connecticut Dept. of Public Safety v. Doe*, 538 U.S. 1, 123 S.Ct. 1160, 155 L.Ed.2d 98 (2003). We are advised that if Texas convicted an adult for private, consensual homosexual conduct under the statute here in question the convicted person would come within the registration laws of a least four States were he or she to be subject to their jurisdiction. Pet. for Cert. 13, and n. 12 (citing IDAHO CODE §§ 18-8301 to 18-8326 (Cum. Supp.2002); LA. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN., §§ 15:540-15:549 (West 2003); MISS. CODE ANN. §§ 45-33-21 to 45-33-57 (Lexis 2003); S.C. CODE ANN. §§ 23-3-400 to 23-3-490 (West 2002)). This underscores the consequential nature of the punishment and the state-sponsored condemnation attendant to the criminal prohibition. Furthermore, the Texas criminal conviction carries with it the other collateral consequences always following a conviction, such as notations on job application forms, to mention but one example.

The foundations of *Bowers* have sustained serious erosion from our recent decisions in *Casey* and *Romer*. When our precedent has been thus weakened, criticism from other sources is of greater significance. In the United States criticism of *Bowers* has been substantial and continuing, disapproving of its reasoning in all respects, not just as to its historical assumptions. See, e.g., C. FRIED, ORDER AND LAW: ARGUING THE REAGAN REVOLUTION—A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT 81-84 (1991); R. POSNER, SEX AND REASON 341-350 (1992). The courts of five different States have declined to follow it in interpreting provisions in their own state constitutions parallel to the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, see *Jegley v. Picado*, 349 Ark. 600, 80 S.W.3d 332 (2002); *Powell v. State*, 270 Ga. 327, 510 S.E.2d 18, 24 (1998); *Gryczan v. State*, 283 Mont. 433, 942 P.2d 112 (1997); *Campbell v. Sundquist*, 926 S.W.2d 250 (Tenn. App.1996); *Commonwealth v. Wasson*, 842 S.W.2d 487 (Ky.1992).

To the extent *Bowers* relied on values we share with a wider civilization, it should be noted that the reasoning and holding in *Bowers* have been rejected elsewhere. The European Court of Human Rights has followed not *Bowers* but its own decision in *Dudgeon v. United Kingdom*. See *P.G. & J.H. v. United Kingdom*, App. No. 00044787/98, & ¶ 56 (Eur. Ct. H.R., Sept. 25, 2001); *Modinos v. Cyprus*, 259 Eur. Ct. H.R. (1993); *Norris v. Ireland*, 142 Eur. Ct. H.R. (1988). Other nations, too, have taken action consistent with an affirmation of the protected right of homosexual adults to engage in intimate, consensual conduct. See Brief for Mary Robinson et al. as Amici Curiae 11-12. The right the petitioners seek in this case has been accepted as an integral part of human freedom in many other countries. There has been no showing that in this country the governmental interest in circumscribing personal choice is somehow more legitimate or urgent.

The rationale of *Bowers* does not withstand careful analysis. In his dissenting opinion in *Bowers* JUSTICE STEVENS came to these conclusions:

Our prior cases make two propositions abundantly clear. First, the fact that the governing majority in a State has traditionally viewed a particular practice as immoral is not a sufficient reason for upholding a law prohibiting the practice; neither history nor tradition could save a law prohibiting miscegenation from constitutional attack. Second, individual decisions by married persons, concerning the intimacies of their physical relationship,

even when not intended to produce offspring, are a form of “liberty” protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Moreover, this protection extends to intimate choices by unmarried as well as married persons.

478 U.S. at 216, 106 S.Ct. 2841 (footnotes and citations omitted). JUSTICE STEVENS’ analysis, in our view, should have been controlling in *Bowers* and should control here.

Bowers was not correct when it was decided, and it is not correct today. It ought not to remain binding precedent. *Bowers v. Hardwick* should be and now is overruled.

The present case does not involve minors. It does not involve persons who might be injured or coerced or who are situated in relationships where consent might not easily be refused. It does not involve public conduct or prostitution. It does not involve whether the government must give formal recognition to any relationship that homosexual persons seek to enter. The case does involve two adults who, with full and mutual consent from each other, engaged in sexual practices common to a homosexual lifestyle. The petitioners are entitled to respect for their private lives. The State cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime. Their right to liberty under the Due Process Clause gives them the full right to engage in their conduct without intervention of the government. “It is a promise of the Constitution that there is a realm of personal liberty which the government may not enter.” *Casey, supra* at 847, 112 S.Ct. 2791. The Texas statute furthers no legitimate state interest which can justify its intrusion into the personal and private life of the individual.

Had those who drew and ratified the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth Amendment or the Fourteenth Amendment known the components of liberty in its manifold possibilities, they might have been more specific. They did not presume to have this insight. They knew times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress. As the Constitution endures, persons in every generation can invoke its principles in their own search for greater freedom.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Texas Fourteenth District is reversed, and the case is remanded for further proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

It is so ordered.

O’CONNOR, JUSTICE, concurring.

The Court today overrules *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186, 106 S.Ct. 2841, 92 L.Ed.2d 140 (1986). I joined *Bowers*, and do not join the Court in overruling it. Nevertheless, I agree with the Court that Texas’ statute banning same-sex sodomy is unconstitutional. See TEX. PENAL CODE ANN. § 21.06 (2003). Rather than relying on the substantive component of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause, as the Court does, I base my conclusion on the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment “is essentially a direction that all persons similarly situated should be treated alike.” *Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, Inc.*, 473 U.S. 432, 439, 105 S.Ct. 3249, 87 L.Ed.2d 313 (1985); see also *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 216, 102 S.Ct. 2382, 72 L.Ed.2d 786 (1982). Under our rational basis standard of review, “legislation is presumed to be valid and will be sustained if the classification drawn by the statute is rationally related to a legitimate state interest.” *Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, supra*, at 440, 105 S.Ct. 3249; see also *Department of Agriculture v. Moreno*, 413 U.S. 528, 534, 93 S.Ct. 2821, 37 L.Ed.2d 782 (1973); *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 632-633, 116 S.Ct. 1620, 134 L.Ed.2d 855 (1996); *Nordlinger v. Hahn*, 505 U.S. 1, 11-12, 112 S.Ct. 2326, 120 L.Ed.2d 1 (1992).

* * *

This case raises a different issue than *Bowers*: whether, under the Equal Protection Clause, moral disapproval is a legitimate state interest to justify by itself a statute that bans homosexual sodomy, but not heterosexual sodomy. It is not. Moral disapproval of this group, like a bare desire to harm the group, is an interest that is insufficient to satisfy rational basis review under the Equal Protection Clause. See, e.g., *Department of Agriculture v. Moreno*, *supra*, at 534, 93 S.Ct. 2821; *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. at 634-35, 116 S.Ct. 1620. Indeed, we have never held that moral disapproval, without any other asserted state interest, is a sufficient rationale under the Equal Protection Clause to justify a law that discriminates among groups of persons.

Moral disapproval of a group cannot be a legitimate governmental interest under the Equal Protection Clause because legal classifications must not be “drawn for the purpose of disadvantaging the group burdened by the law.” *Id.* at 633, 116 S.Ct. 1620. . . .

