ARTICLES

MILLER V. ALABAMA
AND THE RETROACTIVITY OF PROPORTIONALITY RULES

Perry L. Moriearty*

ABSTRACT

In its 2012 decision in the companion cases of Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs, the Supreme Court declared that it was unconstitutional to sentence children to mandatory life without parole because such sentences preclude an individualized consideration of a defendant’s age and other mitigating factors. What Miller did not address, however, and what has confounded lower courts over the last two years, is whether the ruling applies to the more than 2,100 inmates whose convictions were already final when Miller was decided. In all but one case, the question has come down to an exercise in line drawing. If, under the Court’s elusive Teague retroactivity doctrine, Miller articulated a “substantive” rule of constitutional law, it is retroactive; if the rule is merely “procedural,” it is not. The Supreme Court is all but certain to decide the issue in the near future.

I make two primary arguments in this Article. The first adds to the growing body of commentary concluding that, while Miller has “procedural” attributes, they are components of a constitutional mandate that is fundamentally “substantive.” The second argument applies broadly to all new constitutional rules which, like the Miller rule, are grounded in the Eighth Amendment’s proportionality guarantee. As even those who favor limitations on retroactivity have acknowledged, there is a normative point at which interests in “finality” simply must yield to competing notions of justice and equality. I argue that finality interests may be at their weakest when the Court announces a new proportionality rule, because the practical burdens of review and theoretical concerns about undermining the consequentialist goals of punishment are simply not as pronounced with sentences of incarceration as they are with convictions. The risks of offending basic notions of “justice” may be at their most pronounced with new proportionality rules, however, because to deny relief to those whose sentences have been deemed “excessive” (or at a high risk of excessiveness) is to undermine the very principles of proportionality and fundamental fairness in which such rules are grounded. Proportionality rules should therefore be afforded something close to a presumption of retroactivity.

* Associate Professor, University of Minnesota Law School, and co-director of the Child Advocacy and Juvenile Justice Clinic. I am grateful to Barry Feld, Alan Chen, Jessica Clarke, Antony Duff, Richard Frase, Mark Kappelhoff, Jean Sanderson, Dan Schwarz and Michael Tonry for extremely helpful comments and discussion at various phases of this project. I am also deeply indebted to Brad Colbert, Stephen Harper, Emily Keller, Marsha Levick, Leslie Rosenberg and Bryan Stevenson and the attorneys at both Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia and the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama whose advocacy has been the basis for a lot of what is written here. Finally, I thank University of Minnesota law students Lindee Balgaard, Jordon Greenlee, Nate Hainje, Ashleigh Leitch and Caitlin Maly for their research, critical feedback and deep devotion to the clients whose futures will be dictated by the resolution of the questions presented in this Article.
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INTRODUCTION

Quantel Lotts was fourteen years old when he was sentenced to life without parole.1 By any measure, Lotts’ childhood was bleak. He spent the early years of his life in a blighted St. Louis neighborhood and lived in multiple foster homes before he was eventually placed with his father and younger brother.2 When Lotts was ten, his father married, and the three moved to rural St. Francois County, Missouri. By most accounts, Lotts developed a close relationship with his new step-brother, Michael, who was three years older.3 On November 13, 1999, however, the boys got into an argument. Michael hit Lotts with a blow dart, Lotts responded with a toy bow and arrow, and a fight ensued.4 Michael was stabbed and later died.5 Lotts was in seventh grade and not yet five feet tall when he was charged as an adult with first-degree murder, tried, convicted and sentenced to life without parole.6 Under Missouri law, his sentence was mandatory: the sentencer was precluded from considering Quantel Lotts’ age and maturity, the events that led up to Michael’s death, Lotts’ dismal childhood, or the likelihood that he might one day be reformed.7 Over the objections of Michael’s mother, Quantel Lotts was sent to spend the rest of his life in a Bonne Terre, Missouri prison.8

In June 2012, the Supreme Court held in the companion cases Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs that sentencing those under the age of eighteen, like Quantel Lotts, to mandatory life without parole violates the Eighth Amendment because it precludes the sentencer from taking into account the juvenile’s age or other mitigating fac-

3 Id.
5 Id.
8 EQUAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE, supra note 1, at 30.
tors.9 Miller became the third Supreme Court decision in seven years to conclude that three fundamental features of youth—lack of maturity, vulnerability to negative influences, and capacity for change—make children “constitutionally different” from adults and “less deserving of the most severe punishments.”10 Mandatory life without parole for juveniles is cruel and unusual, the Court held, because “by making youth (and all that accompanies it) irrelevant to imposition of that harshest prison sentence, such a scheme poses too great a risk of disproportionate punishment.”11 Though the Court declined to ban juvenile life without parole sentences outright, Justice Elena Kagan’s majority opinion makes clear that all such sentences are now suspect.

What Miller did not address, however, and what has confounded lower courts in the months since, is whether the ruling applies to the more than 2,100 inmates12 who were sentenced as juveniles to mandatory life without parole, but whose convictions were already final when Miller was decided. More than thirty lower courts13 have now considered the question, and while the majority of these have ruled, either preliminarily or finally, that Miller is retroactive, the question has, in all but one case, come down to an “exercise in line drawing.”14

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11 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2469.

12 ELIZABETH CALVIN, ET AL., HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, WHEN I DIE . . . THEY’LL SEND ME HOME: YOUTH SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON WITHOUT PAROLE IN CALIFORNIA, AN UPDATE, 2 (2012), available at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/crd0112webcover.pdf (estimating that there are currently about 2,570 youth offenders serving life without parole in the United States and that approximately 2,100 were sentenced under mandatory statutes).

13 As discussed in Part II, infra, thirteen state courts have ruled on Miller's retroactivity, with nine states granting and four states denying retroactive relief. The issue is now pending before at least four other state courts of last resort. The Fourteenth Circuit is the only federal appeals court to squarely decide Miller’s retroactivity, ruling that it does not apply retroactively. The Eighth Circuit is poised to rule on the issue soon as well. In addition, six federal appeals courts have allowed habeas corpus petitions to proceed on the basis that Miller presents a prima facie case of retroactivity, while two have not. Approximately ten federal district courts have ruled on the issue and are fairly evenly divided.

14 Commonwealth v. Cunningham, 81 A.3d 1, 19 (Pa. 2013) (Baer, J., dissenting) (noting that the process is not “a precise demarcation between rules which are innately substantive versus procedural in character”).
If, under the Court’s beleaguered *Teague v. Lane*\(^{15}\) doctrine, *Miller* articulated a “substantive” rule of constitutional law, it is retroactive; if the rule is “procedural,” it is not.\(^{16}\)

At least seven petitions for certiorari challenging state court rulings on *Miller’s* retroactivity have been filed with the Supreme Court over the last fourteen months.\(^{17}\) Though the first four were denied—two from state court decisions that allowed for retroactivity and two from decisions that had denied it—the Court decided in December 2014 to grant certiorari in a case brought by a Louisiana inmate.\(^{18}\) The Court was scheduled to hear argument in *Toca v. Louisiana* in March 2015, but the case was dismissed in February as moot after the

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15. In *Teague v. Lane*, 489 U.S. 288, 316 (1989), the Court held that the federal courts may not apply “new rules” of criminal procedure retroactively unless they fall into one of two limited exceptions: rules that place particular conduct or classes of persons beyond the State’s power to punish, or those that implicate the fundamental fairness of a proceeding. The Court has since explained that “substantive” rules are not in fact exceptions to the *Teague* bar; they are simply “not subject to the bar.” *Schriro v. Summerlin*, 542 U.S. 348, 352 n.4 (2004).

16. Under *Teague*, a rule may also be retroactive if it is a “‘watershed rule of criminal procedure’ implicating the fundamental fairness and accuracy of the criminal proceeding.” *Summerlin*, 542 U.S. at 351–52 (2004) (quoting *Saffle v. Parks*, 494 U.S. 484, 495 (1990)) (“[W]e give retroactive effect to only a small set of ‘watershed rules of criminal procedure’ implicating the fundamental fairness and accuracy of the criminal proceeding.”). This exception is extremely limited in practice, however. To date, the Supreme Court has identified only one case whose rule would satisfy this standard—*Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963)—which held that the Sixth Amendment requires legal representation at the public’s expense for indigent defendants. See *Beard v. Banks*, 542 U.S. 406, 417 (2004) (“This Court has yet to find a new rule that falls under this exception. In providing guidance as to what might do so, the Court has repeatedly, and only, referred to the right-to-counsel rule of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which altered the Court’s understanding of the *bedrock procedural elements essential to the fairness of a proceeding.*” (internal quotations and citations omitted) (emphasis in original)). In the *Miller* context, only one lower court has deemed *Miller* a “watershed rule.” See *People v. Williams*, 982 N.E.2d 181, 196–97 (Ill. App. Ct. 2012) (granting petitioner the right to file a successive post-conviction petition because *Miller* is a “watershed rule,” and at his pre-*Miller* trial, petitioner had been “denied a ‘basic “precept of justice”’ by not receiving any consideration of his age from the circuit court in sentencing”) (quoting *Miller*, 132 S. Ct. at 2463, abrogated by *People v. Davis*, 6 N.E.3d 709, 722 (Ill. 2014) (holding *Miller* to be “a new substantive rule”)). This Article focuses on what I will call for simplicity the “substantive rule exception.”

17. Discussed Part II.A supra

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state agreed to release Mr. Toca in exchange for a plea to a lesser charge which allowed Mr. Toca to maintain his innocence.¹⁹ Three other petitions are currently pending before the Court, and based on its decision to hear *Toca*, the Court seems likely to decide the issue in the near future.

I make two primary arguments in this Article. The first is doctrinal. While the question of *Miller*’s remedial scope is plainly more complicated than it would have been if *Miller* had simply banned juvenile life without parole outright, the *Miller* rule is fundamentally "substantive." A synthesis of the Court’s decisions suggest that "substantive" rules are those that usurp the state’s authority to punish its citizens in some elemental way. These include rules which modify state sentencing laws by altering the range of sentencing outcomes that a defendant may receive,²⁰ or by making the certain facts essential to the imposition of a particular punishment.²¹ They also include rules which restrict the "class of persons" that a state law may punish,²² or proscribe a "category" of punishment for a class of individuals.²³ In contrast, rules that require states merely to alter the method by which they apply a particular law are "procedural."²⁴ Substantive rules must apply retroactively, according to the Court, because they "necessarily carry a significant risk that a defendant' . . . faces a punishment that the law cannot impose upon him."²⁵

*Miller* has the hallmarks of a substantive rule. First, by stripping their authority to mandate life without parole for juveniles, *Miller* compelled twenty-eight states and the federal government to expand the range of sentencing outcomes available to juveniles convicted of

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²⁰ *Summerlin*, 542 U.S. at 353 (explaining that rules which define "the range of conduct . . . [that may be] subjected to . . . [a specific] penalty" are substantive).

²¹ *Id.* at 352–53 (explaining that a rule through which the Supreme Court "mak[es] a certain fact essential to the death penalty" is substantive).

²² *Id.* (citing *Saffle v. Parks*, 494 U.S. 484, 495 (1990) (substantive rules are those which prohibit "the imposition of . . . punishment on a particular class of persons").


²⁴ *Schriro v. Summerlin*, 542 U.S. 348, 353 (2004) (explaining that "rules that regulate only the manner of determining the defendant’s culpability are procedural" (emphasis in original)).

homicide. At least thirteen states have already done so. 26 Wyoming, for example, has elected to abolish the punishment of juvenile life without parole altogether, replacing it with a range of twenty-five years to life with periodic review. 27 Miller also imposed upon states new essential factors relating to a defendant’s age and life circumstances that sentencers must consider before sentencing a juvenile to life without parole. 28 Hawaii, for instance, now requires sentencing courts to consider fifteen such factors before sentencing any juvenile convicted of homicide. 29 Third, Miller restricted the class of individuals—those who may receive life without parole—to only those “rare” juveniles who are sufficiently culpable. 30 Finally, Miller can be characterized as a rule that proscribes a “category” of punishment—mandatory life without parole—for a class of individuals—juveniles. Though the final outcome may be the same, mandatory life without parole is in important respects a qualitatively different punishment from discretionary life without parole. It is the product of a conscious decision by lawmakers to make a harsh punishment even harsher by depriving defendants of any form of individualized consideration and, as a result, any prospect of a lighter sentence.

The Miller rule has done far more than alter the method by which states sentence juveniles; it has created a decision point where there was none, and, in doing so, has altered the extent to which more than half of the states and the federal government punish juveniles convicted of homicide. While several commentators have concluded over the last two years that Miller applies retroactively as a “substantive” rule, 31 few have focused as extensively on the nature and magnitude of Miller’s impact on state sentencing schemes. 32

28 Miller v. Alabama held that such a sentence can only be imposed after the sentencer has “take[n] into account how children are different, and how those differences counsel against irrevocably sentencing them to a lifetime in prison.” 132 S. Ct. 2455, 2475 (2012).
30 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2469 (distinguishing between “the juvenile offender whose crime reflects unfortunate yet transient immaturity, and the rare juvenile offender whose crime reflects irreparable corruption”) (quoting Roper v. Simmons, 543 U.S. 551, 573 (2005)).
The second primary argument in this Article applies broadly to all new constitutional rules which, like the *Miller* rule, are grounded in the Eighth Amendment’s proportionality guarantee. As Justice John Harlan, one of *Teague*’s early architects, long ago acknowledged, there is a normative point at which society’s interest in preserving final judgments simply must yield to competing notions of justice and equality.\(^{35}\) Finality interests are at their weakest when the Court announces a new Eighth Amendment proportionality rule, such as *Miller*’s, because neither the practical burdens of review nor theoretical concerns about undermining the consequentialist objectives of punishment are as pronounced with sentences of incarceration as they are with convictions. Yet, the risk of offending constitutional norms and undermining fundamental notions of “justice” are at their most pronounced with new proportionality rules, because to deny relief to those whose sentences are “excessive” (or at high risk of excessive-

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\(^{32}\) See, e.g., Brandon Buskey and Daniel Korobkin, *Elevating Substance Over Procedure: The Retroactivity of Miller v. Alabama Under Teague v. Lane*, 18 CUNY L. Rev. (forthcoming 2015) (manuscript at 13) (arguing that *Miller*’s requirement that states alter the range of permissible sentencing outcomes and consider mitigation is substantive).

\(^{33}\) See Mackey v. United States, 401 U.S. 667, 692 (1971) (Harlan, J., dissenting) (acknowledging that “finality interests should yield” to rules which “place certain kinds of primary, private individual conduct beyond the power of the criminal law-making authority to proscribe” because “there is little societal interest in permitting the criminal process to rest at a point where it ought properly never to repose”).

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33 See Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288, 307 (1989) (Black, J., dissenting) (arguing that “a rule that would require the reexamination of all statutes, ordinances, or other criminal laws of the States” would “be too much to ask”); Erwin Chemerinsky, *Criminal Procedure: First, Second, and Third* (Carolina Academic Press 2007) (arguing that “*Miller* is a substantive rule that must be applied retroactively”); Mackey v. United States, 401 U.S. 667, 692 (1971) (Harlan, J., dissenting) (acknowledging that “finality interests should yield” to rules which “place certain kinds of primary, private individual conduct beyond the power of the criminal law-making authority to proscribe” because “there is little societal interest in permitting the criminal process to rest at a point where it ought properly never to repose”).
ness) is to subvert the very principles of proportionality and fundamental fairness on which such rules rest. This may explain why the Supreme Court and lower courts have afforded a broader remedial scope to new proportionality rules than they have to new Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rules and suggests that proportionality rules may merit a presumption of retroactivity.

In many respects, the “new” understanding of adolescence that underlies the Supreme Court’s decisions in *Roper, Graham*, and *Miller* is not new at all. Indeed, the founding of the first juvenile court more than a century ago was premised on the recognition that children are inherently different from adults. What is new, however, is our understanding of those biological differences between children and adults that make youth more impulsive, impetuous, and impressionable, and, at the same time, more amenable to rehabilitation than adults. This emerging body of scientific research has plainly informed the Supreme Court’s establishment in *Roper, Graham, and Miller* of new constitutional limitations on the state’s authority to punish juveniles. As this research continues to accumulate in ways that make adolescent differences ever more clear and particularized, the Court’s willingness to tolerate harsh sentences for children will further erode and new “substantive” mandates about the limits of adolescent sentencing under the Eighth Amendment are sure to emerge. It is almost inevitable that adolescent culpability, proportionality, and retroactivity will continue to collide in the years to come.

This Article has three parts. Part I provides requisite background. It first describes the Supreme Court’s recent decisions in *Roper v. Simmons, Graham v. Florida*, and *Miller v. Alabama*, which comprise the Court’s modern “kids are different” sentencing jurisprudence, within the context of the Court’s historical approach to juvenile lawbreakers. It then turns to the Court’s retroactivity jurisprudence, focusing on the development of the substance/procedure dichotomy that has proven so unwieldy to lower courts in the wake of *Miller*. Part II makes the case that, while *Miller* has procedural attributes, these attributes are components of a broader mandate that is fundamentally “substantive.” Finally, Part III claims that denying relief under *Miller*, or any such “proportionality rule,” is to privilege finality interests at the expense of the fundamental constitutional interests that underlie such rules.

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34 These decisions are discussed in Part III, *infra*. 
I. MILLER AND TEAGUE COLLIDE

With its decisions over the last decade in *Roper v. Simmons*, *Graham v. Florida*, and *Miller v. Alabama*, the Supreme Court helped set the doctrinal stage to dial back three decades of historically unprecedented severity in punitive treatment of adolescent law breakers. What the Court did not address in any of these decisions, however, is whether they provide relief to those who were already serving the sentences they proscribed. The Court’s silence has proven especially problematic in the wake of *Miller*, which has the potential to affect more than 2,100 sentences in twenty-eight states.\(^{35}\) Over the last two years, the Court’s burgeoning “kids are different” jurisprudence has run head-long into the Court’s long-maligned “retroactivity” jurisprudence, creating an analytical conundrum. This Part describes the evolution of both bodies of doctrine.

A. Kids are “Different”

The legal notion that juveniles are “different” is not new. Adolescents have long been denied various legal privileges and afforded enhanced legal protections as a result of their developmental immaturity. What has only recently emerged, however, is scientific research documenting the developmental and neurological differences between adolescents and adults and the Court’s recognition that “children are constitutionally different from adults for purposes of sentencing.”\(^{36}\)

1. *From Parens Patriae to Get Tough*

The legal recognition that children are developmentally different from adults is long-standing. This basic premise was the impetus for the establishment of the first juvenile court in Chicago in 1899 and informed the ideological and procedural foundations of the American juvenile justice system.\(^{37}\) Nearly every component of the nascent juvenile system accounted for adolescents’ reduced culpability and greater capacity for change: Charges against child lawbreakers were deemed civil rather than criminal, social workers and clinicians re-

\(^{35}\) Marcia Coyle, *States Cling to Life Sentences for Juvenile Offenders*, NAT’L L. J. (June 24, 2014) (noting that two years after *Miller* was decided, less than half of the twenty-eight states affected had reformed their laws).


placed lawyers, prosecutors, and juries, \(^{38}\) “crimes” were called “delinquent behavior,” young offenders were adjudicated not convicted,” and judges issued “dispositions” rather than “sentences.” \(^{39}\) Formal rules were abandoned in favor of broad discretionary powers, \(^{40}\) which, it was thought, would best enable the states to carry out their role as “Parens Patriae.” \(^{41}\) As Progressive Era reformer Jane Addams observed, the purpose of the U.S. juvenile justice system was to “understand the growing child and [undertake] a sincere effort to find ways for securing his orderly development in normal society.” \(^{42}\)

During the mid-twentieth century, the ideals of treatment and rehabilitation began to give way to concern over the indeterminate and often arbitrary nature of juvenile court sentencing. \(^{43}\) In response, the Supreme Court imported a series of key constitutional safeguards from the adult system during the 1960s and 1970s, \(^{44}\) including the right to counsel. \(^{45}\) Thus came what has been called the “second

\(^{38}\) See Barry Feld, *Race, Politics, and Juvenile Justice: The Warren Court and the Conservative Backlash*, 87 MINN. L. REV. 1447, 1453–56 (2003) (discussing how the Progressive Movement’s “new cultural conception of childhood” led to social welfare and child labor reforms to help address social problems, such as juvenile criminal justice).


\(^{40}\) Id. at 668 n.45 (“Judges were given broad discretion to ‘[take] up the burden of parenthood and [stand] between all children and the manifest dangers of parental laxness and urban temptation.’”) (quoting Frederic L. Faust & Paul J. Brantingham, *The Invention of the Juvenile Court, in Juvenile Justice Philosophy 550–57* (1974), reprinted in ROBERT H. MNOOKIN & KELLY WEISBERG, *CHILD, FAMILY AND STATE* 1097 (3d ed. 1995)).

\(^{41}\) “Parens patriae” literally means “parent of the country” and, within the context of Progressive Era social reforms in the United States, has been defined as “a concept of standing utilized to protect those quasi-sovereign interests such as health, comfort and welfare of the people, interstate water rights, general economy of the state, etc.” BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 1114 (6th ed. 1990).


\(^{43}\) See THE PRESIDENT’S COMM’N ON LAW ENFORCEMENT & ADMIN. OF JUSTICE, *Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime 9* (1967) (“In theory the [juvenile] court’s operations could justifiably be informal, its findings and decisions made without observing ordinary procedural safeguards, because it would act only in the best interest of the child. In fact it frequently does nothing more nor less than deprive a child of liberty without due process of law—knowing not what else to do and needing, whether admitted-ly or not, to act in the community’s interest even more imperatively than the child’s.”).

\(^{44}\) In 1967, for example, the Court held that the constitutional rights to notice, to counsel, to confront and cross-examine witnesses, to a fair and impartial hearing, and to protections against self-incrimination all applied equally in juvenile court. *In re Gault*, 387 U.S. 1, 31–58 (1967).

\(^{45}\) Id. at 33–34, 41, 55, 57.
wave” of juvenile justice reform—the “constitutional domestication” of the juvenile court. These changes brought a procedural formality and the beginning of an ideological shift in focus from the “best interests” of the child to the gravity of the offense itself.

The legal distinctions between adolescent and adult lawbreakers gave way almost entirely during the “third wave” of reform. With an abrupt rise in the rates of homicide and violent crime among juveniles in the late 1980s came the call for lawmakers to “get tough” on juvenile crime.

Between 1992 and 1997 alone, legislatures in forty-five states enacted or enhanced statutes that made it easier to punish children like adults. Laws like California’s Proposition 21, which expanded criminal court jurisdiction over juvenile offenders, transferred discretion from judges to prosecutors to determine which juveniles should be tried as adults, weakened confidentiality laws, toughened gang laws, and expanded California’s three-strikes law for both juveniles and adults, proliferated. Adolescent offenders were branded juvenile “super-predators,” “morally-impoverished” youth who had grown up “surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in abusive, violence-ridden, fatherless, Godless, and jobless settings.” If lawmakers did not do more to incapacitate them, experts

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47 Feld, supra note 38, at 1461.


49 See id. at 201 (noting that the juvenile arrest rate for all violent crimes increased 67.3% between 1986 and 1995).


51 See CAL. WELF. & INST. CODE § 707(d) (West 2010) (dictating when a prosecutor in California can try a juvenile as an adult).

52 John J. Dilulio, Jr., The Coming of the Super-Predator, WKLY STANDARD, Nov. 27, 1995, at 25–26, see also John Dilulio, Defining Criminality Up, WALL ST. J., July 3, 1996, at A10 (demonstrating that inner-city children are more likely to be engaged in crime); Suzanne Fields, The Super-Predator, WASH. TIMES, Oct. 17, 1996, at A23 (“The super-predator is upon us”); Gene Koprowski, The Rise of the Teen Super-Predator, WASH. TIMES, Oct. 23, 1996, at A17 (explaining that “drug use and violence among ‘super-predators’ are actually caused by moral poverty—that is, the poverty of growing up without a loving, responsible parent who can teach right from wrong”). See generally Perry L. Moriearty, Framing Justice: Media,
predicted, 270,000 more super-predators would be on the streets by 2010. \(^{55}\) “Unless we act today, we’re going to have a bloodbath when these kids grow up,” criminologist James Fox warned.\(^{54}\) Not surprisingly, the number of adolescents sentenced as adults increased abruptly\(^{55}\) as determinate sentencing, mandatory minimum sentences, truth-in-sentencing laws and so-called habitual offender statutes continued to expand.\(^{56}\) Life sentences for both adults and juveniles also rose dramatically. In 1992, about 12,500 individuals were serving sentences of life without parole in the United States; by 2008, the number had increased to more than 41,000.\(^{57}\) More than 2,500 were juveniles.\(^{58}\)

The profile of the population of those sentenced to life without parole as juveniles was in many ways predictable: more than 75% were youth of color,\(^{56}\) and according to subsequent surveys, many had experienced childhoods that were marked by highly elevated levels of poverty, abuse, exposure to community violence, familial incarceration, problems in school, engagement with delinquent peers, and were frequently raised in homes with few adult guardians.\(^{56}\) The majority of their sentences could also be tied directly to “get tough” era measures (most had been imposed in states where the sentences were mandatory, and the majority in just five states: California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania) and more than 25% of the life without parole sentences were imposed upon juveniles convicted of felony murder or accomplice liability, meaning they were not the primary perpetrators and, in some cases, were not even pre-

\(^{53}\) Former Princeton Professor John DiIulio was perhaps the most vocal of these experts, coining the term adolescent “superpredator” in a now famous 1995 article in The Weekly Standard. JOHN J. DIIULIO, HOW TO STOP THE COMING CRIME WAVE 1 (1996), see also WILLIAM J. BENNETT ET AL., BODY COUNT: MORAL POVERTY . . . AND HOW TO WIN AMERICA’S WAR AGAINST CRIME AND DRUGS 26 (1996) (charting the projected increase in the United States juvenile population between 1990 and 2010).

\(^{54}\) Laurie Garrett, Murder by Teens has Soared Since ’85, N.Y. NEWSDAY, Feb. 18, 1995.


\(^{56}\) See MICHAEL TONRY, PUNISHING RACE: A CONTINUING AMERICAN DILEMMA, 28, 75, 77 (2011) (discussing mandatory sentencing laws and how they bring about racial disparities in the prison system).


\(^{58}\) CALVIN, supra note 12.

\(^{59}\) Nellis, supra note 55, at 8.

\(^{60}\) Id.
Despite these statistics, though the Court was willing through some of its decisions early in the “get tough” era to hold that age was a constitutionally significant mitigating factor, it resisted throughout the twentieth century the call to find juvenile sentences constitutionally excessive.

2. The Roper, Graham, and Miller Trilogy

By the turn of the twenty-first century, crime rates among both juveniles and adults had dropped to their lowest points in thirty years. Concern was growing about the economic costs of incarceration, and, at the same time, researchers had begun to publish studies documenting the developmental and neurological differences between adolescents and adults. A fourth “wave” of juvenile justice reforms
began to take hold, which were aimed at holding child lawbreakers accountable for their offenses in ways that were developmentally appropriate. Amid this groundswell, the Court decided over the course of seven years three cases that have, in many respects, reinvigorated its Eighth Amendment proportionality jurisprudence. To put this in context, a brief synopsis of the Court’s approach to such proportionality challenges is warranted.

Prominent detractors notwithstanding, scholars and jurists generally agree that the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment contains a proportionality requirement. For the past century, the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the ban “flows from the basic ‘precept of justice that punishment for [a] crime should be graduated and proportioned to [the] offense,’” interpreting the requirement to include “not only those punishments that are ‘barbaric’ but also those that are ‘excessive’ in relation to the crime and the committed.” Since 1910, the “precept” of proportionality
articulated by the Court in Weems v. United States\textsuperscript{72} has evolved into two distinct lines of Eighth Amendment precedent. The first includes cases in which the Court has banned the death penalty for specific categories of offenders or offenses—“categorical” cases—while the second involves cases where the Court has considered whether a particular term-of-years sentence is “grossly disproportionate” to the offender or offense in question—“as-applied” cases.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1977, the Court held that it was “grossly disproportionate and excessive punishment” to impose the death penalty for the rape of an adult,\textsuperscript{74} and in 2008, extended this prohibition to the rape of a child.\textsuperscript{75} The Court has also banned capital punishment for certain classes of offenders based on their cognitive status or their diminished role in the underlying offense. In 2002, the Court deemed the execution of mentally retarded individuals a disproportionate punishment in Atkins, explaining that “[i]f the culpability of the average murderer is insufficient to justify the most extreme sanctions available to the state, the lesser culpability of the mentally retarded offender surely does not merit that form of retribution.”\textsuperscript{76} For the same reasons, the Court has banned capital punishment for those declared “insane,”\textsuperscript{77} and, in 2005, extended this rationale to juveniles under eighteen in Roper.\textsuperscript{78} Finally, the Court has held that the death penalty may not be imposed in a way that precludes the sentencer from considering as a mitigating factor “any aspect of a defendant’s character or record and any of the circumstances of the offense that the defendant or to the public, it does not compare with murder, which does involve the unjustified taking of human life”).

\textsuperscript{72} Weems, 217 U.S. at 367.

\textsuperscript{73} Richard Frase, What’s “Different” (Enough) in Eighth Amendment Law?, 11 O HIO ST. J. OF CRIM. L. 9, 22 (2013) (differentiating between the Court’s “categorical (all-cases-of-this-type) approach” and its “as-applied-to-these-facts approach” to proportionality review); see also Rachel E. Barkow, The Court of Life and Death: The Two Tracks of Constitutional Sentencing Law and the Case for Uniformity, 107 M ICH. L. REV. 1145, 1146 (2009) (noting that in capital cases, “[t]he Court will scrutinize whether the death sentence is proportionate to the crime and the defendant, exempting certain crimes and certain offenders from a capital sentence to avoid an unconstitutionally excessive punishment”).

\textsuperscript{74} Coker, 433 U.S. at 598; see also Kennedy, 554 U.S. at 441–45 (striking down the punishment on the ground that it created “risks of overpunishment”).

\textsuperscript{75} Kennedy, 554 U.S. at 441–45.

\textsuperscript{76} Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304, 319–20 (2002). The Court also noted that executing the mentally retarded would not “further the goal of deterrence,” because murder by those who are mentally debilitated is not the result of premeditation and deliberation. \textit{Id}.

\textsuperscript{77} See Ford v. Wainwright, 477 U.S. 399, 410 (1986) (“The Eighth Amendment prohibits the State from inflicting the penalty of death upon a prisoner who is insane.”).