* * *

Indeed, Texas law confirms that the sodomy statute is directed toward homosexuals as a class. In Texas, calling a person a homosexual is slander per se because the word “homosexual” “impute[s] the commission of a crime.” *Plumley v. Landmark Chevrolet, Inc.*, 122 F.3d 308, 310 (C.A.5 1997) (applying Texas law); see also *Head v. Newton*, 596 S.W.2d 209, 210 (Tex. App.1980). The State has admitted that because of the sodomy law, being homosexual carries the presumption of being a criminal. See *State v. Morales*, 826 S.W.2d at 202-03. . . . Texas’ sodomy law therefore results in discrimination against homosexuals as a class in an array of areas outside the criminal law. See *ibid.* In *Romer v. Evans*, we refused to sanction a law that singled out homosexuals “for disfavored legal status.” 517 U.S. at 633, 116 S.Ct. 1620. The same is true here. The Equal Protection Clause “neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.” *Id.* at 623, 116 S.Ct. 1620 (quoting *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 559, 16 S.Ct. 1138, 41 L.Ed. 256 (1896) (Harlan, J. dissenting)).

A State can of course assign certain consequences to a violation of its criminal law. But the State cannot single out one identifiable class of citizens for punishment that does not apply to everyone else, with moral disapproval as the only asserted state interest for the law. The Texas sodomy statute subjects homosexuals to “a lifelong penalty and stigma. A legislative classification that threatens the creation of an underclass . . . cannot be reconciled with” the Equal Protection Clause. *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S., at 239, 102 S.Ct. 2382 (Powell, J., concurring).

Whether a sodomy law that is neutral both in effect and application, see *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356, 6 S.Ct. 1064, 30 L.Ed. 220 (1886), would violate the substantive component of the Due Process Clause is an issue that need not be decided today. I am confident, however, that so long as the Equal Protection Clause requires a sodomy law to apply equally to the private consensual conduct of homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, such a law would not long stand in our democratic society. . . .

That this law as applied to private, consensual conduct is unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause does not mean that other laws distinguishing between heterosexuals and homosexuals would similarly fail under rational basis review. Texas cannot assert any legitimate state interest here, such as national security or preserving the traditional institution of marriage. Unlike the moral disapproval of same-sex relations—he asserted state interest in this case—other reasons exist to promote the institution of marriage beyond mere moral disapproval of an excluded group.

A law branding one class of persons as criminal solely based on the State’s moral disapproval of that class and the conduct associated with that class runs contrary to the values of the

Constitution and the Equal Protection Clause, under any standard of review. I therefore concur in the Court's judgment that Texas' sodomy law banning "deviate sexual intercourse" between consenting adults of the same sex, but not between consenting adults of different sexes, is unconstitutional.

JUSTICE SCALIA, with whom THE CHIEF JUSTICE and JUSTICE THOMAS join, dissenting opinion omitted.

JUSTICE THOMAS' dissent is also omitted.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. John G. Lawrence, named defendant in *Lawrence v. Texas*, died of a heart condition on November 20, 2011. The other man who was also charged at the same time, Tyrone Garner, succumbed to meningitis in 2006. Mitchell Katine who represented Mr. Lawrence as local counsel is a *summa cum laude* graduate of South Texas College of Law.
2. Why is *Lawrence* included in a family law text book?
3. Of the foregoing opinions, *Reynolds*, *Loving*, *Zablocki*, and *Lawrence*, which would you expect to see in the "same sex" marriage opinions issued by the United States Supreme Court in the summer of 2013? Why?

I. Standing to Challenge Same Sex Marriage

HOLLINGSWORTH

v.

PERRY

U.S. _____

2013 WL 3196927

(June 26, 2013)

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS delivered the opinion of the Court.

The public is currently engaged in an active political debate over whether same-sex couples should be allowed to marry. That question has also given rise to litigation. In this case, petitioners, who oppose same-sex marriage, ask us to decide whether the Equal Protection Clause "prohibits the State of California from defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman." Pet. for Cert. i. Respondents, same-sex couples who wish to marry, view the issue in somewhat different terms: For them, it is whether California—having previously recognized the right of same-sex couples to marry—may reverse that decision through a referendum.

Federal courts have authority under the Constitution to answer such questions only if necessary to do so in the course of deciding an actual "case" or "controversy." As used in the Constitution, those words do not include every sort of dispute, but only those "historically viewed as capable of resolution through the judicial process." *Flast v. Cohen*, 392 U.S. 83, 95, 88 S.Ct.

1942, 20 L.Ed.2d 947 (1968). This is an essential limit on our power: It ensures that we act *as judges*, and do not engage in policymaking properly left to elected representatives.

For there to be such a case or controversy, it is not enough that the party invoking the power of the court have a keen interest in the issue. That party must also have “standing,” which requires, among other things, that it have suffered a concrete and particularized injury. Because we find that petitioners do not have standing, we have no authority to decide this case on the merits, and neither did the Ninth Circuit.

I

In 2008, the California Supreme Court held that limiting the official designation of marriage to opposite-sex couples violated the equal protection clause of the California Constitution. *In re Marriage Cases*, 43 Cal.4th 757, 76 Cal.Rptr.3d 683, 183 P.3d 384. Later that year, California voters passed the ballot initiative at the center of this dispute, known as Proposition 8. That proposition amended the California Constitution to provide that “[o]nly marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” Cal. Const., Art. I, § 7.5. Shortly thereafter, the California Supreme Court rejected a procedural challenge to the amendment, and held that the Proposition was properly enacted under California law. *Strauss v. Horton*, 46 Cal.4th 364, 474-475, 93 Cal.Rptr.3d 591, 207 P.3d 48, 122 (2009).

According to the California Supreme Court, Proposition 8 created a “narrow and limited exception” to the state constitutional rights otherwise guaranteed to same-sex couples. *Id.*, at 388, 93 Cal.Rptr.3d 591, 207 P.3d, at 61. Under California law, same-sex couples have a right to enter into relationships recognized by the State as “domestic partnerships,” which carry “the same rights, protections, and benefits, and shall be subject to the same responsibilities, obligations, and duties under law . . . as are granted to and imposed upon spouses.” Cal. Fam.Code Ann. § 297.5(a) (West 2004). In *In re Marriage Cases*, the California Supreme Court concluded that the California Constitution further guarantees same-sex couples “all of the constitutionally based incidents of marriage,” including the right to have that marriage “officially recognized” as such by the State. 43 Cal.4th, at 829, 76 Cal.Rptr.3d 683, 183 P.3d, at 433-434. Proposition 8, the court explained in *Strauss*, left those rights largely undisturbed, reserving only “the official *designation* of the term ‘marriage’ for the union of opposite-sex couples as a matter of state constitutional law.” 46 Cal.4th, at 388, 93 Cal.Rptr.3d 591, 207 P.3d, at 61.