\textsuperscript{78} Roper v. Simmons, 545 U.S. 551 (2005). In Enmund v. Florida, 458 U.S. 782 (1982), the Court also held that that the Eighth Amendment prohibits capital punishment for those who were not major participants in felony murder.
fendant proffers as a basis for a sentence less than death.” This “individualization” requirement in capital cases rejects any statute that mandates death as a punishment for a particular offense.

The Court takes a two-step approach to categorical challenges. First, the Court applies what has become known as the “evolving standards of decency test,” which measures a punishment’s proportionality according to the “evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society,” as a threshold inquiry. In Atkins and Roper, for example, the Court found a societal consensus against putting mentally retarded and juvenile offenders to death.

The Court then turns to an “independent judgment” analysis to determine whether it agrees with the national consensus. Here, the Court weighs the culpability of the offender or offense against the severity of the punishment. In Coker and Kennedy, for example, the death penalty created an unacceptable risk of disproportionality, because the Court found the offense of rape to be insufficiently severe. The Court then considers whether the particular sentencing practice can be justified by any of the standard theories of punishment. The Atkins Court, for example, stated that it was “not persuaded that the execution of mentally retarded criminals will measurably advance the deterrent or the retributive purpose of the death penalty,” and in Roper, the Court concluded that “[o]nce the diminished culpability of

79 Lockett v. Ohio, 438 U.S. 586, 604 (1978) (plurality opinion). Nor can a judge exclude mitigating evidence from her sentencing determination; see Eddings v. Oklahoma, 455 U.S. 104, 114 (1982) (“[N]either may the sentencer refuse to consider, as a matter of law, any relevant mitigating evidence.”); Woodson v. North Carolina, 428 U.S. 280, 304 (1976) (plurality opinion) (“[T]he character and record of the individual offender and the circumstances of the particular offense are a constitutionally indispensable part of the process of inflicting the penalty of death.”).

80 Trop v. Dulles, 356 U.S. 86, 100–01 (1958) (plurality opinion). The test has been heavily criticized. See Erwin Chemerinsky, Foreword: The Vanishing Constitution, 103 HARV. L. REV. 43, 88 n.200 (1989) (“The preferences of the majority should not determine the nature of the [E]ighth [A]mendment or of any other constitutional right.”); Stinneford, supra note 69, at 905 (criticizing the test’s limited protection for criminal offenders on the grounds that it “rarely yields an unambiguous showing of societal consensus against a given punishment, for virtually all punishments reviewed by the Supreme Court enjoy significant public support”); David A. Strauss, The Modernizing Mission of Judicial Review, 76 U. CHI. L. REV. 859, 868 (2009) (noting that, if society were to pivot toward a “a large-scale movement toward executing juveniles or the insane,” the Court would have to deem such punishments proportional).

81 Roper, 543 U.S. at 562–63; Atkins, 536 U.S at 316.


83 Atkins, 536 U.S at 321.
juveniles is recognized, it is evident that the penological justifications
for the death penalty apply to them with lesser force than to adults. 84

Until very recently, however, the Court has taken a much different
approach to non-capital cases, refusing to apply the robust categori-
cal analysis that it utilized in the capital context. Instead, it has ap-
plied a “narrow” proportionality inquiry which requires the Court to
determine only whether the sentence is “grossly disproportionate” to
the offense. 85 Under this deferential standard, as long as the state has
a “reasonable basis for believing” that the sentence in question serves
some penological goal, the Court will not find it grossly dispropor-
tionate and will not even turn to its inter- and intra-jurisdictional in-
quiry. 86

In 1980, in Rummel v. Estelle, the Court made clear that “death is
different” for purposes of Eighth Amendment proportionality anal-
ysis, noting that “[o]utside the context of capital punishment, success-
ful challenges to the proportionality of particular sentences have
been exceedingly rare.” 87 Yet, three years later, in Solem v. Helm, the
Court unexpectedly reversed as excessive a life without parole sen-
tence for a repeat non-violent offender who had passed bad checks. 88
Reaffirming the “principle that a punishment should be propor-
tionate to the crime” as one “deeply rooted and frequently repeated in
common-law jurisprudence,” the Court made clear that proportion-
ality review does in fact apply to term-of-years sentences. 89 Nonethe-
less, the Court refused to overrule Rummel. 90

In 1991, the Court reversed course yet again in Harmelin v. Michi-
gan, where it upheld a life without parole sentence for a first-time
drug offender. 91 In rejecting the defendant’s argument that a sen-
tence of life without parole could not be imposed without a consid-
eration of mitigating factors, the Court made clear that it would not re-
quire individualized sentencing in non-capital cases. Writing for the
majority, Justice Antonin Scalia also attempted to confine the Court’s

84 Roper, 543 U.S. at 571; see also Kennedy, 554 U.S. at 442, 445 (finding that “the death penal-
ty for child rape would not further retributive purposes” and that “punishment by death
may not result in more deterrence or more effective enforcement”).
Eighth Amendment does not require strict proportionality between crime and sentence.
Rather, it forbids only extreme sentences that are ‘grossly disproportionate’ to the
crime.”).
89 Id.
90 Id. at 297–98.
proportionality review to capital cases, noting that the death penalty gives rise to “protections that the Constitution nowhere else provides.”

Solem v. Helm was wrongly decided, Justice Scalia argued, because the Eighth Amendment does not contain a proportionality guarantee. In his concurrence, however, Justice Anthony Kennedy disagreed, affirming that the Court’s Eighth Amendment jurisprudence recognizes a “narrow” proportionality requirement in non-capital cases which “forbids only extreme sentences that are ‘grossly disproportionate’ to the crime.”

Harmelin signaled the Court’s apparent willingness to uphold virtually any term-of-years sentence, and in its 2003 decisions in Ewing v. California and Lockyer v. Andrade, the Court did just that, affirming sentences of twenty-five years to life under California’s “Three-Strikes” law for of a man who stole three golf clubs worth $1,200 from a golf pro shop and life in prison for a defendant who stole $153 worth of videotapes from K-Mart. In both cases, the Court professed penal agnosticism, maintaining that “[s]electing the sentencing rationales is generally a policy choice to be made by state legislatures, not federal courts.”

a. Roper v. Simmons

It was against this backdrop that the Court decided Roper v. Simmons in 2005. Advocates had been preparing for a challenge to the juvenile death penalty for years, marshaling an arsenal of science and social science research on child development and comparative statistics from the international community, which highlighted the fact that the United States was the only western country still putting ado-
lescents to death.98 The case of Chris Simmons, who was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death in Missouri at age seventeen, proved timely.99 In the wake of the Court’s 2002 decision in Atkins v. Virginia—that, by virtue of their diminished culpability, it was unconstitutional to execute “mentally retarded” offenders100—Simmons filed for post conviction relief with the Missouri Supreme Court, arguing that his death sentence violated the Eighth Amendment.101 The Missouri Supreme Court agreed.102

In 2004, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case.103 Simmons’ lawyers were joined by a cadre of amici, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association, who argued that the developmental differences between juveniles and adults rendered juveniles inherently less culpable and therefore less deserving of the ultimate punishment.104 The Supreme Court agreed. Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy began by observing that something akin to a “national consensus” against the death penalty for juveniles was emerging in the United States,105 and had already

98 See, e.g., Juvenile Life Without Parole (JLWOP) in Juvenile and Criminal Justice, JUVENILE LAW CENTER, http://www.jlc.org/current-initiatives/promoting-fairness-courts/juvenile-life-without-parole-jlwop (last updated Nov. 26, 2013) (“The United States is the only country in the world that currently sentences juveniles to life without the possibility of parole.”).
99 State v. Simmons, 944 S.W.2d 165, 169 (Mo. 1997) (en banc), habeas corpus granted and rev’d en banc sub nom. State ex rel. Simmons v. Roper, 112 S.W.3d 397 (Mo. 2003), aff’d sub nom. Roper, 543 U.S. 551.
102 Id.
103 Roper, 543 U.S. 551.
104 See Roper, 543 U.S. at 569–71 (discussing the numerous developmental differences between juveniles and adults raised by Simmons and his amici and concluding that these “demonstrate that juvenile offenders cannot with reliability be classified among the worst offenders”); Brief for Am. Med. Ass’n et al. as Amici Curiae Supporting Respondent, Roper, 543 U.S. 551 (No. 03-633) (“This Court has concluded that [ ] adolescents who are under age 16 . . . exhibit characteristics . . . that categorically disqualify them from the death penalty. Offenders at age 16 and 17 exhibit those characteristics as well.”); Brief for Am. Psychological Ass’n & Mo. Psychological Ass’n as Amici Curiae Supporting Respondent, Roper, 543 U.S. 551 (No. 03-633) (“The unformed nature of adolescent character makes execution of 16- and 17-year-olds fall short of the purposes this Court has articulated for capital punishment. Developmentally immature decision-making, paralleled by immature neurological development, diminishes an adolescent’s blameworthiness.”).
105 Roper, 543 U.S. at 564, 568.
emerged in other countries.\footnote{The Court observed that only the United States and Somalia had not ratified Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which expressly prohibits capital punishment for crimes committed by juveniles. Id. at 576.} Then, drawing upon the same categorical analysis that it had employed in Atkins, the Court identified three fundamental features of youth that make juveniles constitutionally different from adults for purposes of capital sentencing: first, juveniles’ immaturity and limited self-control often causes them to act impulsively and without appreciation of the consequences of their actions, Justice Kennedy noted; second, juveniles’ increased susceptibility to peer pressure and inability to escape criminogenic environments diminishes their responsibility for unlawful behavior; and third, the transient nature of adolescent personality development means that it is harder to determine which juveniles are truly depraved, he concluded.\footnote{See id. at 569–71 (discussing these three distinctive features of adolescence). Justice Kennedy’s decision to rely on a “categorical” rather than an “as-applied” approach was met with considerable opposition. In her dissent, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor decried the Court’s use of a “categorical age-based rule” rather than an “individualized sentencing” methodology, id. at 602-03 (O’Connor, J., dissenting), while Justice Scalia argued that the majority’s “startling conclusion undermines the very foundations of our capital sentencing system, which entrusts juries with ‘mak[ing] the difficult and uniquely human judgments that defy codification and that buil[d] discretion, equity, and flexibility into a legal system.’” Id. at 620 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (quoting McCleskey v. Kemp, 481 U.S. 279, 311 (1987)).}

Justice Kennedy went on to explain that the developmental differences between juveniles and adults also diminished the penological justifications for imposing the death penalty. “Retribution is not proportional if the law’s most severe penalty is imposed on one whose culpability or blameworthiness is diminished, to a substantial degree, by reason of youth and immaturity,” Justice Kennedy noted, and “the same characteristics that render juveniles less culpable than adults suggest as well that juveniles will be less susceptible to deterrence.”\footnote{Id. at 571.} In a 5-4 decision, the Court set aside Simmons’ sentence and declared the death penalty unconstitutional for offenders who committed their crimes under the age of eighteen overruling Stanford v. Kentucky and marking the first time that the Court had applied proportionality principles to juveniles as a class.\footnote{Id. at 578–79.} The Court’s modern “kids are different” jurisprudence was born.
b. Graham v. Florida

Just four years after *Roper* was decided, the Court granted certiorari in *Graham v. Florida*.\(^{110}\) *Graham* presented a distinct but related question: did the same reduced culpability that precluded the state from imposing the death penalty on juveniles also preclude the state from sentencing juveniles who had not killed to the next harshest punishment—life without parole? Terrence Graham, who was sentenced to life without parole for the commission of armed robbery, an attempted armed robbery, and a subsequent parole violation that occurred when he was seventeen years old,\(^{111}\) argued that *Roper’s* diminished culpability rationale should be extended to juveniles who had been sentenced to life without parole for non-homicide offenses. Graham’s categorical challenge to a non-capital sentence created a methodological conundrum for the Court: would the Court invoke the narrow, “gross disproportionality” framework that it had used in the past for challenges to term-of-years sentences, or would it rely on *Roper’s* “categorical” ban analysis?

Justice Kennedy again wrote for the majority, and as he had in *Roper*, began with an inquiry into the “evolving standards of decency.”\(^{112}\) Noting that the practice of sentencing juvenile, non-homicide offenders to life without parole was “exceedingly rare,”\(^{113}\) Justice Kennedy turned to the Court’s “independent judgment,” which, he said, required “consideration of the culpability of the offenders at issue in light of their crimes and characteristics, along with the severity of the punishment in question.”\(^{114}\) Declaring that “the concept of proportionality is central to the Eighth Amendment,” Justice Kennedy went on to summarize the Court’s two distinct lines of proportionality jurisprudence.\(^{115}\) The first includes cases in which the Court has banned the death penalty for specific categories of offenders or offenses—“categorical” cases—while the second involves cases where the Court has considered whether a particular term-of-years sentence is “grossly disproportionate” to the offender or offense in question—“as-applied” cases.\(^{116}\) Acknowledging the difficulty of establishing a


\(^{111}\) *Id.* at 2019–20.

\(^{112}\) *Id.* at 2023 (quoting *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U. S. 97, 102 (1976)).

\(^{113}\) *Id.* at 2026.

\(^{114}\) *Id.*

\(^{115}\) *Id.* at 2021.

\(^{116}\) See Frase, *supra* note 73, at 9–10 (differentiating between the Court’s “categorical (all-cases-of-this-type) approach” and its “as-applied-to-these-facts approach” to proportionality review).
constitutio
al violation under the “narrow,” non-capital approach, Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. Justice Kennedy proceeded to the Court’s “categorical” prohibition cases. The appropriate analysis is the one used in cases that involved the categorical approach, specifically Atkins, Roper, and Kennedy,” Justice Kennedy affirmed.

Justice Kennedy first revisited the three major distinguishing features of youth that he had identified in Roper, concluding that because “[j]uveniles are more capable of change than are adults . . . [f]rom a moral standpoint it would be misguided to equate the failings of a minor with those of an adult, for a greater possibility exists that a minor’s character deficiencies will be reformed.” He then turned to the severity of the punishment itself. Like the death penalty, life without parole “alters the offender’s life by a forfeiture that is irrevocable,” he observed. Finally, Justice Kennedy considered whether sentencing juveniles who had not killed to life without parole “serves legitimate penological goals,” and concluded that it did not. The lack of penological justification, the diminished culpability of juvenile offenders, and the severity of life without parole sentences led Kennedy to conclude that sentencing juvenile non-homicide offenders to life without parole is disproportionate and therefore barred by the Eighth Amendment.

If Roper was groundbreaking, Graham was seismic. Central to Graham’s holding was the Court’s determination that juveniles are categorically less culpable than adults, doubly so when they had not killed, and as a result, they are categorically less deserving of the sentence of life without parole—a punishment which the Court expressly noted in Graham, was akin to death for juveniles. The Court also

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117 See Graham, 130 S. Ct. at 2022–23 (“[A] threshold comparison between the severity of the penalty and the gravity of the crime does not advance the analysis. Here, in addressing the question presented, the appropriate analysis is the one used in cases that involved the categorical approach . . . .”).