Respondents, two same-sex couples who wish to marry, filed suit in federal court, challenging Proposition 8 under the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution. The complaint named as defendants California’s Governor, attorney general, and various other state and local officials responsible for enforcing California’s marriage laws. Those officials refused to defend the law, although they have continued to enforce it throughout this litigation. The District Court allowed petitioners—the official proponents of the initiative, see Cal. Elec.Code Ann. § 342 (West 2003)—to intervene to defend it. After a 12-day bench trial, the District Court declared Proposition 8 unconstitutional, permanently enjoining the California officials named as defendants from enforcing the law, and “directing the official defendants that all persons under their control or supervision” shall not enforce it. *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 704 F.Supp.2d 921, 1004 (N.D.Cal.2010).

Those officials elected not to appeal the District Court order. When petitioners did, the Ninth Circuit asked them to address “why this appeal should not be dismissed for lack of Article III standing.” *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, Civ. No. 10-16696 (CA9, Aug. 16, 2010), p. 2. After briefing and argument, the Ninth Circuit certified a question to the California Supreme Court:

“Whether under Article II, Section 8 of the California Constitution, or otherwise under California law, the official proponents of an initiative measure possess either a particularized interest in the initiative’s validity or the authority to assert the State’s interest in the initiative’s validity, which would enable them to defend the constitutionality of the initiative upon its adoption or appeal a judgment invalidating the initiative, when the public officials charged with that duty refuse to do so.” *Perry v. Schwarzenegger*, 628 F.3d 1191, 1193 (2011).

The California Supreme Court agreed to decide the certified question, and answered in the affirmative. Without addressing whether the proponents have a particularized interest of their own in an initiative’s validity, the court concluded that “[i]n a postelection challenge to a voter-approved initiative measure, the official proponents of the initiative are authorized under California law to appear and assert the state’s interest in the initiative’s validity and to appeal a judgment invalidating the measure when the public officials who ordinarily defend the measure or appeal such a judgment decline to do so.” *Perry v. Brown*, 52 Cal.4th 1116, 1127, 134 Cal.Rptr.3d 499, 265 P.3d 1002, 1007 (2011).

Relying on that answer, the Ninth Circuit concluded that petitioners had standing under federal law to defend the constitutionality of Proposition 8. California, it reasoned, “ ‘has standing to defend the constitutionality of its [laws],’ ” and States have the “prerogative, as independent sovereigns, to decide for themselves who may assert their interests.” *Perry v. Brown*, 671 F.3d 1052, 1070, 1071 (2012) (quoting *Diamond v. Charles*, 476 U.S. 54, 62, 106 S.Ct. 1697, 90 L.Ed.2d 48 (1986)). “All a federal court need determine is that the state has suffered a harm sufficient to confer standing and that the party seeking to invoke the jurisdiction of the court is authorized by the state to represent its interest in remedying that harm.” 671 F.3d, at 1072.

On the merits, the Ninth Circuit affirmed the District Court. The court held the Proposition unconstitutional under the rationale of our decision in *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 116 S.Ct. 1620, 134 L.Ed.2d 855 (1996). 671 F.3d, at 1076, 1095. In the Ninth Circuit’s view, *Romer* stands for the proposition that “the Equal Protection Clause requires the state to have a legitimate reason for withdrawing a right or benefit *from one group but not others*, whether or not it was required to confer that right or benefit in the first place.” 671 F.3d, at 1083-1084. The Ninth Circuit concluded that “taking away the official designation” of “marriage” from same-sex couples, while continuing to afford those couples all the rights and obligations of marriage, did not further any legitimate interest of the State. *Id.*, at 1095. Proposition 8, in the court’s view, violated the Equal Protection Clause because it served no purpose “but to impose on gays and lesbians, through the public law, a majority’s private disapproval of them and their relationships.” *Ibid.*

We granted certiorari to review that determination, and directed that the parties also brief and argue “Whether petitioners have standing under Article III, § 2, of the Constitution in this case.” 568 U.S. (2012).

II

Article III of the Constitution confines the judicial power of federal courts to deciding actual “Cases” or “Controversies.” § 2. One essential aspect of this requirement is that any person invoking the power of a federal court must demonstrate standing to do so. This requires the litigant to prove that he has suffered a concrete and particularized injury that is fairly traceable to the challenged conduct, and is likely to be redressed by a favorable judicial decision. *Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555, 560–561, 112 S.Ct. 2130, 119 L.Ed.2d 351 (1992). In other words, for a federal court to have authority under the Constitution to settle a dispute, the party

before it must seek a remedy for a personal and tangible harm. “The presence of a disagreement, however sharp and acrimonious it may be, is insufficient by itself to meet Art. III’s requirements.” *Diamond, supra*, at 62.

The doctrine of standing, we recently explained, “serves to prevent the judicial process from being used to usurp the powers of the political branches.” *Clapper v. Amnesty Int’l USA*, 568 U.S. ___, ___ (2013) (slip op., at 9). In light of this “overriding and time-honored concern about keeping the Judiciary’s power within its proper constitutional sphere, we must put aside the natural urge to proceed directly to the merits of [an] important dispute and to ‘settle’ it for the sake of convenience and efficiency.” *Raines v. Byrd*, 521 U.S. 811, 820, 117 S.Ct. 2312, 138 L.Ed.2d 849 (1997) (footnote omitted).

Most standing cases consider whether a plaintiff has satisfied the requirement when filing suit, but Article III demands that an “actual controversy” persist throughout all stages of litigation. *Already, LLC v. Nike, Inc.*, 568 U.S. ___, ___ (2013) (slip op., at 4) (internal quotation marks omitted). That means that standing “must be met by persons seeking appellate review, just as it must be met by persons appearing in courts of first instance.” *Arizonans for Official English v. Arizona*, 520 U.S. 43, 64, 117 S.Ct. 1055, 137 L.Ed.2d 170 (1997). We therefore must decide whether petitioners had standing to appeal the District Court’s order.

Respondents initiated this case in the District Court against the California officials responsible for enforcing Proposition 8. The parties do not contest that respondents had Article III standing to do so. Each couple expressed a desire to marry and obtain “official sanction” from the State, which was unavailable to them given the declaration in Proposition 8 that “marriage” in California is solely between a man and a woman. App. 59.

After the District Court declared Proposition 8 unconstitutional and enjoined the state officials named as defendants from enforcing it, however, the inquiry under Article III changed. Respondents no longer had any injury to redress—they had won—and the state officials chose not to appeal.

The only individuals who sought to appeal that order were petitioners, who had intervened in the District Court. But the District Court had not ordered them to do or refrain from doing anything. To have standing, a litigant must seek relief for an injury that affects him in a “personal and individual way.” *Defenders of Wildlife, supra*, at 560, n. 1. He must possess a “direct stake in the outcome” of the case. *Arizonans for Official English, supra*, at 64 (internal quotation marks omitted). Here, however, petitioners had no “direct stake” in the outcome of their appeal. Their only interest in having the District Court order reversed was to vindicate the constitutional validity of a generally applicable California law.

We have repeatedly held that such a “generalized grievance,” no matter how sincere, is insufficient to confer standing. A litigant “raising only a generally available grievance about government—claiming only harm to his and every citizen’s interest in proper application of the Constitution and laws, and seeking relief that no more directly and tangibly benefits him than it does the public at large—does not state an Article III case or controversy.” *Defenders of Wildlife, supra*, at 573-574; see *Lance v. Coffman*, 549 U.S. 437, 439, 127 S.Ct. 1194, 167 L.Ed.2d 29 (2007) (*per curiam*) (“Our refusal to serve as a forum for generalized grievances has a lengthy pedigree.”); *Allen v. Wright*, 468 U.S. 737, 754, 104 S.Ct. 3315, 82 L.Ed.2d 556 (1984) (“an asserted right to have the Government act in accordance with law is not sufficient, standing alone, to confer jurisdiction on a federal court”); *Massachusetts v. Mellon*, 262 U.S. 447, 488, 43 S.Ct. 597, 67 L.Ed. 1078 (1923) (“The party who invokes the [judicial] power must be able to show . . . that he has sustained or is immediately in danger of sustaining some direct

injury . . . and not merely that he suffers in some indefinite way in common with people generally.”).

* * *

Article III standing “is not to be placed in the hands of ‘concerned bystanders,’ who will use it simply as a ‘vehicle for the vindication of value interests.’ ” *Diamond*, 476 U.S., at 62. No matter how deeply committed petitioners may be to upholding Proposition 8 or how “zealous [their] advocacy,” *post*, at 4 (KENNEDY, J., dissenting), that is not a “particularized” interest sufficient to create a case or controversy under Article III. *Defenders of Wildlife*, 504 U.S., at 560, and n. 1; see *Arizonans for Official English*, 520 U.S., at 65 (“Nor has this Court ever identified initiative proponents as Article III qualified defenders of the measures they advocated.”); *Don’t Bankrupt Washington Committee v. Continental Ill. Nat. Bank & Trust Co. of Chicago*, 460 U.S. 1077, 103 S.Ct. 1762, 76 L.Ed.2d 338 (1983) (summarily dismissing, for lack of standing, appeal by an initiative proponent from a decision holding the initiative unconstitutional).

III

A

Without a judicially cognizable interest of their own, petitioners attempt to invoke that of someone else. They assert that even if *they* have no cognizable interest in appealing the District Court’s judgment, the State of California does, and they may assert that interest on the State’s behalf. It is, however, a “fundamental restriction on our authority” that “[i]n the ordinary course, a litigant must assert his or her own legal rights and interests, and cannot rest a claim to relief on the legal rights or interests of third parties.” *Powers v. Ohio*, 499 U.S. 400, 410, 111 S.Ct. 1364, 113 L.Ed.2d 411 (1991). There are “certain, limited exceptions” to that rule. *Ibid.* But even when we have allowed litigants to assert the interests of others, the litigants themselves still “must have suffered an injury in fact, thus giving [them] a sufficiently concrete interest in the outcome of the issue in dispute.” *Id.*, at 411 (internal quotation marks omitted).

* * *

Petitioners argue that, by virtue of the California Supreme Court’s decision, they *are* authorized to act “‘as agents of the people’ of California.” Brief for Petitioners 15 (quoting *Arizonans for Official English, supra*, at 65). But that Court never described petitioners as “agents of the people,” or of anyone else. Nor did the Ninth Circuit. The Ninth Circuit asked—and the California Supreme Court answered—only whether petitioners had “the authority to assert the State’s interest in the initiative’s validity.” 628 F.3d, at 1193, 52 Cal.4th, at 1124, 265 P.3d, at 1005. All that the California Supreme Court decision stands for is that, so far as California is concerned, petitioners may argue in defense of Proposition 8. This “does not mean that the proponents become de facto public officials”; the authority they enjoy is “simply the authority to participate as parties in a court action and to assert legal arguments in defense of the state’s interest in the validity of the initiative measure.” *Id.*, at 1159, 134 Cal.Rptr.3d 499, 265 P.3d, at 1029. That interest is by definition a generalized one, and it is precisely because proponents assert such an interest that they lack standing under our precedents.

And petitioners are plainly not agents of the State—“formal” or otherwise, see *post*, at 7. As an initial matter, petitioners’ newfound claim of agency is inconsistent with their representations to the District Court. When the proponents sought to intervene in this case, they did not purport to be agents of California. They argued instead that “no other party in this case w[ould] adequately represent *their interests as official proponents.*” Motion to Intervene in No. 09-2292 (ND Cal.), p. 6 (emphasis added). It was their “unique legal status” as official proponents—not an agency

relationship with the people of California—that petitioners claimed “endow[ed] them with a significantly protectable interest” in ensuring that the District Court not “undo[] all that they ha[d] done in obtaining . . . enactment” of Proposition 8. *Id.*, at 10, 11, 134 Cal.Rptr.3d 499, 265 P.3d 1002.

More to the point, the most basic features of an agency relationship are missing here. Agency requires more than mere authorization to assert a particular interest. “An essential element of agency is the principal’s right to control the agent’s actions.” 1 Restatement (Third) of Agency § 1.01, Comment *f* (2005) (hereinafter Restatement). Yet petitioners answer to no one; they decide for themselves, with no review, what arguments to make and how to make them. Unlike California’s attorney general, they are not elected at regular intervals—or elected at all. See Cal. Const., Art. V, § 11. No provision provides for their removal. As one *amicus* explains, “the proponents apparently have an unelected appointment for an unspecified period of time as defenders of the initiative, however and to whatever extent they choose to defend it.” Brief for Walter Dellinger 23.

“If the relationship between two persons is one of agency . . . , the agent owes a fiduciary obligation to the principal.” 1 Restatement § 1.01, Comment *e*. But petitioners owe nothing of the sort to the people of California. Unlike California’s elected officials, they have taken no oath of office. *E.g.*, CAL. CONST., Art. XX, § 3 (prescribing the oath for “all public officers and employees, executive, legislative, and judicial”). As the California Supreme Court explained, petitioners are bound simply by “the same ethical constraints that apply to all other parties in a legal proceeding.” 52 CAL.4th, at 1159, 134 CAL.RPTR.3d 499, 265 P.3d, at 1029. They are free to pursue a purely ideological commitment to the law’s constitutionality without the need to take cognizance of resource constraints, changes in public opinion, or potential ramifications for other state priorities.

* * *

Finally, the California Supreme Court stated that “[t]he question of who should bear responsibility for any attorney fee award . . . is *entirely distinct* from the question” before it. *Id.*, at 1161, 134 Cal.Rptr.3d 499, 265 P.3d, at 1031. (emphasis added). But it is hornbook law that “a principal has a duty to indemnify the agent against expenses and other losses incurred by the agent in defending against actions brought by third parties if the agent acted with actual authority in taking the action challenged by the third party’s suit.” 2 Restatement § 8.14, Comment *d*. If the issue of fees is entirely distinct from the authority question, then authority cannot be based on agency.

Neither the California Supreme Court nor the Ninth Circuit ever described the proponents as agents of the State, and they plainly do not qualify as such.

IV

The dissent eloquently recounts the California Supreme Court’s reasons for deciding that state law authorizes petitioners to defend Proposition 8. See *post*, at 3-5. We do not “disrespect[]” or “disparage[]” those reasons. *Post*, at 12. Nor do we question California’s sovereign right to maintain an initiative process, or the right of initiative proponents to defend their initiatives in California courts, where Article III does not apply. But as the dissent acknowledges, see *post*, at 1, standing in federal court is a question of federal law, not state law. And no matter its reasons, the fact that a State thinks a private party should have standing to seek relief for a generalized grievance cannot override our settled law to the contrary.