118 Id. at 2023.

119 Id. at 2026–27 (quoting Roper v. Simmons, 543 U.S. 551, 570 (2005)).

120 Id. at 2027.


122 Id. at 2030.


A young person who knows that he or she has no chance to leave prison before life’s end has little incentive to become a responsible individual . . . . A categorical rule against life without parole for juvenile nonhomicide offenders avoids the perverse consequence in which the lack of maturity that led to an offender’s crime is reinforced by the prison term.
explicitly dispensed with the stance of penal agnosticism that it had taken just seven years earlier in the companion cases of Ewing v. California and Lockyer v. Andrade, in which it had affirmed that, as long as the state has a reasonable basis for believing that the sentence in question serves some penological goal, the Court would not find it grossly disproportionate. The Court pivoted abruptly in Graham, holding that the sentence of life without parole for juveniles convicted of non-homicide offenses, like the death penalty in Atkins and Roper, was disproportionate because it did not advance any legitimate goals of punishment. Juveniles who did not kill had “twice diminished moral culpability,” Justice Kennedy noted, and none of the rationales for punishment could justify imposing upon them a sentence of life without parole. The significance of the Court’s methodological approach was immediately evident to scholars, advocates, and jurists. Graham had all but eviscerated the Court’s “death is different” approach to proportionality review.

In the aftermath of Graham, questions abounded about whether the Court was prepared to take the next logical step and ban juvenile life without parole outright. At the time, forty-two states permitted judges to impose life without parole sentences on juveniles convicted

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126 Id.
128 See Graham, 130 S. Ct. at 2046 (Thomas, J., dissenting). Justice Clarence Thomas complained that the majority’s reliance on its capital proportionality analysis “impose[s] a categorical proportionality rule banning life-without-parole sentences not just in this case, but in every case involving a juvenile nonhomicide offender, no matter what the circumstances.” Id. at 2047 (emphasis in original).
of homicide, and in twenty-seven of these states, the sentence was mandatory. When just a year after the Court decided Graham it granted certiorari in the cases of Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs, both advocates and scholars were stunned. 

c. Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs

Evan Miller and Kuntrell Jackson were both fourteen years old and accompanied by co-defendants when they committed their underlying offenses. In July 2003, Mr. Miller and another boy assaulted and robbed a neighbor near Mr. Miller’s trailer home in Alabama. The neighbor later died after the boys set fire to his house. Though Alabama law required Mr. Miller to be charged as a juvenile, it allowed the prosecutor to seek removal of the case to adult court. He did so, charging Mr. Miller as an adult with murder in the course of arson. Mr. Miller was convicted in 2006, and, under Alabama law, sentenced to a mandatory term of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. The Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals affirmed the conviction, and the Alabama Supreme Court denied review.

Mr. Jackson was with two friends in 1999 when the trio decided to rob a video store in Arkansas. Mr. Jackson waited outside and later entered to find one of the other boys demanding money from the

131 Id. at 4.
135 Id., 132 S. Ct. at 2462.
136 Id. (citing Ala. Code § 12–15–34 (1977)).
137 Id. at 2462–63.
138 Id. at 2463.
139 Id. at 2465.
140 Id. at 2461.
store clerk. When the clerk threatened to call the police, the boy shot and killed her. Mr. Jackson was convicted by an Arkansas jury of capital felony murder and aggravated robbery and subsequently sentenced to the “only one possible punishment”—mandatory life without parole. Mr. Jackson did not challenge the sentence on appeal, and the Arkansas Supreme Court affirmed his conviction. Mr. Jackson then filed a Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus arguing that the Court’s holding in *Roper v. Simmons* should be extended to sentences of life without parole. This argument was rejected.

In 2011, the Supreme Court granted certiorari in both Mr. Jackson and Mr. Miller’s cases. At the time, Mr. Miller’s case was pending on direct review from the Alabama Supreme Court, and Mr. Jackson’s case was already final. Despite their different procedural postures, the Court elected to consider both cases together. Like *Graham*, *Miller* and *Jackson* were framed as categorical challenges to non-capital sentences.

The cases were decided on June 25, 2012, and Justice Kagan wrote for the majority. Though, in many respects, *Miller* picked up where *Graham* left off methodologically, Justice Kagan was not as explicit about the Court’s application of a “categorical” approach as Justice Kennedy had been in *Graham*. Instead of beginning with a “national consensus” assessment, Justice Kagan began by reiterating *Graham*’s declaration that “proportionality is central to the Eighth Amendment.” *Miller* brought together “two strands” of Eighth Amendment precedent, she explained, and, without identifying them as such, promptly turned to the Court’s “categorical” ban line of cases. *Atkins, Kennedy, Roper,* and *Graham* were controlling, Justice Kagan explained, because each case banned a category of punishment (the

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141 *Id.*

142 *Id.*

143 *Id.* at 2461 (citing Ark. Code Ann. § 5-4-104(b) (1997)).


146 *Id.* at 106.

147 See Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 7, *Jackson*, 132 S. Ct. 2455 (No. 10-9647) (“*Graham* confirmed [Jackson’s] basic submission that juveniles sentenced to life imprisonment without parole could maintain categorical challenges to their sentences under the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments.”); Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 8-10, *Miller*, 132 S. Ct. 2455 (No. 10-9646) (“*Miller* continued to raise his categorical challenge to the constitutionality of sentencing a fourteen-year-old child to life imprisonment without parole . . . .”).


149 *Id.* at 2465.

150 *Id.*
death penalty in Atkins, Kennedy and Roper; life without parole in Graham because either the class of defendants (mentally retarded individuals in Atkins, juveniles in Roper, and juveniles who had not killed in Graham) was insufficiently culpable, or the class conduct (rape of a child in Kennedy) was insufficiently severe. By removing youth from the balance—by subjecting a juvenile to the same life-without-parole sentence applicable to an adult—[mandatory sentencing] laws prohibit a sentencing authority from assessing whether the law’s harshest term of imprisonment proportionately punishes a juvenile offender,” Justice Kagan concluded. That contravenes Graham’s (and also Roper’s) foundational principle: that imposition of a state’s most severe penalties on juvenile offenders cannot proceed as though they were not children.

The second strand of cases included those “requiring that sentencing authorities consider the characteristics of a defendant and the details of his offense before sentencing him to death.” These decisions were implicated, Kagan explained, because the Graham Court had drawn a direct comparison between life without parole for juveniles and the death penalty. While Roper, Graham, and Atkins focused principally on the vulnerability of the class of defendants in question, Woodsen, Lockett, and Eddings had focused on the severity of the punishment, engrafting an individualization requirement into capital sentencing because it is uniquely harsh. Because mandatory life-without-parole sentences for juveniles “preclude a sentencer from taking account of an offender’s age and the wealth of characteristics and circumstances attendant to it,” including “immaturity, impetuosity, and failure to appreciate risks and consequences,” as well as the juvenile’s “family and home environment,” and the circumstances of

151 Id. at 2463–65.
152 Id. at 2466.
153 Id.
the offense, they “pose[ ] too great a risk of disproportionate punishment,” Justice Kagan warned.

Though Kagan brushed rapidly past the threshold “objective indicia” inquiry, she did go through the motions. She then considered and rejected each of the major penological justifications for imposing mandatory life without parole on juveniles. Retribution could not justify the practice, because, by definition, a mandatory penalty precludes a sentencer from considering a juvenile’s diminished culpability; deterrence was inapplicable, as it was in Roper and Graham, because the same developmental characteristics that make juveniles less culpable also make them less deterrable. Incapacitation cannot justify mandatory life without parole, because juveniles cannot be said to be beyond repair; and rehabilitation is inapposite because life without parole “foreswears altogether the rehabilitative ideal.”

Though Justice Kagan declined to ban juvenile life without parole sentences outright, she took pains to make clear that all such sentences are now suspect. “[G]iven all that we have said in Roper, Graham and this decision about children’s diminished culpability, and heightened capacity for change, we think appropriate occasions for sentencing juveniles to this harshest possible penalty will be uncommon,” she cautioned.

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157 See Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2467–68.
158 Id. at 2469.
159 Some commentators have seen this as a signal that the Court is moving away from its “objective indicia” analysis. See, e.g., Ian P. Farrell, Abandoning Objective Indicia, 122 YALE L.J. ONLINE 303 (2013), available at http://yalelawjournal.org/2013/03/14/farrell.html (arguing that Justice Kagan’s opinion in Miller suggests that the Court “may be poised to abandon objective indicia [when applying the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause]” in favor of a “suspect categories” approach).
160 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2465.
161 Id. What the Court did not articulate, however, is how legislatures, courts, and review boards should incorporate the mitigating qualities of youth into sentencing and release decisions. Because they have been so deeply divided over Miller’s retroactivity, most state and federal courts have yet to address resentencing, while legislatures across the country are racing to amend their mandatory sentencing statutes. See, e.g., ALA. CODE § 13A-5-51 (2013) (delineating general mitigating factors to be considered when juveniles are convicted of capital crimes); N.C. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 15A-1340.19A (West 2012) (a juvenile convicted of first degree felony murder shall be sentenced to “life imprisonment with parole” and become eligible for parole release after a minimum of 25 years imprisonment). In July 2012, in an effort to avoid Miller’s resentencing quagmire altogether, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad commuted the mandatory life without parole sentences of thirty-eight juveniles to mandatory sixty-year prison terms. See Branstad commutes life sentences in North Iowa Cases, THE GLOBAL GAZETTE (July 16, 2012), available at http://globegazette.com/news/iowa/branstad-commutes-life-sentences-in-north-iowa-cases/article_149555d06-cf59-11e1-81f2401fa4b887a.html.
Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito all issued strong dissents, and Justice Scalia joined all three. All three dissents argued that the majority’s holding had broken from precedent in significant respects. “[T]he Court’s holding does not follow from Roper and Graham,” Chief Justice Roberts claimed bluntly.162 Graham was about non-homicide offenses, Chief Justice Roberts maintained, and “a case that expressly puts an issue in a different category from its own subject . . . cannot fairly be said to control that issue.”163 Roper was even less helpful than Graham, Roberts reasoned, because it had “expressly invoke[ed] ‘special’ Eighth Amendment analysis for death penalty cases.”164

Justice Thomas argued that Miller was wrongly decided, because the Court’s decision in Harmelin v. Michigan had already made clear that mandatory life without parole was constitutional.165 In response, Justice Kagan revisited the Court’s conclusion in Roper and Graham that “kids are different” for purposes of sentencing: “We have by now held on multiple occasions that a sentencing rule permissible for adults may not be so for children. . . . So if (as Harmelin recognized) ‘death is different,’ children are different too.”166 Justice Alito argued that, because multiple states allow mandatory life without parole for juveniles, no national consensus against it existed.167 To this, Justice Kagan responded with a passage that has loomed large in the debate over Miller’s retroactivity: “Our decision does not categorically bar a penalty for a class of offenders or type of crime—as, for example, we did in Roper or Graham. Instead, it mandates only that a sentencer follow a certain process—considering an offender’s youth and attendant characteristics—before imposing a particular penalty.”168 The doctrinal implications of this passage are explored in detail in Part II. But first, an overview of the Court’s retroactivity jurisprudence is warranted.

B. Retroactivity, Substance, and Procedure

The Supreme Court’s retroactivity jurisprudence has been well-documented over the last half century in a number of excellent arti-

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162 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2480 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
163 Id. at 2481.
164 Id.
165 Id. at 2485–86 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
166 Id. at 2470.
167 Id. at 2489.
168 Id. at 2471. The significance of this passage is discussed in Part III.C, infra.
The summary provided here is condensed and focuses principally on the emergence of the Court’s decision to limit the retroactive application of new rules of constitutional law to those that are “substantive.”

1. Linkletter v. Walker and the Birth of “Non-Retroactivity”

During the 1960s, the Supreme Court dramatically expanded the constitutional rights of criminal defendants as its decisions in cases like *Miranda v. Arizona* and *Mapp v. Ohio* began to call into ques-

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tion the legitimacy of thousands of convictions. At the same time, the availability of federal habeas corpus relief was expanding. As Justice Lewis Powell would later comment, the Court’s 1963 decision in *Fay v. Noia* removed “[the] final barrier to broad collateral reexamination of state criminal convictions . . . .”174 These expansions drove the Court to confront for the first time how to cabin the new rules it was so readily promulgating.175

The case of *Linkletter v. Walker* seemed to provide the ideal vehicle. The question in *Linkletter* was whether the Court’s 1961 decision in *Mapp v. Ohio,*176 which had made the exclusionary rule binding on state courts, would affect convictions that had become final before *Mapp* was decided.177 Concerned by the prospect of reversing “thousands”178 of cases, and insisting that the Constitution was indifferent to the issue, the Supreme Court declared for the first time that it had discretion to give full or partial retroactive effect to a decision creating a new constitutional rule.179 The Court devised a three-part inquiry which based a rule’s remedial scope on its “prior history,” its “purpose and effect,” and whether retrospective application would “further or retard its operation.”180 Under this new test, *Mapp* did not apply retroactively, the Court concluded.181

*Linkletter* sparked immediate criticism, most notably from University of Pennsylvania Law Professor Paul Mishkin. Characterizing the decision as “basically unwise,” Mishkin criticized the Court’s apparent rejection of the Blackstonian “declaratory” theory of judicial review—that courts interpret and declare the law, not create it—in favor of the approach endorsed by British philosopher John Austin—that courts may, at times, serve a legislative function.182 He argued that

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175 While “[t]here were flickers of [federal non-retroactivity earlier] . . . it was not until the late 1960s that these sparks found tinder. It was then that the Court found a need to engage in prospective overruling; it was then that the question of retroactivity truly emerged.” Roosevelt, *A Little Theory,* supra note 169 at 1089 (citing Griffin v. Illinois, 351 U.S. 12, 20 (1956) (Frankfurter, J., concurring) and Mosser v. Darrow, 341 U.S. 267, 275 (1951) (Black, J., dissenting)).
176 Mapp, 367 U.S. at 657.
178 Id. at 636.
179 Id. at 620.
180 Id. at 629.
181 Id. at 640.
182 Mishkin, supra note 169. Several scholars have explored Mishkin’s critique in depth. See Steven W. Allen, *Toward a Unified Theory of Retroactivity,* 54 N.Y.L. SCH. L. REV. 105, 115
new rules of constitutional law should be fully retroactive to cases on direct review, but should apply retroactively to cases on collateral review only to rectify constitutional errors.\(^{183}\) In many respects, Mishkin “recast the problem from one of retroactivity versus prospectivity to one of the availability of habeas corpus relief.”\(^{184}\) Nonetheless, the Warren Court continued to invoke the Linkletter test to minimize the impact of its rights-expanding changes to the law.\(^{185}\)

Two years later, in Stovall v. Denno,\(^{186}\) the Court somewhat modified its approach. At issue in Stovall was whether the Court’s holdings in United States v. Wade\(^{187}\) and Gilbert v. California,\(^{188}\) which guaranteed an accused the right to counsel at any critical points of pretrial confrontation and required the exclusion of identification evidence that had been tainted by faulty procedures, applied retroactively. The Court held that that decisions need not be given retroactive effect,\(^{189}\) reasoning that that, though “the exclusionary rules set forth in Wade and Gilbert are justified by the need to assure the integrity and reliability of our system of justice,” they were not indispensable to a fair trial.\(^{190}\)

2. Justice Harlan and the Importance of Finality

Like Linkletter v. Walker, Stovall v. Denno prompted swift criticism. The chief critic this time was Justice John Harlan, who began through several concurrences and dissents to develop his own approach to retroactivity.\(^{191}\) Justice Harlan agreed with Professor Mishkin that because pure prospectivity would violate the “case and controversy” re-

\(^{183}\) Mishkin, \textit{supra} note 169, at 86-87 (describing why new rules of constitutional law should apply retroactively to cases on collateral review only to rectify constitutional errors).

\(^{184}\) Lasch, \textit{supra} note 169, at 14.


\(^{187}\) 388 U.S. 218 (1967).

\(^{188}\) 388 U.S. 263 (1951).

\(^{189}\) Stovall, 388 U.S. at 296.