The Article III requirement that a party invoking the jurisdiction of a federal court seek relief for a personal, particularized injury serves vital interests going to the role of the Judiciary in our

system of separated powers. “Refusing to entertain generalized grievances ensures that . . . courts exercise power that is judicial in nature,” *Lance*, 549 U.S., at 441, and ensures that the Federal Judiciary respects “the proper—and properly limited—role of the courts in a democratic society,” *DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Cuno*, 547 U.S. 332, 341, 126 S.Ct. 1854, 164 L.Ed.2d 589 (2006) (internal quotation marks omitted). States cannot alter that role simply by issuing to private parties who otherwise lack standing a ticket to the federal courthouse.

* * *

We have never before upheld the standing of a private party to defend the constitutionality of a state statute when state officials have chosen not to. We decline to do so for the first time here. Because petitioners have not satisfied their burden to demonstrate standing to appeal the judgment of the District Court, the Ninth Circuit was without jurisdiction to consider the appeal. The judgment of the Ninth Circuit is vacated, and the case is remanded with instructions to dismiss the appeal for lack of jurisdiction.

It is so ordered.

JUSTICE KENNEDY’s Dissenting Opinion, with whom JUSTICE THOMAS, JUSTICE ALITO, and JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR join, omitted.

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. Does the Texas Family Code require “agency” in any instance of attributing responsibility or liability?

J. DOMA’s Definition of Marriage—Unconstitutional!

UNITED STATES
v.
WINDSOR
____ U.S. ____
2013 WL 3196928
(June 26, 2013)

[The first portion of this opinion is deleted; that portion focuses upon: (1) the district court’s exercise of jurisdiction in light of the decision by the Department of Justice to NOT defend DOMA; (2) the U.S. government’s possible injury relating to Windsor’s claim for tax refund as a stake “sufficient to support Article III jurisdiction on appeal.” (Opinion at *7); and, (3) the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group (BLAG) of the House of Representatives intervention to defend § 3 of DOMA. The portion of the opinion that is presented in this text focuses upon the striking of §3 of DOMA as being unconstitutional.]

KENNEDY, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which GINSBURG, BREYER, SOTOMAYOR, and KAGAN, JJ., joined.

Two women then resident in New York were married in a lawful ceremony in Ontario, Canada, in 2007. Edith Windsor and Thea Spyer returned to their home in New York City. When

Spyer died in 2009, she left her entire estate to Windsor. Windsor sought to claim the estate tax exemption for surviving spouses. She was barred from doing so, however, by a federal law, the Defense of Marriage Act, which excludes a same-sex partner from the definition of “spouse” as that term is used in federal statutes. Windsor paid the taxes but filed suit to challenge the constitutionality of this provision. The United States District Court and the Court of Appeals ruled that this portion of the statute is unconstitutional and ordered the United States to pay Windsor a refund. This Court granted certiorari and now affirms the judgment in Windsor’s favor.

I

In 1996, as some States were beginning to consider the concept of same-sex marriage, *see, e.g., Baehr v. Lewin*, 74 Haw. 530, 852 P.2d 44 (1993), and before any State had acted to permit it, Congress enacted the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), 110 Stat. 2419. DOMA contains two operative sections: Section 2, which has not been challenged here, allows States to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed under the laws of other States. See 28 U.S.C. § 1738C. Section 3 is at issue here. It amends the Dictionary Act in Title 1, § 7, of the United States Code to provide a federal definition of “marriage” and “spouse.” Section 3 of DOMA provides as follows:

“In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.” 1 U.S.C. § 7.

The definitional provision does not by its terms forbid States from enacting laws permitting same-sex marriages or civil unions or providing state benefits to residents in that status. The enactment’s comprehensive definition of marriage for purposes of all federal statutes and other regulations or directives covered by its terms, however, does control over 1,000 federal laws in which marital or spousal status is addressed as a matter of federal law. *See GAO, D. Shah, Defense of Marriage Act: Update to Prior Report 1* (GAO-04-353R, 2004).

Edith Windsor and Thea Spyer met in New York City in 1963 and began a long-term relationship. Windsor and Spyer registered as domestic partners when New York City gave that right to same-sex couples in 1993. Concerned about Spyer’s health, the couple made the 2007 trip to Canada for their marriage, but they continued to reside in New York City. The State of New York deems their Ontario marriage to be a valid one. See 699 F.3d 169, 177–178 (C.A.2 2012).

Spyer died in February 2009, and left her entire estate to Windsor. Because DOMA denies federal recognition to same-sex spouses, Windsor did not qualify for the marital exemption from the federal estate tax, which excludes from taxation “any interest in property which passes or has passed from the decedent to his surviving spouse.” 26 U.S.C. § 2056(a). Windsor paid \$363,053 in estate taxes and sought a refund. The Internal Revenue Service denied the refund, concluding that, under DOMA, Windsor was not a “surviving spouse.” Windsor commenced this refund suit in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. She contended that DOMA violates the guarantee of equal protection, as applied to the Federal Government through the Fifth Amendment.

While the tax refund suit was pending, the Attorney General of the United States notified the Speaker of the House of Representatives, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 530D, that the Department of Justice would no longer defend the constitutionality of DOMA’s § 3. Noting that “the Department has previously defended DOMA against . . . challenges involving legally married

same-sex couples,” App. 184, the Attorney General informed Congress that “the President has concluded that given a number of factors, including a documented history of discrimination, classifications based on sexual orientation should be subject to a heightened standard of scrutiny.” *Id.*, at 191. The Department of Justice has submitted many § 530D letters over the years refusing to defend laws it deems unconstitutional, when, for instance, a federal court has rejected the Government’s defense of a statute and has issued a judgment against it. This case is unusual, however, because the § 530D letter was not preceded by an adverse judgment. The letter instead reflected the Executive’s own conclusion, relying on a definition still being debated and considered in the courts, that heightened equal protection scrutiny should apply to laws that classify on the basis of sexual orientation.

Although “the President . . . instructed the Department not to defend the statute in *Windsor*,” he also decided “that Section 3 will continue to be enforced by the Executive Branch” and that the United States had an “interest in providing Congress a full and fair opportunity to participate in the litigation of those cases.” *Id.*, at 191-193. The stated rationale for this dual-track procedure (determination of unconstitutionality coupled with ongoing enforcement) was to “recogniz[e] the judiciary as the final arbiter of the constitutional claims raised.” *Id.*, at 192.

In response to the notice from the Attorney General, the Bipartisan Legal Advisory Group (BLAG) of the House of Representatives voted to intervene in the litigation to defend the constitutionality of § 3 of DOMA. The Department of Justice did not oppose limited intervention by BLAG. The District Court denied BLAG’s motion to enter the suit as of right, on the rationale that the United States already was represented by the Department of Justice. The District Court, however, did grant intervention by BLAG as an interested party. *See* FED. RULE CIV. PROC. 24(a)(2).