\(^{190}\) \textit{Id.} at 299.

quirement, and selective prospectivity would offend principles of equality, new constitutional rules should always apply to cases on direct review. \(^\text{192}\) It was permissible, however, for the Court to treat cases on collateral review differently, he argued. \(^\text{195}\) Habeas review had always been more limited in scope than direct review, Justice Harlan noted, largely because of “[t]he interest in leaving concluded litigation in a state of repose.” \(^\text{194}\)

In a lengthy dissent in *Mackey v. United States*, Justice Harlan expanded upon what he viewed as the paramount importance of “finality.” \(^\text{195}\) “Finality in the criminal law is an end which must always be kept in plain view,” he counseled. \(^\text{196}\) “No one, not criminal defendants, not the judicial system, not society as a whole is benefited by a judgment providing a man shall tentatively go to jail today, but tomorrow and every day thereafter his continued incarceration shall be subject to fresh litigation on issues already resolved.” \(^\text{197}\) In Harlan’s view, society’s interest in finality could outweigh even the reliability interest that would be served by retroactively applying constitutional rules “purportedly aimed at improving the factfinding process.” \(^\text{198}\)

In support of these views, Justice Harlan drew heavily upon an influential 1963 article by Professor Paul Bator and a 1970 article by Judge Henry J. Friendly. Professor Bator questioned the expansion of federal habeas corpus review, urging resistance to the “the impulse . . . to make doubly, triply, even ultimately sure that the particular judgment is just, that the facts as found are ‘true’ and the law applied ‘correct.’” \(^\text{199}\) Bator’s opposition to relitigating federal constitutional questions that had already been decided by state courts was animated primarily by concerns about finality. Finality, is critical to the “conservation of resources,” he wrote, “not only simple eco-

\(^{192}\) *Mackey*, 401 U.S. at 679 (Harlan, J., dissenting) (arguing that “fishing one case from the stream of appellate review, using it as a vehicle for pronouncing new constitutional standards, and then permitting a stream of similar cases subsequently to flow by unaffected by that new rule constitute an indefensible departure from th[e] model of judicial review . . . .”).

\(^{193}\) *Desist*, 394 U.S. at 262–63 (Harlan, J., dissenting) (arguing that the “threat of habeas serves as a necessary additional incentive for trial and appellate courts . . . to conduct their proceedings in a manner consistent with established constitutional standards” and that “[i]n order to perform this deterrence function, the habeas court need not . . . necessarily apply all ‘new’ constitutional rules retroactively”).

\(^{194}\) *Mackey*, 401 U.S. at 683 (Harlan, J., dissenting).

\(^{195}\) Id. at 690.

\(^{196}\) Id.

\(^{197}\) Id. at 691.

\(^{198}\) Id. at 694–95.

nomic resources, but all of the intellectual, moral, and political resources involved in the legal system.”

In a 1970 article, Judge Friendly took Bator’s arguments one step further, arguing that expanding opportunities for collateral review would not only expend resources, but would also harm the criminal law’s consequentialist objectives. Justice Harlan embraced these rationales, arguing that this paramount interest in finality counseled a general rule of non-retroactivity for cases pending on collateral review.

Justice Harlan did concede, however, that there were two exceptions to this general rule. The first was for constitutional rules which place “certain kinds of primary private individual conduct beyond the power of the criminal law making authority to proscribe,” and the second, for rules that recognize a new right of procedure that is “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty”—these should apply retroactively to cases on collateral review. These cases “represent[] the clearest instance where finality interests should yield,” he noted, because “[t]here is little societal interest in permitting the criminal process to rest at a point where it ought properly never to repose.”

3. Teague, Summerlin and the Substance/Procedure Dichotomy

Nearly two decades later, the Supreme Court would adopt Justice Harlan’s approach. In 1987, in Griffith v. Kentucky, the Court held that all new rules of constitutional law must apply retroactively to cases on direct review, and, just a year later, in Teague v. Lane, declared that such rules would not apply retroactively to cases on collateral review except in limited circumstances. Writing for a plurality of the Court in Teague, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor embraced Justice Harlan’s view that the proper focus of the retroactivity inquiry was not the purpose and predictability of the new rule, but rather the pur-

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200 Id. at 451.
202 Mackey, 401 U.S. at 688–89 (arguing that “it is sounder . . . generally to apply the law prevailing at the time a conviction became final than it is to seek to dispose of all these cases on the basis of intervening changes in constitutional interpretation”).
203 Id. at 692–93.
204 Id. at 693.
205 Griffith v. Kentucky, 479 U.S. 314, 328 (1987) (“We therefore hold that a new rule for the conduct of criminal prosecutions is to be applied retroactively to all cases.”).
206 Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288, 305–14 (1988) (O’Connor, J.) (plurality opinion) (“[T]he fact that life and liberty are at stake in criminal prosecutions ‘shows only that ‘conventional notions of ‘finality’ should not have as much place in criminal as in civil litigation, not that they should have none.’” (emphasis in original)).
pose of habeas corpus in the criminal justice system.\footnote{Id. at 308.} Agreeing with Justice Harlan that the role of habeas corpus was to deter misconduct rather than to ensure an error-free trial, Justice O'Connor maintained that blanket, retroactive amelioration was unnecessary to serve that end.\footnote{Id. at 305–07 (quoting Justice Harlan arguing that it is “sounder, in adjudicating habeas petitions, generally to apply the law prevailing at the time a conviction became final”).} With this in mind, and in the “interests of comity and finality,” Justice O'Connor concluded that new constitutional rules would not apply retroactively to cases on collateral review, subject to two exceptions: the first was for rules that “place[ ] ‘certain kinds of primary, private individual conduct beyond the power of the criminal law-making authority to proscribe’”\footnote{Id. at 307 (quoting Mackey, 401 U.S. at 692) (‘[I]n some situations it might be that time and growth in social capacity, as well as judicial perceptions of what we can rightly demand of the adjudicatory process, will properly alter our understanding of the bedrock procedural elements that must be found to vitiate the fairness of a particular conviction.” (emphasis in original)). This was subsequently found to include decisions that place a certain class of persons outside of a state’s power to punish.; See also Penry v. Lynaugh, 492 U.S. 302, 339 (1989), overruled in part on other grounds by Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304 (2002) (urging courts to rely on the concept of “mental age” when sentencing).} and the second, much narrower exception was for watershed rules of criminal procedure that are “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty” and affect the accuracy of the conviction.\footnote{Teague, 489 U.S. at 311.} The Court extended these exceptions several months later in Penry v. Lynaugh to include rules that “deprive[ ] the [s]tate of the power to impose a certain penalty” as well as those that deprive the state of the “power to punish at all.”\footnote{Penry, 492 U.S. at 330, abrogated on other grounds by Atkins, 536 U.S. 304.}

rule,’” its extraordinarily restrictive second exception for “watershed” rules of criminal procedure, and its treatment of retroactivity as a “threshold test.” Teague’s first exception—for rules that place certain categories of people and offenses outside the state’s power to punish—did not draw as much sustained attention, however, until the Court’s 2004 decision in Schriro v. Summerlin.

In Summerlin, the Court was asked to determine whether its 2002 decision in Ring v. Arizona, that the Sixth Amendment requires a jury (not a judge) to find aggravating factors necessary for imposition of the death penalty, applies retroactively to cases on federal habeas review. Writing for the majority, Justice Scalia took the opportunity to recast Teague’s first exception—for rules that place certain classes of persons and types of conduct outside of a state’s power to punish—as an exception for “substantive” rules. Justice Scalia defined substantive rules as those that “narrow the scope of a criminal statute by interpreting its terms” and “place particular conduct or persons covered by the statute beyond the state’s power to punish.” They “generally apply retroactively,” he explained, because they “necessarily carry a significant risk that a defendant stands convicted of ‘an act that the law does not make criminal’ or faces a punishment that the law cannot impose upon him.”

Procedural rules are treated differently, Justice Scalia wrote, because “[t]hey do not produce a class of persons convicted of conduct the law does not make criminal, but merely raise the possibility that someone convicted with use of the invalidated procedure might have

213 See, e.g., Lyn S. Entzeroth, Reflections on Fifteen Years of the Teague v. Lane Retroactivity Paradigm: A Study of the Persistence, the Pervasiveness, and the Perversity of the Court’s Doctrine, 35 N.M. L. REV. 161, 212 (2005) (“As fifteen years of Teague have taught, the new rule doctrine is interpreted in such an extraordinarily broad manner that it is removed from the traditional concerns and concepts that gave rise to retroactivity limits in general and in the context of habeas corpus proceedings in particular.”); Yin, supra note 169, at 287 (“Teague and its progeny have failed to provide sufficient guidance for determining when a rule is new, thus leaving federal courts a zone of discretion with which they can make outcome determinative decisions without necessarily reaching the merits of the claims.”).
214 See, e.g., Roosevelt III, A Retroactivity Retrospective, supra note 169, at 1694 (“[N]o new procedural rule has yet satisfied the Teague exception, and the Court has strongly intimated that none shall.”).
218 Id. at 352.
219 Id. at 351–52.
220 Id. (citing Bousley v. United States, 523 U.S. 614, 620 (1998)).
been acquitted otherwise.” The only procedural rules that should apply retroactively are “‘watershed rules of criminal procedure’” which implicate the “fundamental fairness and accuracy of the criminal proceeding” and “without which the likelihood of an accurate conviction is seriously diminished.” Gideon v. Wainwright, is the “prototypical example” of such a rule, he noted. The rule articulated in Ring was merely “procedural,” Justice Scalia concluded, because it did not substantively modify Arizona law, but simply obligated the state to prove the Arizona statute’s aggravating factors to a jury. “Rules that allocate decisionmaking authority,” Justice Scalia insisted, “are prototypical procedural rules.”

4. The Definition of a “Substantive” Rule

A recent article by Jason Zarrow and William Milliken, which examines the interplay between Teague, § 2254 of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), and Miller v. Alabama, makes the case that the Supreme Court “has acted like a common-law court” when it comes to retroactivity, “expanding the doctrine on a case-by-case basis.” The Court’s definition of “substantive rules” is actually an amalgam of three to four “sub-rules,” the authors contend, which were promulgated by the Court in a series of decisions stretching over fifteen years.

First, a rule is substantive if it places primary, private conduct beyond the power of the state to proscribe. Second, a rule is substantive if it prohibits a certain category of punishment for a certain class of defendant because of their status or offense. Third, a rule is sub-

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221 Id. at 352.
222 Id. (quoting Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288, 311, 313 (1988) (plurality opinion)).
225 Summerlin, 542 U.S. at 553.
226 Id.
227 Zarrow & Milliken, supra note 31, at 38.
228 Id. at 39 (citing Saffle, 494 U.S. at 494). This was the entirety of the substantive-rule exception as first articulated in Teague. See Teague, 489 U.S. at 311 (citing Mackey v. United States, 401 U.S. 667, 692 (1971) (Harlan, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)). An example of this type of substantive rule would be the holding of Lawrence v. Texas, which prohibited the criminalization of sodomy. 539 U.S. 558, 578 (2003)).
stantive if it narrows the scope of a criminal statute by interpreting its terms or, fourth, modifies the elements of the offense for which the individual was convicted or punished.

Zarrow and Milliken’s approach to the “substantive” rule exception provides analytical clarity that has been largely missing from the academic commentary on retroactivity. Where Zarrow and Milliken see four sub-rules, however, I see six. The second and fourth rules identified by Zarrow and Milliken can themselves be subdivided. The *Penry* sub-rule, which defines substantive rules as those that “prohibit of a certain category of punishment for a certain class of defendant because of their status or offense,” can be further divided into those rules which (1) proscribe a “category” of punishment for a class of individuals, (which is what the Court did in *Atkins* and *Roper* when it banned the death penalty for “mentally retarded” defendants and juveniles); and which (2) restrict the class of individuals who may receive a particular punishment because of their status or offense, (which is what the Court did in *Graham* when it restricted life without parole to only those juveniles who committed homicide). Similarly, the *Summerlin* sub-rule—that substantive rules are those that “modify the elements of the offense for which the individual was convicted or punished”—can be divided into those which: (1) alter the range of sentencing outcomes that a state may impose; and those which (2) change the “essential facts” a state must consider before imposing a type of punishment. These are fine distinctions, to be sure (and might amount to distinctions without a difference in another context), but, as Part II illustrates, these distinctions have proven critical as lower courts attempt to define the remedial scope of new constitutional rules.

Zarrow and Milliken also make the case that, while the substantive rule exception has plainly been expanded from its original scope—which applied only to those rules that place private conduct beyond the state power to punish—it remains moored to its roots in the

\[\text{footnotes}...\]
Court’s habeas corpus jurisprudence. As habeas corpus relief was historically available for prisoners challenging the state’s jurisdiction to impose punishment, the substantive rule exception counsels that such protections ought to be available whenever the Court articulates new constitutional protections which substantially alter the state’s power to punish. While Zarrow and Milliken insist that the “Court has not deviated from a categorical understanding of the substantive-rule exception,” however, I argue in Part II that the substantive rule exception should be understood to apply more broadly to any rule that compels the state to alter its substantive laws in fundamental ways, irrespective of whether the rule bans a distinct category of punishment.

II. MILLER’S RETROACTIVITY

Almost as soon as the Supreme Court issued its opinion in Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs on June 25, 2012, questions arose about the remedial scope of the ruling. “The court did not specify whether the ruling was retroactive or how states should comply, and the legal ramifications remain unclear,” Boston Globe reporters lamented just hours after the decision came down. Over the last two years, this initial uncertainty has taken on a life of its own as courts, legislators, and advocates across the country have wrestled with the question of whether Miller applies retroactively to the more than 2,100 individuals sentenced to mandatory life without parole for juvenile offenses, but whose cases were final when Miller was decided. This Part traces the post-Miller retroactivity litigation that has consumed and divided both federal and state courts for the last two and a half years. Miller has “procedural attributes,” but these attributes are components of a broader mandate that is fundamentally “substantive” in at least two respects.

A. An Exercise in “Line-Drawing”

Since June 2012, dozens of federal and state courts have been asked to determine whether Miller applies retroactively to cases on
collateral review. As of the writing of this Article, thirteen state courts of last resort had ruled on the merits of Miller’s retroactivity. Nine of these (Iowa, Mississippi, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Texas, Wyoming, Illinois, and South Carolina) have ruled that Miller applies retroactively, while four (Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and Michigan) have concluded that it does not. Just one United States court of appeal, the Fourth Circuit, has squarely decided Miller’s retroactivity, ruling that Miller does not apply retroactively. Five federal appeals courts (the First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Eight Circuits) have allowed habeas corpus petitions to proceed on the basis that Miller presents a prima facie case of retroactivity, while the Fifth and Eleventh Circuits have dismissed such petitions on the basis that Miller does not apply retroactively. These decisions are laid out briefly.

In every decision issued to date, the question has, for the most part, come down to the court’s application of the Teague substance/procedure inquiry, albeit with varied analytics. Those courts finding the Miller rule to be substantive have articulated three primary rationales. The most widely invoked rationales rely on the Penry sub-rules: that Miller is substantive because it banned a specific category of punishment—mandatory life without parole—for a specific class of offenders—juveniles—because of their status. The Supreme Courts of Mississippi, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Illinois, Texas, and South Carolina have all based their decision to

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239 Jones v. State, 122 So. 3d 698, 702 (Miss. 2013) (stating that Miller is substantive because it “explicitly foreclosed the imposition of a mandatory sentence of life without parole on juvenile offenders”).

240 State v. Ragland, 836 N.W.2d 107, 115 (Iowa 2013) ( “[Miller’s] procedural rule for a hearing is the result of a substantive change in the law that prohibits mandatory life-without-parole sentencing. Thus, the case bars states from imposing a certain type of punishment on certain people.”).

241 Diatchenko v. Dist. Attorney for Suffolk Dist., 1 N.E.3d 270, 281 (Mass. 2013) (finding Miller retroactive because it “forecloses the imposition of a certain category of punishment—mandatory life in prison without the possibility of parole—on a specific class of defendants” and because the Supreme Court retroactively applied Miller in Jackson).

242 State v. Mantich, 842 N.W.2d 716, 730 (Neb. 2014) (“In essence, Miller amounts to something close to a de facto substantive holding, because it sets forth the general rule that life imprisonment without parole should not be imposed upon a juvenile except in the rarest of cases where that juvenile cannot be distinguished from an adult based on diminished capacity or culpability.” (internal quotations and footnotes omitted)).

243 People v. Davis, 6 N.E.3d 709, 722 (Ill. 2014) (stating that Miller is substantive because it “places a particular class of persons covered by the statute—juveniles—constitutionally beyond the State’s power to punish with a particular category of punishment—mandatory sentences of natural life without parole.”).

244 Ex parte Maxwell, 424 S.W.3d 66, 75 (Tex. Crim. App. 2014) (“We conclude that [the Miller rule] is a new substantive rule that puts a juvenile’s mandatory life without parole sen-
apply *Miller* retroactively on some version of this reasoning. The Mississippi Supreme Court relied on a related rationale, concluding that *Miller* was substantive because it narrowed the class of juveniles who can be subjected to life without parole. The court noted:

Prior to *Miller*, everyone convicted of murder in Mississippi was sentenced to life imprisonment and was ineligible for parole. Following *Miller*, Mississippi’s current sentencing and parole statutes could not be followed in homicide cases involving juvenile defendants. Our sentencing scheme may be applied to juveniles only after applicable *Miller* characteristics and circumstances have been considered by the sentencing authority. As such, *Miller* modified our substantive law by narrowing its application for juveniles.²⁴⁶

The second less frequently invoked rationale is that *Miller* affected a substantive change to state sentencing laws. The Supreme Courts of Wyoming²⁴⁷ and New Hampshire²⁴⁸ have relied on this argument. Several of these courts have also cited as supportive of their holdings the fact that the Supreme Court applied the *Miller* rule in *Miller*’s companion case, *Jackson v. Hobbs*.²⁴⁹ This was significant because unlike Evan Miller’s case, Kuntrell Jackson’s case was on collateral rule review when *Miller* was decided. In *Diatchenko v. District Attorney for Suffolk County*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court noted:

> Our conclusion is supported by the fact that in *Miller* . . . the Supreme Court retroactively applied the rule that it was announcing in that case to

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²⁴⁶ Jones v. State, 122 So. 3d 698, 702 (Miss. 2013).

²⁴⁷ State v. Mares, 335 P.3d 487, 507 (Wyo. 2014) (holding that while *Miller* “certainly has a procedural component” it is a substantive rule because it “has effected a substantive change in the sentencing statutes applicable to juvenile offenders”).


²⁴⁹ State v. Mantich, 287 N.W.2d 716, 731 (Neb. 2014) (“We also find it noteworthy that the Court applied the rule announced in *Miller* to *Jackson*, who was before the Court on collateral review . . . . [W]e are not inclined to refuse to apply the rule announced in *Miller* to a defendant before us on collateral review when the Court has already applied the rule to a defendant before it on collateral review.”); State v. Ragland, 836 N.W.2d 107, 116 (Iowa 2013) (“The procedural posture of the *Miller* decision further supports retroactive application . . . . [T]he Supreme Court specifically held the new rule applied not only to the defendant in *Miller*, but also to the defendant in *Jackson* on collateral review . . . . There would have been no reason for the Court to direct such an outcome if it did not view the *Miller* rule as applying retroactively to cases on collateral review.”).
the defendant in the companion case who was before the Court on collateral review. . . . After holding that the imposition of sentence on a juvenile homicide offender was unconstitutional because it constituted "cruel and unusual punishment," the Supreme Court applied this "new" rule to Jackson’s case. [Miller] at 2469, 2473–2475. As the Court stated in Teague, 489 U.S. at 300, "once a new rule is applied to the defendant in the case announcing the rule, evenhanded justice requires that it be applied retroactively to all who are similarly situated." 250

Though a decision is imminent in the Eighth Circuit, 251 no federal appeals court has yet to find Miller retroactive. However, the United States Courts of Appeal for the First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Eighth Circuits have all authorized successive habeas corpus petitions on the grounds that Miller either applies retroactively to cases on collateral review or presents a prima facie case of retroactivity. In each case, the Courts have found, in fairly perfunctory orders, that Miller articulated a "substantive rule." 252

252 See Evans-Garcia v. United States, 744 F.3d 235, 238 (1st Cir. 2014) ("We need not answer [the question of whether Miller is retroactive] because the government has also conceded that Miller has been made retroactive, at least under the prima facie standard."); Wang v. United States, No. 13-2426, 2013 U.S. App. LEXIS 20386, at *1–2 (2d Cir. July 16, 2013) (granting motion to file a successive habeas corpus petition after finding that the petitioner had made a successful prima facie showing that Miller is substantive and therefore retroactive); Stone v. United States, No. 13-1486 (2d Cir. June 7, 2013) (same); In re Pendleton, 732 F.3d 280, 283 (3d Cir. 2013) (same); In re James, No. 12-287 (4th Cir. May 10, 2013) (same); Johnson v. United States, 720 F.3d 720, 720 (8th Cir. 2013) (same).

Several federal district courts have summarily concluded that the Miller rule applies retroactively as a new substantive rule. See, e.g., Hill v. Snyder, No. 10-14568, 2013 WL 364198, at *1–2 (E.D. Mich. Jan. 30, 2013) (holding the Miller rule is retroactive to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 plaintiffs who challenged the constitutionality of a Michigan statute that prohibits the Michigan parole board from considering for parole those sentenced to life in prison for first-degree murder). The court noted that "if ever there was a legal rule that should—as a matter of law and morality—be given retroactive effect, it is the rule announced in Miller. To hold otherwise would allow the state to impose unconstitutional punishment on some persons but not others, an intolerable miscarriage of justice." Id. at *2 (emphasis in original). In a footnote, the court stated it "would find Miller retroactive on collateral review, because it is a new substantive rule, which ‘generally applies retroactively.’" Id. at *2 n.2 (citation omitted); see also Songster v. Beard, No. 04-5916, 2014 WL 3731459, at *3 (E.D. Pa. July 29, 2014) ("[Miller] eliminated the ‘significant risk’ that a punishment that the law cannot impose would be imposed—a juvenile would be sentenced to die in prison when he would not otherwise be sentenced because of his peculiar characteristics associated with his youth."); Flowers v. Roy, 13-cv-01508, at 13–14 (D. Minn. May 1, 2014) (applying Miller retroactively to case on collateral review both because "the Supreme Court has already made the Miller rule retroactive to cases on collateral review" by granting relief in Jackson, and because "Miller is a substantive rule because it puts juveniles as a class beyond the reach of criminal statutes like Minn. Stat. § 609.106 . . ."); Alejandro v. United States, No. 13-4364, 2013 WL 4574066, at *1–2 (S.D.N.Y. Aug. 22, 2013) (granting petitioner’s successive motion to set aside sentence of life imprisonment
By contrast, every court denying retroactive application to *Miller* has done so on the grounds that *Miller* is a procedural rule that does not rise to the level of a “watershed rule.” In each case, courts have leaned heavily upon Justice Kagan’s now-well-cited assurance that “*Miller* does not categorically bar a penalty for a class of offenders or type of crime” but “mandates only that a sentencer follow a certain process . . . .” The Supreme Courts of Minnesota, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Michigan have all deemed *Miller* procedural on this basis.

In March 2015, the Fourth Circuit became the first federal appeals court to rule squarely on the merits of *Miller*’s retroactivity. In *Johnson v. Ponton*, the Court held that *Miller* was not a substantive rule because it did not categorically bar life without parole for juveniles, and did not rise to the level of a watershed rule of criminal procedure. The panel also explicitly rejected the argument that the Supreme Court’s application of the *Miller* rule to *Jackson* was sufficient to establish its retroactivity. In addition, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held in an unpublished opinion in 2013 that *Miller* was

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254 Chambers v. State, 831 N.W.2d 311, 328 (Minn. 2013) (reasoning that *Miller* is procedural because it did not “eliminate the power of the State to impose the punishment of life imprisonment without the possibility of release,” but merely mandated that “a sentencer follow a certain process—considering an offender’s youth and attendant characteristics—before imposing a sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole”).
255 State v. Tate, 130 So. 3d 829, 837 (La. 2013) (“[Miller] simply altered the range of permissible methods for determining whether a juvenile could be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for such a conviction, mandating only that a sentence follow a certain process—considering an offender’s youth and attendant circumstances—before imposing a particular penalty.”).
256 Commonwealth v. Cunningham, 81 A.3d 1, 10 (Pa. 2013) (*Miller* is procedural because, “by its own terms, the *Miller* decision does not categorically bar” the sentence of life without parole for juveniles).
257 People v. Carp, 828 N.W.2d 685, 711 (Mich. App. 2012) (“It is simply the manner and factors to be considered in the imposition of that particular sentence that *Miller* dictates, rendering the ruling procedural and not substantive in nature.”).
259 Id. at *4.
not retroactive because was not a categorical rule, and the Eleventh Circuit barred a successive habeas petition on the same basis.

What has been apparent to jurists on both sides of the issue, however, is that the “modern application of the Teague doctrine . . . [is] more an exercise in (perhaps necessary) line drawing than as a precise demarcation between rules which are innately substantive versus procedural in character, or as an effort to address the treatment of the vast range of rules having both attributes in varying degrees.”

In all probability, it is the extreme variation in analytical approaches taken and outcomes reached by these lower courts that prompted the Court on December 12, 2014 to grant certiorari in the case of *Toca v. Louisiana*. Mr. Toca’s petition was the fifth presented to the Court in the last year. The Court had already denied two from states that had deemed *Miller* retroactive—Illinois and Nebraska—and two that had reached the opposite conclusion—Pennsylvania and Louisiana.

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260 *See Craig v. Cain*, No. 12-30035, 2013 WL 69128, at *2 (5th Cir. Jan. 4, 2013) (”*Miller* does not satisfy the test for retroactivity because it does not categorically bar all sentences of life imprisonment for juveniles; *Miller* bars only those sentences made mandatory by a sentencing scheme. Therefore, the first *Teague* exception does not apply.” (citations omitted)).

261 *In re Morgan*, 713 F.3d 1365, 1368 (11th Cir. 2013) (”*Miller* changed the procedure by which a sentencer may impose a sentence of life without parole on a minor by requiring the sentencer to take into account how children are different, and how those differences counsel against irrevocably sentencing them to a lifetime in prison. And the Court declined to consider a categorical bar on life without parole for juveniles, or at least those 14 and younger.” (citations and internal quotations omitted)).


262 *See, e.g., Commonwealth v. Cunningham*, 81 A.3d 1, 5 n.7 (Pa. 2013).

263 *See, e.g., Cunningham*, 81 A.3d 1, *cert. denied*, 134 S. Ct. 2724 (2014) (denying review of Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s denial of retroactive application); *State v. Tate*, 111 So. 3d 1013 (La. 2013), *cert. denied* 134 S. Ct. 2663 (2014) (denying review of Louisiana Supreme Court’s denial of retroactive application); *People v. Davis*, 6 N.E.3d 709 (Ill. 2014), *cert. denied* 135 S. Ct. 710 (2014) (denying review of Illinois Supreme Court’s grant of retroac-
Toca v. Louisiana was dismissed on February 3, 2015, however, after Mr. Toca was released by the state of Louisiana unexpectedly after thirty years in prison. Three other petitions are currently pending before the Court, and based on its decision to hear Toca, the Court seems likely to decide the issue in the near future.

B. The Substance of Miller

While Miller’s mandate that states engraft into their sentencing schemes a mechanism through which sentencers can take an individualized look at each juvenile convicted of homicide has “procedural” attributes, I agree with those courts and commentators who have concluded that Miller is a fundamentally “substantive” decision. This conclusion relies on the Penry and Summerlien “sub-rules”, which themselves can be broken into two types. Perhaps the stronger argument relies on Summerlin, which decision was, ironically, a non-retroactivity decision. In Summerlin, Justice Scalia identified what was ever-expanding, but nameless set of exceptions to the Teague ban and divided them into two categories. The first included constitutional rules that require states merely to alter the method by which they apply a particular law, which he deemed “procedural,” and the second, rules which “modify the elements of an offense,” which he labeled “substantive.” Unlike procedural rules, whose purpose is to enhance the fairness and accuracy of state sentencing processes by requiring states to shore up the methods through which they determine guilt and administer punishment, he implied, substantive rules do something more fundamental—they usurp the State’s jurisdiction over the substance its own laws.

Under Summerlin, Miller is a substantive rule because it modifies state sentencing laws by changing the “essential facts” a state must consider before imposing a sentence of life without parole, and by
expanding the range of sentencing outcomes available to juveniles convicted of homicide. The other rationales, which have been invoked in some form by six of the nine state supreme courts to hold Miller retroactive, rely on the Penry sub-rules. Under Penry, Miller is substantive both because it strips states of their authority to impose a distinct “category” of punishment—mandatory life without parole—on a class of individuals, and because it narrows the class of juveniles eligible for such punishment. I address each rationale in turn.

1. Modifying State Sentencing Laws

Miller modified state sentencing laws by imposing upon states new factors that sentencers must consider before imposing a sentence of life without parole and by expanding the range of sentencing outcomes available to juveniles convicted of homicide. Prior to Miller, a juvenile convicted of homicide in states with mandatory sentencing provisions was not afforded any individualized consideration. Without any acknowledgment of his age, role in the offense, maturity, mental acuity, history of trauma and abuse or family background, the sentencer did little more than order the juvenile to serve out the mandated sentence. After Miller, before she can impose a life without parole sentence, state sentencers must consider factors that relate to the youth’s overall culpability. According to Miller, factors must include: (1) the juvenile’s “chronological age” and related “immaturity, impetuosity, and failure to appreciate risks and consequences;” (2) the juvenile’s “family and home environment that surrounds him;” (3) “the circumstances of the homicide offense, including the extent of his participation in the conduct and the way familial and peer pressures may have affected him;” (4) the “incompetencies associated with youth” in dealing with law enforcement and a criminal justice system designed for adults; and (5) “the possibility of rehabilitation.” Because Miller requires the sentencer “to take into account how children are different, and how those differences counsel against irrevocably sentencing them to a lifetime in prison,” the Court has

269 Id. at 353.
270 See supra text accompanying notes 239–45.
272 Summerlin, 542 U.S. at 352–53 (citing Saffle v. Parks, 494 U.S. 484, 495 (2002)).
274 Id. at 2468.
275 Id. at 2469.
made consideration of these factors “essential” to imposing life without parole on juveniles.