* * *

III

When at first *Windsor* and *Spyer* longed to marry, neither New York nor any other State granted them that right. After waiting some years, in 2007 they traveled to Ontario to be married there. 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. For marriage between a man and a woman no doubt had been thought of by most people as essential to the very definition of that term and to its role and function throughout the history of civilization. That belief, for many who long have held it, became even more urgent, more cherished when challenged. For others, however, came the beginnings of a new perspective, a new insight. Accordingly some States concluded that same-sex marriage ought to be given recognition and validity in the law for those same-sex couples who wish to define themselves by their commitment to each other. The limitation of lawful marriage to heterosexual couples, which for centuries had been deemed both necessary and fundamental, came to be seen in New York and certain other States as an unjust exclusion.

Slowly at first and then in rapid course, the laws of New York came to acknowledge the urgency of this issue for same-sex couples who wanted to affirm their commitment to one another before their children, their family, their friends, and their community. And so New York recognized same-sex marriages performed elsewhere; and then it later amended its own marriage laws to permit same-sex marriage. New York, in common with, as of this writing, 11 other States and the District of Columbia, decided that same-sex couples should have the right to marry and so live with pride in themselves and their union and in a status of equality with all other married persons. After a statewide deliberative process that enabled its citizens to discuss and weigh arguments for and against same sex marriage, New York acted to enlarge the definition of

marriage to correct what its citizens and elected representatives perceived to be an injustice that they had not earlier known or understood. See Marriage Equality Act, 2011 N.Y. Laws 749 (codified at N.Y. Dom. Rel. Law Ann. §§ 10-a, 10-b, 13 (West 2013)).

Against this background of lawful same-sex marriage in some States, the design, purpose, and effect of DOMA should be considered as the beginning point in deciding whether it is valid under the Constitution. By history and tradition the definition and regulation of marriage, as will be discussed in more detail, has been treated as being within the authority and realm of the separate States. Yet it is further established that Congress, in enacting discrete statutes, can make determinations that bear on marital rights and privileges. Just this Term the Court upheld the authority of the Congress to pre-empt state laws, allowing a former spouse to retain life insurance proceeds under a federal program that gave her priority, because of formal beneficiary designation rules, over the wife by a second marriage who survived the husband. *Hillman v. Maretta*, 569 U.S. ___ (2013); see also *Ridgway v. Ridgway*, 454 U.S. 46, 102 S.Ct. 49, 70 L.Ed.2d 39 (1981); *Wissner v. Wissner*, 338 U.S. 655, 70 S.Ct. 398, 94 L.Ed. 424 (1950). This is one example of the general principle that when the Federal Government acts in the exercise of its own proper authority, it has a wide choice of the mechanisms and means to adopt. See *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 4 Wheat. 316, 421, 4 L.Ed. 579 (1819). Congress has the power both to ensure efficiency in the administration of its programs and to choose what larger goals and policies to pursue.

Other precedents involving congressional statutes which affect marriages and family status further illustrate this point. In addressing the interaction of state domestic relations and federal immigration law Congress determined that marriages “entered into for the purpose of procuring an alien’s admission [to the United States] as an immigrant” will not qualify the noncitizen for that status, even if the noncitizen's marriage is valid and proper for state-law purposes. 8 U.S.C. § 1186a(b)(1) (2006 ed. and Supp. V). And in establishing income-based criteria for Social Security benefits, Congress decided that although state law would determine in general who qualifies as an applicant’s spouse, common-law marriages also should be recognized, regardless of any particular State’s view on these relationships. 42 U.S.C. § 1382c(d)(2).

Though these discrete examples establish the constitutionality of limited federal laws that regulate the meaning of marriage in order to further federal policy, DOMA has a far greater reach; for it enacts a directive applicable to over 1,000 federal statutes and the whole realm of federal regulations. And its operation is directed to a class of persons that the laws of New York, and of 11 other States, have sought to protect. See *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, 440 Mass. 309, 798 N.E.2d 941 (2003); An Act Implementing the Guarantee of Equal Protection Under the Constitution of the State for Same Sex Couples, 2009 Conn. Pub. Acts no. 09-13; *Varnum v. Brien*, 763 N.W.2d 862 (Iowa 2009); Vt. Stat. Ann., Tit. 15, § 8 (2010); N.H.Rev.Stat. Ann. § 457:1-a (West Supp.2012); Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009, 57 D.C.Reg. 27 (Dec. 18, 2009); N.Y. Dom. Rel. Law Ann. § 10-a (West Supp.2013); WASH. REV.CODE § 26.04.010 (2012); Citizen Initiative, Same Sex Marriage, Question 1 (Me.2012) (results online at <http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/2012/tab-ref-2012.html> (all Internet sources as visited June 18, 2013, and available in Clerk of Court’s case file)); MD. FAM. LAW CODE ANN. § 2-201 (Lexis 2012); An Act to Amend Title 13 of the Delaware Code Relating to Domestic Relations to Provide for Same-Gender Civil Marriage and to Convert Existing Civil Unions to Civil Marriages, 79 Del. Laws ch. 19 (2013); An act relating to marriage; providing for civil marriage between two persons; providing for exemptions and protections based on religious association, 2013 Minn. Laws ch. 74; An Act Relating to Domestic Relations—Persons Eligible to Marry, 2013 R. I. Laws ch. 4.

In order to assess the validity of that intervention it is necessary to discuss the extent of the state power and authority over marriage as a matter of history and tradition. State laws defining and regulating marriage, of course, must respect the constitutional rights of persons, see, e.g., *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 87 S.Ct. 1817, 18 L.Ed.2d 1010 (1967); but, subject to those guarantees, “regulation of domestic relations” is “an area that has long been regarded as a virtually exclusive province of the States.” *Sosna v. Iowa*, 419 U.S. 393, 404, 95 S.Ct. 553, 42 L.Ed.2d 532 (1975).

The recognition of civil marriages is central to state domestic relations law applicable to its residents and citizens. See *Williams v. North Carolina*, 317 U.S. 287, 298, 63 S.Ct. 207, 87 L.Ed. 279 (1942) (“Each state as a sovereign has a rightful and legitimate concern in the marital status of persons domiciled within its borders”). The definition of marriage is the foundation of the State’s broader authority to regulate the subject of domestic relations with respect to the “[p]rotection of offspring, property interests, and the enforcement of marital responsibilities.” *Ibid.* “[T]he states, at the time of the adoption of the Constitution, possessed full power over the subject of marriage and divorce . . . [and] the Constitution delegated no authority to the Government of the United States on the subject of marriage and divorce.” *Haddock v. Haddock*, 201 U.S. 562, 575, 26 S.Ct. 525, 50 L.Ed. 867 (1906); see also *In re Burrus*, 136 U.S. 586, 593–594, 10 S.Ct. 850, 34 L.Ed. 500 (1890) (“The whole subject of the domestic relations of husband and wife, parent and child, belongs to the laws of the States and not to the laws of the United States”).

Consistent with this allocation of authority, the Federal Government, through our history, has deferred to state-law policy decisions with respect to domestic relations. In *De Sylva v. Ballentine*, 351 U.S. 570, 76 S.Ct. 974, 100 L.Ed. 1415 (1956), for example, the Court held that, “[t]o decide who is the widow or widower of a deceased author, or who are his executors or next of kin,” under the Copyright Act “requires a reference to the law of the State which created those legal relationships” because “there is no federal law of domestic relations.” *Id.*, at 580. In order to respect this principle, the federal courts, as a general rule, do not adjudicate issues of marital status even when there might otherwise be a basis for federal jurisdiction. See *Ankenbrandt v. Richards*, 504 U.S. 689, 703, 112 S.Ct. 2206, 119 L.Ed.2d 468 (1992). Federal courts will not hear divorce and custody cases even if they arise in diversity because of “the virtually exclusive primacy . . . of the States in the regulation of domestic relations.” *Id.*, at 714 (BLACKMUN, J., concurring in judgment).

The significance of state responsibilities for the definition and regulation of marriage dates to the Nation’s beginning; for “when the Constitution was adopted the common understanding was that the domestic relations of husband and wife and parent and child were matters reserved to the States.” *Ohio ex rel. Popovici v. Agler*, 280 U.S. 379, 383-384, 50 S.Ct. 154, 74 L.Ed. 489 (1930). Marriage laws vary in some respects from State to State. For example, the required minimum age is 16 in Vermont, but only 13 in New Hampshire. Compare Vt. Stat. Ann., Tit. 18, § 5142 (2012), with N.H.REV.STAT. ANN. § 457:4 (West Supp.2012). Likewise the permissible degree of consanguinity can vary (most States permit first cousins to marry, but a handful—such as Iowa and Washington, see IOWA CODE § 595.19 (2009); WASH. REV.CODE § 26.04.020 (2012)—prohibit the practice). But these rules are in every event consistent within each State.

Against this background DOMA rejects the long-established precept that the incidents, benefits, and obligations of marriage are uniform for all married couples within each State, though they may vary, subject to constitutional guarantees, from one State to the next. Despite these considerations, it is unnecessary to decide whether this federal intrusion on state power is a violation of the Constitution because it disrupts the federal balance. The State’s power in defining

the marital relation is of central relevance in this case quite apart from principles of federalism. Here the State's decision to give this class of persons the right to marry conferred upon them a dignity and status of immense import. When the State used its historic and essential authority to define the marital relation in this way, its role and its power in making the decision enhanced the recognition, dignity, and protection of the class in their own community. DOMA, because of its reach and extent, departs from this history and tradition of reliance on state law to define marriage. “ [D]iscriminations of an unusual character especially suggest careful consideration to determine whether they are obnoxious to the constitutional provision.’ ” *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 633, 116 S.Ct. 1620, 134 L.Ed.2d 855 (1996) (quoting *Louisville Gas & Elec. Co. v. Coleman*, 277 U.S. 32, 37-38, 48 S.Ct. 423, 72 L.Ed. 770 (1928)).

The Federal Government uses this state-defined class for the opposite purpose—to impose restrictions and disabilities. That result requires this Court now to address whether the resulting injury and indignity is a deprivation of an essential part of the liberty protected by the Fifth Amendment. What the State of New York treats as alike the federal law deems unlike by a law designed to injure the same class the State seeks to protect.

In acting first to recognize and then to allow same-sex marriages, New York was responding “to the initiative of those who [sought] a voice in shaping the destiny of their own times.” *Bond v. United States*, 564 U.S. ___, ___ (2011) (slip op., at 9). These actions were without doubt a proper exercise of its sovereign authority within our federal system, all in the way that the Framers of the Constitution intended. The dynamics of state government in the federal system are to allow the formation of consensus respecting the way the members of a discrete community treat each other in their daily contact and constant interaction with each other.

The States' interest in defining and regulating the marital relation, subject to constitutional guarantees, stems from the understanding that marriage is more than a routine classification for purposes of certain statutory benefits. Private, consensual sexual intimacy between two adult persons of the same sex may not be punished by the State, and it can form “but one element in a personal bond that is more enduring.” *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558, 567, 123 S.Ct. 2472, 156 L.Ed.2d 508 (2003). By its recognition of the validity of same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions and then by authorizing same-sex unions and same-sex marriages, New York sought to give further protection and dignity to that bond. For same-sex couples who wished to be married, the State acted to give their lawful conduct a lawful status. This status is a far-reaching legal acknowledgment of the intimate relationship between two people, a relationship deemed by the State worthy of dignity in the community equal with all other marriages. It reflects both the community's considered perspective on the historical roots of the institution of marriage and its evolving understanding of the meaning of equality.

IV

DOMA seeks to injure the very class New York seeks to protect. By doing so it violates basic due process and equal protection principles applicable to the Federal Government. *See* U.S. Const., Amdt. 5; *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 347 U.S. 497, 74 S.Ct. 693, 98 L.Ed. 884 (1954). The Constitution's guarantee of equality “must at the very least mean that a bare congressional desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot” justify disparate treatment of that group. *Department of Agriculture v. Moreno*, 413 U.S. 528, 534-535, 93 S.Ct. 2821, 37 L.Ed.2d 782 (1973). In determining whether a law is motivated by an improper animus or purpose, “ [d]iscriminations of an unusual character’ ” especially require careful consideration. *Supra*, at 19 (quoting *Romer, supra*, at 633). DOMA cannot survive under these principles. The responsibility of the States for the regulation of domestic relations is an important indicator of the substantial societal impact the State's classifications have in the daily lives and customs of its

people. DOMA's unusual deviation from the usual tradition of recognizing and accepting state definitions of marriage here operates to deprive same-sex couples of the benefits and responsibilities that come with the federal recognition of their marriages. This is strong evidence of a law having the purpose and effect of disapproval of that class. The avowed purpose and practical effect of the law here in question are to impose a disadvantage, a separate status, and so a stigma upon all who enter into same-sex marriages made lawful by the unquestioned authority of the States.

The history of DOMA's enactment and its own text demonstrate that interference with the equal dignity of same-sex marriages, a dignity conferred by the States in the exercise of their sovereign power, was more than an incidental effect of the federal statute. It was its essence. The House Report announced its conclusion that "it is both appropriate and necessary for Congress to do what it can to defend the institution of traditional heterosexual marriage H.R. 3396 is appropriately entitled the 'Defense of Marriage Act.' The effort to redefine 'marriage' to extend to homosexual couples is a truly radical proposal that would fundamentally alter the institution of marriage." H.R.Rep. No. 104-664, pp. 12-13 (1996). The House concluded that DOMA expresses "both moral disapproval of homosexuality, and a moral conviction that heterosexuality better comports with traditional (especially Judeo—Christian) morality." *Id.*, at 16 (footnote deleted). The stated purpose of the law was to promote an "interest in protecting the traditional moral teachings reflected in heterosexual-only marriage laws." *Ibid.* Were there any doubt of this far-reaching purpose, the title of the Act confirms it: The Defense of Marriage.

The arguments put forward by BLAG are just as candid about the congressional purpose to influence or interfere with state sovereign choices about who may be married. As the title and dynamics of the bill indicate, its purpose is to discourage enactment of state same-sex marriage laws and to restrict the freedom and choice of couples married under those laws if they are enacted. The congressional goal was "to put a thumb on the scales and influence a state's decision as to how to shape its own marriage laws." *Massachusetts*, 682 F.3d, at 12-13. The Act's demonstrated purpose is to ensure that if any State decides to recognize same-sex marriages, those unions will be treated as second-class marriages for purposes of federal law. This raises a most serious question under the Constitution's Fifth Amendment.