States have begun to comply with this mandate. Hawaii, for example, now requires that a sentencing court consider the following factors when sentencing a juvenile convicted of homicide:

(a) Age of the defendant at the time of the offense; (b) Impetuosity of the defendant at the time of the offense; (c) Family and community environment of the defendant; (d) Ability of the defendant to appreciate the risks and consequences of the conduct; (e) Intellectual capacity of the defendant; (f) The outcome of any comprehensive mental health evaluation conducted by an adolescent mental health professional licensed in the State of Hawaii; (g) Family or peer pressure on the defendant; (h) Level of the defendant’s participation in the offense; (i) Ability of the defendant to participate meaningfully in the defendant’s defense; (j) Capacity for rehabilitation; (k) School records and any special education evaluations of the defendant; (l) Trauma history of the defendant; (m) Community involvement of the defendant; (n) Involvement in the child welfare system; and (o) Any other mitigating factor or circumstance the court deems relevant to its decision. 276

Miller has also compelled states to expand the range of sentencing outcomes available to juveniles convicted of homicide. Before Miller, juveniles convicted of first-degree homicide in the states in question were given a single sentence—mandatory life without parole. Miller stripped twenty-eight states and the federal government of their authority to impose this sentence and required them to formulate an alternative range of sentences. In the months since Miller was decided, the magnitude of this mandate has become plain. At least thirteen states have now replaced their automatic first-degree murder sentencing provisions for juveniles with a range of alternatives. 277 Five states have opted for an alternative sentencing range of twenty-five years to life in prison with periodic review, 278 for example. Others have selected a determinate sentence of forty to life. 279 In doing so, states were necessarily required to consider juveniles’ reduced culpability and decide whether, given all the Supreme Court has said about the incomparable severity of life without parole, to continue to im-

279 Leg. 44, 103rd Leg., 1st Sess. (Neb. 2013); S. 2, 83rd Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2013). As I have argued elsewhere in this Article, many of these laws are likely to fall prey to future proportionality challenges based on adolescents’ diminished culpability.
pose discretionary life without parole sentences upon juveniles. In
Miller’s aftermath, at least three state legislatures have decided to

In more than half of the twenty-eight affected states, Miller has al-
ready done far more than alter a single method of administering a sen-
tence; it has entirely reshaped both how and how much these states
punish juveniles convicted of homicide. This readily distinguishes
Miller from the rule at issue in Summerlin. In Summerlin, the Court
found that the rule announced in Ring v. Arizona, which held that a
jury rather than a judge must find the aggravating factors necessary to
impose the death penalty, was “procedural.”\footnote{Schriro v. Summerlin, 542 U.S. 348, 353–54 (2004).} Justice Scalia based this conclusion on the fact that Ring merely “allocate[d] decisionmaking authority” without altering state law.\footnote{Id.} In contrast to Ring, however, Miller does not simply reallocate decision-making au-
thority, it creates decision-making authority where there was none.
Miller can also be distinguished from United States v. Booker, which
held that the Federal Sentencing Guidelines were not binding on
federal courts under the Sentencing Reform Act.\footnote{543 U.S. 220 (2005).} While both Booker and Miller restored sentencing discretion to the trial courts and in doing so, expanded the range of sentences courts could impose, Miller did something more—it compelled states to incorporate into this new discretionary decision-point a series of factors that explicitly “take in-
to account how children are different, and how those differences
counsel against irrevocably sentencing them to a lifetime in prison.”\footnote{132 S. Ct. at 2469.}

2. Narrowing the Class and Proscribing the Punishment

Miller may also be deemed substantive because it narrowed the
class of juveniles who may be subjected to life without parole. Before
Miller, every juvenile convicted of first-degree murder in states with
such mandatory statutes was sentenced to life without parole. Yet,
Miller explicitly counseled that, “[b]ecause juveniles have diminished
culpability and greater prospects for reform . . . ‘they are less deser-
ving of the most severe punishments.’”\footnote{Id. at 2464 (quoting Graham v. Florida, 130 S. Ct. 2011, 2026 (2010)).} While the Court did not
eliminate states’ authority to impose life without parole, it made clear
that such sentences should henceforth be “uncommon.” Thus, after *Miller*, even discretionary life without parole sentences are suspect. It also stands to reason that if, as Justice Scalia maintained in *Summerlin*, a metric for substance is the relative “risk” that an offender is serving an unconstitutional sentence, the narrowing of this class of defendants by the Court to the “rare” juvenile increases the possibility that many of those already serving life without parole are subject to “a punishment that the law cannot impose upon [them].”

*Miller* also proscribes a distinct “category” of punishment for a class of offenders because of their status. Mandatory life without parole sentences are qualitatively harsher than alternative sentencing schemes in which life without parole is a discretionary alternative. As the Supreme Court explained in 2013 in *Alleyne v. United States*, “[m]andatory minimum sentences increase the penalty for a crime,” and it is “impossible to dissociate the floor of a sentencing range from the penalty affixed to the crime.” “Elevating the low-end of a sentencing range heightens the loss of liberty associated with the crime,” the Court stated. Mandatory life without parole for a juvenile is substantively harsher than a discretionary life without parole sentence because it forecloses the possibility that a juvenile could receive a reduced sentence. It is also conceptually harsher. Mandatory life without parole is a punishment that gained favor in the “get tough” era of the 1990s as the ultimate expression of society’s view that certain offenders are so culpable and irredeemable, and their offenses so heinous, that they do not deserve the individualized consideration normally afforded defendants in this country. It ascended during the so-called super-predator era of juvenile justice—a time when the Progressive ideals of care and rehabilitation gave way almost entirely to the goal of incapacitation. Other than death, there is no punishment more incapacitating than life without parole and no more inhumane way to impose it than automatically.

This argument, of course, runs squarely into Justice Kagan’s characterization of *Miller* as a decision that “does not categorically bar a penalty for a class of offenders or type of crime” and instead “requires

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286 Id. at 2481.
289 Id. at 2161.
only that a sentencer follow a certain process.” A cynical reading of this passage would be that it reflects little more than the judicial bartering sometimes required to attract majority support for a decision. But, this seems unlikely. What makes the passage especially curious is that it is in direct conflict with other aspects of the decision. Even as Justice Kagan assured Miller’s dissenters that Miller did not categorically bar a penalty, she also took pains to craft Miller’s holding from the Court’s categorical and individualization proportionality jurisprudence. Unlike rules arising under other constitutional provisions, which premise their prophylactic mandates on the need for accuracy, reliability and fairness, Miller bases the elimination of mandatory life without parole for juveniles on the reduced culpability of adolescents as a class, the harshness and irrevocability of life without parole as a category, and the fact that mandatory sentences do not allow decision-makers to take either of these into account.

Two independent strands of the Court’s proportionality jurisprudence factor into the result. The first, the Roper/Graham strand, established that juveniles are categorically different from adults and less deserving of harsh punishment, while the second, the Woodson/Lockett/Eddings line, established that, when the most severe available punishments are at stake, the state must give individual defendants the opportunity to mitigate. It was the “confluence” of the individualization cases and the categorical prohibition cases that drove the result. Were Miller only about the procedural right to individualized sentencing, Justice Kagan could have based the decision on the Woodson/Lockett/Eddings line of cases alone. She did not do that. Justice Kagan also positioned Miller as a classic proportionality decision in the mold of the Court’s capital jurisprudence—a categorical, all-cases-of-this-type ruling, explicitly modeled after Graham, Roper, and the Court’s earlier cases imposing substantive limits on

292 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2455, 2459.
293 See Part I, supra.
294 Id. at 2463.
296 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2463–64.
298 Interestingly, at least some, if not all of these individualization cases, have also been applied retroactively by lower courts. See e.g., Thigpen v. Thigpen, 541 So. 2d 465, 466 (Ala. 1989) (applying Sumner retroactively); Songer v. Wainwright, 769 F.2d 1488, 1489 (11th Cir. 1985) (applying Lockett retroactively).
death penalty eligibility." As in *Graham*, the Court could have, but elected not to, apply a narrow proportionality framework, and instead invoked the same robust proportionality review that it had used in its capital cases. Though *Miller*'s holding—that mandatory life without parole for juveniles violates the Eighth Amendment—also draws from the Court’s “individualization” cases, it is grounded in concerns about juveniles’ diminished capacity and the relative harshness of mandatory life without parole.

*Miller* also has other features that align it with the Court’s categorical cases. As in *Roper* and *Graham*, Justice Kagan dispensed with the stance of penal agnosticism the Court had so explicitly adopted in *Ewing* and *Andrade*. Though Justice Kagan refused to classify *Miller* as a retributive holding, the Court’s emphasis on reduced culpability suggests that it has strong retributive strains. “Ultimately, proportionality is a retributive concept, not a utilitarian one and *Roper, Graham,* and *Miller/Jackson* rest firmly on retributive grounds—reduced culpability—after examining and rejecting utilitarian justifications for punishment,” juvenile justice expert Barry Feld has argued.

Related to this is the Court’s apparent willingness to depart from the posture of legislative deference that it had taken in *Harmelin* and *Ewing*. Justice Kagan describes in detail the practical realities of juvenile justice decision-making in the modern era. The mechanism through which juveniles are transferred to adult court—a process once envisioned as an individualized, evidentiary hearing—is now legislatively mandated in many states. Even the discretion that ju-

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299 See Frase, supra note 73, at 12.
300 As Chief Justice Roberts noted in his concurrence in *Graham*, Terrence Graham had raised both a “categorical” and an “as-applied” challenge, and Chief Justice Roberts believed that the majority could have and should have chosen to rule on that basis. Graham v. Florida, 130 S. Ct. 2011, 2036 (2010) (Roberts, C.J., concurring). In *Miller*, without even identifying it as a threshold methodological choice, Justice Kagan simply launched into a categorical analysis.
301 See, e.g., Smith & Cohen, supra note 127 (describing the *Graham* Court’s departure from prior Eighth Amendment jurisprudence and implications); Steiker & Steiker, supra note 127 (discussing implications of *Graham* decision for capital and noncapital Eighth Amendment challenges).
302 See Barry C. Feld, *The Youth Discount: Old Enough to Do the Crime, Too Young to Do the Time*, 11 OHIO ST. J. OF CRIM. L. 9, 145 (2013). But see Frase, supra note 73, at 22 (discussing *Graham* and *Miller*’s non-retributive principles).
juvenile court judges have retained has "limited utility," Kagan noted, because judges have incomplete and inadequate information about the youth before them. 305 Miller and Graham represent "the Court’s first, tentative steps to restore some checks and balances to the [juvenile justice] system, much as the Court groped its way toward a similar end in its early capital-punishment cases." 306

III. PROPORTIONALITY AND RETROACTIVITY

Comity and federalism concerns notwithstanding, the primary rationale for denying relief to the 2,100 individuals sentenced to mandatory life without parole as juveniles is that preserving the finality of criminal judgments is essential to the efficiency, accuracy, legitimacy, and consequentialist objectives of the criminal process. 308 Yet, as even Teague’s proponents have acknowledged, there is a normative point at which society’s interest in preserving final judgments simply must yield to competing notions of justice and equality. 309 I argue

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305 Miller, 132 S. Ct. at 2474.
307 Courts and scholars considering the proper scope of collateral review have long raised concerns about comity and federalism. See, e.g., Duncan v. Walker, 533 U.S. 167, 178 (2001) (explaining that the purpose of the statutory habeas bars are to "further the principles of comity, finality, and federalism" (quoting Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 420, 436 (2000)); see also Ann Woolhandler, Demodeling Habeas, 45 STAN. L. REV. 575, 577–79 (1993) (discussing how finality, comity, and federalism interests are invoked in theories on the proper scope of the habeas writ). Because federalism and comity considerations are unique to federal habeas review of state convictions rather than state post-conviction proceedings, see Danforth v. Minnesota, 552 U.S. 264, 279–80 (2007) (noting that "[i]f anything, considerations of comity militate in favor of allowing state courts to grant habeas relief to a broader class of individuals than is required by Teague").
308 See, e.g., Sanders v. United States, 373 U.S. 1, 24–25 (1963) (Harlan, J., dissenting) ("Both the individual criminal defendant and society have an interest in insuring that there will at some point be the certainty that comes with an end to litigation, and that attention will ultimately be focused not on whether a conviction was free from error but rather on whether the prisoner can be restored to a useful place in the community."); Bator, supra note 199, at 452 n.21 (1963) (emphasizing the importance of the finality of criminal judgments); Friendly, supra note 201 (citing finality concerns as a basis for limited habeas review).
309 See Mackey v. United States, 401 U.S. 667, 692–93 (1971). (Harlan, J., dissenting) (acknowledging that "finality interests should yield" to rules which "place . . . certain kinds of primary, private individual conduct beyond the power of the criminal law-making author-
that finality interests are at their weakest when the Court announces a new Eighth Amendment proportionality rule, such as Miller’s, because neither the practical burdens of retrial nor theoretical concerns about undermining the consequentialist objectives of punishment are as pronounced with sentences of incarceration as they are with convictions. The risk of offending fundamental notions of “justice,” however, may be at their most pronounced with new proportionality rules, because to deny relief to those whose sentences have been deemed “excessive” (or at high risk of excessiveness) is to undermine the very principles of proportionality and fundamental fairness on which such rules rest. This may explain why the Supreme Court and lower courts have afforded a broader remedial scope to new proportionality rules than they have to new Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rules.

A. Diminished Finality Concerns

In Mackey v. United States, Justice Harlan worried that reviewing cases on collateral review would threaten the accuracy of convictions and jeopardize scant judicial resources. Revisiting cases would compel parties to “relitigate facts buried in the remote past through presentation of witnesses whose memories of the relevant events often have dimmed,” he wrote. It would also “seriously distort the very limited resources society has allocated to the criminal process [and] expend[ ] substantial quantities of the time and energies of judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers litigating the validity under present law of criminal convictions that were perfectly free from error when made final.”

Yet, “different conceptual, policy and practical considerations are implicated when a defendant seeks only review and reconsideration of his final sentence and does not challenge his underlying conviction,” Doug Berman noted in a recent symposium issue devoted to the topic. Unlike trials, which require extensive resources and de-

310 This decisions are discussed in Part II.B, infra.
311 Mackey, 401 U.S. at 691.
312 Id.
313 See Douglas Berman, Re-Balancing Fitness, Fairness and Finality for Sentences, 4 WAKE FOREST J.L. & POL’Y 151, 165–76 (2014) (“Sentence finality, in short, has gone from being a non-issue to being arguably one of the most important issues in modern American criminal justice systems.”); Sarah French Russell, Reluctance to Resentence: Courts, Congress and Collateral Review, 91 N.C. L. REV. 79, 88–89 (2012) (noting the weakness of finality interests at stake compared to requests for sentence correction). But see Ryan W. Scott, In Defense Of
pend on evidentiary preservation and presentation, sentencing is at least as prospective as it is retrospective. The risks of inaccuracy, spoiled evidence, and procedural illegitimacy are simply not as great during re-sentencing as they are during retrial. Trials also have different objectives than sentencing hearings. While trials “are designed and seek only to determine the binary question of a defendant’s legal guilt,” sentencing hearings “are structured to assess and prescribe a convicted offender’s future and fate.”

Accuracy concerns are even further diminished with mandatory sentences, because evidence was never presented at the original sentencing phase. Resentencing will be the first time the court considers a juvenile’s mitigating characteristics. Moreover, reducing a sentence of incarceration may actually save resources that otherwise would have been spent on the operation of corrections systems.