DOMA's operation in practice confirms this purpose. When New York adopted a law to permit same-sex marriage, it sought to eliminate inequality; but DOMA frustrates that objective through a system-wide enactment with no identified connection to any particular area of federal law. DOMA writes inequality into the entire United States Code. The particular case at hand concerns the estate tax, but DOMA is more than a simple determination of what should or should not be allowed as an estate tax refund. Among the over 1,000 statutes and numerous federal regulations that DOMA controls are laws pertaining to Social Security, housing, taxes, criminal sanctions, copyright, and veterans' benefits.

DOMA's principal effect is to identify a subset of state-sanctioned marriages and make them unequal. The principal purpose is to impose inequality, not for other reasons like governmental efficiency. Responsibilities, as well as rights, enhance the dignity and integrity of the person. And DOMA contrives to deprive some couples married under the laws of their State, but not other couples, of both rights and responsibilities. By creating two contradictory marriage regimes within the same State, DOMA forces same-sex couples to live as married for the purpose of state law but unmarried for the purpose of federal law, thus diminishing the stability and predictability of basic personal relations the State has found it proper to acknowledge and protect. By this dynamic DOMA undermines both the public and private significance of state-sanctioned same-sex marriages; for it tells those couples, and all the world, that their otherwise valid marriages are

unworthy of federal recognition. This places same-sex couples in an unstable position of being in a second-tier marriage. The differentiation demeans the couple, whose moral and sexual choices the Constitution protects, *see Lawrence*, 539 U.S. 558, 123 S.Ct. 2472, 156 L.Ed.2d 508, and whose relationship the State has sought to dignify. And it humiliates tens of thousands of children now being raised by same-sex couples. The law in question makes it even more difficult for the children to understand the integrity and closeness of their own family and its concord with other families in their community and in their daily lives.

Under DOMA, same-sex married couples have their lives burdened, by reason of government decree, in visible and public ways. By its great reach, DOMA touches many aspects of married and family life, from the mundane to the profound. It prevents same-sex married couples from obtaining government healthcare benefits they would otherwise receive. *See* 5 U.S.C. §§ 8901(5), 8905. It deprives them of the Bankruptcy Code's special protections for domestic-support obligations. *See* 11 U.S.C. §§ 101(14A), 507(a)(1)(A), 523(a)(5), 523(a)(15). It forces them to follow a complicated procedure to file their state and federal taxes jointly. Technical Bulletin TB-55, 2010 Vt. Tax LEXIS 6 (Oct. 7, 2010); Brief for Federalism Scholars as *Amici Curiae* 34. It prohibits them from being buried together in veterans' cemeteries. National Cemetery Administration Directive 3210/1, p. 37 (June 4, 2008).

For certain married couples, DOMA's unequal effects are even more serious. The federal penal code makes it a crime to "assaul[t], kidna[p], or murde[r] . . . a member of the immediate family" of "a United States official, a United States judge, [or] a Federal law enforcement officer," 18 U.S.C. § 115(a)(1)(A), with the intent to influence or retaliate against that official, § 115(a)(1). Although a "spouse" qualifies as a member of the officer's "immediate family," § 115(c)(2), DOMA makes this protection inapplicable to same-sex spouses.

DOMA also brings financial harm to children of same-sex couples. It raises the cost of health care for families by taxing health benefits provided by employers to their workers' same-sex spouses. *See* 26 U.S.C. § 106; Treas. Reg. § 1.106-1, 26 CFR § 1.106-1 (2012); IRS Private Letter Ruling 9850011 (Sept. 10, 1998). And it denies or reduces benefits allowed to families upon the loss of a spouse and parent, benefits that are an integral part of family security. *See* Social Security Administration, Social Security Survivors Benefits 5 (2012) (benefits available to a surviving spouse caring for the couple's child), online at <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10084.pdf>.

DOMA divests married same-sex couples of the duties and responsibilities that are an essential part of married life and that they in most cases would be honored to accept were DOMA not in force. For instance, because it is expected that spouses will support each other as they pursue educational opportunities, federal law takes into consideration a spouse's income in calculating a student's federal financial aid eligibility. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1087nn(b). Same-sex married couples are exempt from this requirement. The same is true with respect to federal ethics rules. Federal executive and agency officials are prohibited from "participat[ing] personally and substantially" in matters as to which they or their spouses have a financial interest. 18 U.S.C. § 208(a). A similar statute prohibits Senators, Senate employees, and their spouses from accepting high-value gifts from certain sources, *see* 2 U.S.C. § 31-2(a)(1), and another mandates detailed financial disclosures by numerous high-ranking officials and their spouses. *See* 5 U.S.C.App. §§ 102(a), (e). Under DOMA, however, these Government-integrity rules do not apply to same-sex spouses.

* * *

The power the Constitution grants it also restrains. And though Congress has great authority to design laws to fit its own conception of sound national policy, it cannot deny the liberty protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.

What has been explained to this point should more than suffice to establish that the principal purpose and the necessary effect of this law are to demean those persons who are in a lawful same-sex marriage. This requires the Court to hold, as it now does, that DOMA is unconstitutional as a deprivation of the liberty of the person protected by the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution.

The liberty protected by the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause contains within it the prohibition against denying to any person the equal protection of the laws. *See Bolling*, 347 U.S., at 499-500; *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 200, 217-218, 115 S.Ct. 2097, 132 L.Ed.2d 158 (1995). While the Fifth Amendment itself withdraws from Government the power to degrade or demean in the way this law does, the equal protection guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment makes that Fifth Amendment right all the more specific and all the better understood and preserved.

The class to which DOMA directs its restrictions and restraints are those persons who are joined in same-sex marriages made lawful by the State. DOMA singles out a class of persons deemed by a State entitled to recognition and protection to enhance their own liberty. It imposes a disability on the class by refusing to acknowledge a status the State finds to be dignified and proper. DOMA instructs all federal officials, and indeed all persons with whom same-sex couples interact, including their own children, that their marriage is less worthy than the marriages of others. The federal statute is invalid, for no legitimate purpose overcomes the purpose and effect to disparage and to injure those whom the State, by its marriage laws, sought to protect in personhood and dignity. By seeking to displace this protection and treating those persons as living in marriages less respected than others, the federal statute is in violation of the Fifth Amendment. This opinion and its holding are confined to those lawful marriages.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit is affirmed.

It is so ordered.

CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS, dissenting. (Dissenting opinion omitted).

JUSTICE SCALIA, with whom JUSTICE THOMAS joins, and with whom THE CHIEF JUSTICE joins as to Part I, dissenting. (Dissenting opinion omitted).

JUSTICE ALITO, with whom JUSTICE THOMAS joins as to Parts II and III, dissenting. (Dissenting opinion Omitted)

Notes, Comments & Questions

1. Identify the numerous harmful effects of DOMA mentioned in the majority opinion.
 2. What section of DOMA was not challenged, but may be ripe for such?
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