Take Quantel Lotts. While conducting a new sentencing hearing for Lotts under Miller would likely require a court to consider mitigating evidence relating to his age, maturity, and life circumstances at the time of offense, much of the evidence would be gathered from existing documents—perhaps child protection documents regarding trauma history and family circumstances, medical records documenting his mental health history, schools records discussing his educational progress, trial records detailing the offense itself, and witness testimony about Lotts’ maturity, relationship with the victim and level of remorse. The proceeding would plainly be less burdensome than retrying the case, and there would be far less emphasis on hard-to-preserve items like forensics and ballistics. Moreover, a significant portion of the proceeding would likely focus on Lotts’ recent institutional history and current psychological profile as evidence of his “rehabilitation” and projected risk of recidivism.

Nor would resentencing individuals like Quantel Lotts undermine the “deterrent effect” of criminal punishment, as the Teague Court warned. Unlike a reversed conviction, the reduction of an excessive sentence cannot reasonably be seen or described as a free-pass to would-be criminals. Moreover, as the Court observed in both Roper
and *Graham*, juveniles, by virtue of their impulsivity an impetuosity, are less deterrable anyway.\footnote{317}

Interests in finality may be even less compelling in the case of proportionality rules than they are with other sentencing rules. No sentence of incarceration, after all, is ever really \textit{final} until it has been fully served.\footnote{318} Since the Court’s modern proportionality decisions have proscribed only the harshest sentences for the narrowest classes of individuals, such decisions are more likely to apply to active prisoners than decisions grounded in the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. Those standing to benefit from the retroactive application of new proportionality rules are, as a conceptual matter, the least likely to have final sentences.

\textbf{B. Enhanced Justice Concerns}

By contrast, the risk of offending constitutional norms and undermining fundamental notions of justice may be at their most pronounced with new proportionality rules, because denying a second look to those whose sentences are “excessive” is to offend the constitutional principles that underlie these rules. This may explain why the Supreme Court and lower courts have afforded a broader remedial scope to new proportionality rules than they have to new Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rules\footnote{319} and suggests that proportionality rules merit a presumption of retroactivity.

\textit{1. The Principle of Proportionality}

Like *Atkins*, *Roper*, and *Graham* before it, *Miller* is grounded in the Court’s proportionality jurisprudence, which holds that, by virtue of their reduced culpability, certain offenders (because of age, mental capacity or offense) are less deserving of the harshest punishments.\footnote{320}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{317}{See *Graham* v. Florida, 130 S. Ct. 2011, 2028–29 (2010) (noting juveniles “are less likely to take a possible punishment into consideration when making decisions”); *Roper* v. *Simmons*, 543 U.S. 511, 571 (2005) (noting that “juveniles will be less susceptible to deterrence”).}
\item \footnote{318}{Berman, supra note 314, at 167.}
\item \footnote{319}{This decisions are discussed in Part I.B, infra.}
\item \footnote{320}{*Graham*, 560 U.S. at 29, 31 (holding that life without parole sentences for non-homicide offenses committed by juvenile offenders violate the Eighth Amendment); *Kennedy* v. *Virginia*, 554 U.S. 407, 446 (2008) (holding that a death sentence is “not a proportionate punishment” for raping a child); *Roper*, 543 U.S. at 568 (holding that a death sentence for juvenile offenders under age eighteen violates the Eighth Amendment); *Atkins* v. *Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304, 321 (2002) (holding that a death sentence for a mentally-retarded offender is “excessive,” thereby violating the Eighth Amendment).}
\end{itemize}
Miller is, in other words, a proportionality rule. It can be argued that new proportionality rules are retroactive by definition, because the continued imposition of the proscribed (or highly suspect) punishment upon any member of that class, irrespective of when she was sentenced, would violate the Eighth Amendment (or create a serious risk of such a violation). While those who oppose applying Miller retroactively might argue that, because the Court did not ban juvenile life without parole outright, we cannot be sure that any of the 2,100 inmates is serving a disproportionate sentence, the question then is whether our collective interest in the finality of these sentences should outweigh the constitutional risks of foreclosing the inquiry. In the wake of Atkins, would it be constitutionally tolerable for states to insist on executing mentally-impaired death row inmates on the grounds that Atkins did not proscribe capital punishment, but merely required states to impose a “process” to determine which offenders were “mentally retarded” enough to be spared? It seems unlikely.

This may, in part, explain the distinctions between those rules that the Court has deemed retroactive and those it has not. Since Teague, the Court has considered the retroactivity of fourteen new rules of criminal procedure and has yet to find that any of them fall within either of the Teague exceptions. Eight of these new rules have involved the regulation of sentencing in some way; four of these were grounded in the Eighth Amendment’s individualization and reliability requirements, one in the Fifth Amendment’s Double Jeopardy Clause, two in the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause, and one in the Sixth Amendment’s jury trial guarantee.

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321 See Beard v. Banks, 542 U.S. 406, 408 (2004) (holding that the new rule announced in Mills v. Maryland, 486 U.S. 367, 384 (1988), which held that capital sentencing schemes that require juries to disregard mitigating factors not unanimously found violate the Eighth Amendment, is not a watershed rule); Graham v. Collins, 506 U.S. 461, 478 (1993) (holding that a proposed new Eighth Amendment rule barring jury instructions that forbid a sentencing jury to consider mitigating evidence would not be watershed); Saffle v. Parks, 494 U.S. 484, 486 (1990) (holding that a new Eighth Amendment rule which forbids the trial court from “telling the jury to avoid any influence of sympathy” is not a watershed rule); Sawyer v. Smith, 497 U.S. 227 (1990) (holding that the new rule announced in Caldwell v. Mississippi, 474 U.S. 320, 328–29 (1985), which held that the Eighth Amendment prohibits the imposition of a death sentence by a sentencer who “has been led to the false belief that the responsibility for determining the appropriateness of the defendant’s capital sentence rests elsewhere” is not a watershed rule).

322 See Caspari v. Bohlen, 510 U.S. 383, 396 (1994) (holding that the application of the Double Jeopardy Clause to noncapital sentencing proceedings constituted a new rule that is not a watershed rule).

323 See O’Dell v. Netherland, 521 U.S. 151, 167 (1997) (holding that the new rule announced in Simmons v. South Carolina, 512 U.S. 154, 168–69 (1994), which held that a defendant has a right arising under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause to in-
Five have been non-sentencing cases and have denied retroactive application to rules rooted in the Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendments. In addition, though the Supreme Court has never itself addressed the retroactivity of the Apprendi-Booker-Blakely line of Sixth Amendment cases, several lower courts have and, with a few exceptions, have denied retroactivity.

Over the last twelve years, however, the Court has announced four new rules—the Atkins, Kennedy, Roper, and Graham rules—which have been deemed “substantive” and applied retroactively by lower courts. Each of these was a “proportionality rule.” Although Atkins was decided on direct appeal, courts have uniformly applied it retroactively to cases on collateral review because, according to lower courts, it announced a new, substantive categorical rule. Roper, which was on collateral review when it was decided, has been applied retroactively to cases on collateral review because, according to lower courts, it announced a new, substantive categorical rule.

form a sentencing jury contemplating capital punishment that he is parole-ineligible and therefore not a future danger, is not a watershed rule); Gray v. Netherland, 518 U.S. 132, 170 (1996) (holding that the new rule arising under the Fourteenth Amendment Due Process Clause, which requires the state to give adequate notice of the evidence it intends to use in the sentencing phase, is not a watershed rule).


See, e.g., Simpson v. Norris, 490 F.3d 1029, 1035 (8th Cir. 2007); Ochoa v. Sirmons, 485 F.3d 538, 540 (10th Cir. 2007); In re Holladay, 331 F.3d 1169, 1172–73 (11th Cir. 2003); In re Morris, 328 F.3d 739, 740 (5th Cir. 2003).
for the same reason. Lower courts have also found that *Graham* articulated a new, substantive rule which applies retroactively because it “bar[red] the imposition of a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on a juvenile offender.”

Surprisingly, the correlation between the constitutional roots of a rule and where on the substance/procedure spectrum it falls is something that only a few jurists and scholars have explored. In an article published shortly after *Teague* was decided, Richard Fallon and Daniel Meltzer alluded to the connection. Fallon and Meltzer argue that the Warren Court’s “new law” doctrine raises issues that are best resolved through a “constitutional remedies” framework, and apply this framework to some of the Warren Court’s most well known decisions. A blanket bar to the application of new rules to cases on collateral review is “too unbending,” they argue, and the inquiry should

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328 See Loggins v. Thomas, 654 F.3d 1204, 1206, 1221, 1231 (11th Cir. 2011) (noting *Roper* applied retroactively to cases on collateral review as a case “prohibiting a certain category of punishment for a class of defendants because of their status or offense” (quoting Penry v. Lynaugh, 492 U.S. 302, 330 (1989))); Lee v. Smeal, 447 F. App’x 357, 359 n.2 (3d Cir. 2011) (noting the seventeen-year-old appellant’s murder conviction was later commuted into two consecutive life sentences under *Roper*); Horn v. Quarterman, 508 F.3d 306, 308 (5th Cir. 2007) (noting the appellant’s pre-*Roper* death sentence was vacated on appeal); LeCroy v. Sec’y, Florida Dept. of Corr., 421 F.3d 1237, 1239–40 (11th Cir. 2005) (“[T]he Florida Supreme Court vacated the defendant’s death sentence based on [*Roper*] because he was 17 years old at the time of his offenses.”); Sharikas v. Kelly, No. 1:07CV537CMHTCB, 2008 WL 6626950, at *2 (E.D. Va. Apr. 7, 2008) (“*Roper* recognized a new constitutional right for juveniles sentenced to death prior to its issuance and that the ruling is retroactive on collateral review . . . .”); Holly v. Mississippi, No. 3:98CV53-D-A, 2006 WL 763133 (N.D. Miss. Mar. 24, 2006) (vacating the petitioner’s death sentence based on the retroactive application of *Roper*); Little v. Dretke, 407 F. Supp. 2d 819, 823–24 (W.D. Tex. 2005) (“*Roper* is clearly substantive, rather than procedural, in nature.”); Baez Arroyo v. Dretke, 362 F. Supp. 2d 859, 883 (W.D. Tex. 2005) (“*Roper* applies retroactively to all cases involving offenders under the age of eighteen at the time of the offense, including those cases on collateral review . . . .”), aff’d sub nom. Arroyo v. Quarterman, 222 F. App’x 425 (5th Cir. 2007) (per curiam); Sims v. Commonwealth, 233 S.W.3d 731, 733 (Ky. Ct. App. 2007) (holding the rule in *Roper*, while retroactive, only applies to death sentences, not life imprisonment without the possibility of parole); Duncan v. State, 925 So. 2d 245, 252 (Ala. Crim. App. 2005) (vacating the appellant’s death sentence pursuant to *Roper*).

329 In re Sparks, 657 F.3d 258, 262 (5th Cir. 2011); see also In re Evans, 449 Fed. App’x 284 (4th Cir. 2011) (per curiam) (noting the government “properly acknowledged” *Graham* applies retroactively on collateral review); State v. Dyer, 77 So. 3d 928, 929 (La. 2011) (holding compliance with *Graham* required removal of the defendant’s parole eligibility restriction); Bonilla v. State, 791 N.W.2d 697, 700–01 (Iowa 2010) (holding *Graham* applies retroactively); Kleppinger v. State, 81 So. 3d 547, 550 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2012) (applying *Graham* on collateral review); Manuel v. State, 48 So. 3d 94, 97 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2010) (vacating a sentence of life without parole on collateral review pursuant to *Graham*).

330 Fallon & Meltzer, supra note 169.

331 Id. at 1733.
instead be able to “accommodate a variety of practical pressures.”

An inquiry into the “nature and purpose of the right” at stake is one appropriate metric for assessing a new rule’s remedial scope. “At one end [of the spectrum] lie rules and decisions that hold a defendant’s conduct constitutionally immune from punishment,” while “at the other end of the spectrum stand rules whose purposes are substantially deterrent,” such as the “exclusionary rule.” The nature and purpose of the former “clearly calls for retroactive application even of surprising holdings,” while the “argument for retroactive application” of the latter is “relatively weak.” “Occupying the “middle of the spectrum are rules that involve procedural protections, rather than constitutional immunities from prosecution.” Though not explicit, Fallon and Meltzer seemed to be distinguishing between proportionality rules, which should be applied retroactively, Fourth and Fifth Amendment rules, for which the argument was weak, and Sixth Amendment rules, which could go either way.

2. Fundamental Unfairness

In 2010, the Washington, D.C.-based Sentencing Project surveyed 1,579 of the 2,500 juveniles serving life without parole in the United States. The results were predictable, but nonetheless, deeply sobering. Mirroring other statistical portraits of youth incarcerated in adult prisons, 77.3% were of color, and many reported childhoods that were marked by highly elevated levels of poverty, abuse, exposure to community violence, familial incarceration, problems in school, engagement with delinquent peers, and were frequently raised in homes with few adult guardians—all facts which, because many were waived to adult court without hearings, did not make their way into court proceedings. The report also revealed that over 60% of juvenile lifers were not participating in rehabilitation programming in prison largely because of restrictions placed by corrections systems.

\[^{332}\text{Id. at 1807.}\]
\[^{333}\text{Id. at 1808.}\]
\[^{334}\text{Id.}\]
\[^{335}\text{Id.}\]
\[^{336}\text{Fallon & Meltzer, supra note 169, at 1808.}\]
\[^{337}\text{Nellis, supra note 55, at 2.}\]
\[^{338}\text{Id. at 8.}\]
\[^{339}\text{Id.}\]
\[^{340}\text{Id. at 23.}\]
\[^{341}\text{Id.}\]
As the Court has repeatedly acknowledged, allowing one petitioner to be the “chance beneficiary” of a new rule while denying that benefit to others based upon nothing more than an accident of timing results in “actual inequity.”\textsuperscript{342} That is precisely what happens in a non-retroactivity regime. It is conceivable that two defendants convicted of the same crime on the same day might have entirely different prospects for release if the direct appeal process for one was sufficiently delayed.

The inherent inequity is even more pronounced with proportionality rules whose historical function has been, in part, to serve as a check on states’ propensity to overreact in times of moral panic.\textsuperscript{343} The majority of mandatory life without parole statutes were enacted during the “get tough” era of the 1990s—a period that, in the words of one scholar, “witnessed the broadest and most sustained legislative crackdown ever on serious offenses committed by youth within the jurisdictional ages of American Juvenile Courts.”\textsuperscript{344} Lawmakers on both sides of the political spectrum are now rethinking the policies of the “get tough” era. To refuse to take a second look at these sentences is to, in essence, proclaim these 2,100 individuals to be the unfortunate casualties of an era of extreme punitiveness. In the words of Erwin Chemerinsky, “It would be terribly unfair to have individuals imprisoned for life without any chance of parole based on the accident of the timing of the trial.”\textsuperscript{345}

CONCLUSION

With its decision in December 2014 to grant certiorari in\textit{Toca v. Louisiana}, the Supreme Court signaled that it wants to resolve the issue of \textit{Miller’s} retroactivity in the near term. Given all that \textit{Miller} has already done to redefine the sentencing of juveniles convicted of homicide in this country—altering the range of sentencing outcomes


\textsuperscript{343} Stinneford, supra note 69, at 907 (noting that the historical focus was not on punishments that were “cruel and rare” but on those that are “cruel and new,” which suggests “the core purpose of the Clause is to protect criminal offenders when the government’s desire to inflict pain has become temporarily and unjustly enflamed, whether this desire is caused by political or racial animus or moral panic in the face of a perceived crisis”).


\textsuperscript{345} See Chemerinsky, supra note 31.
that over half the states may impose upon them, changing the facts that these states must now consider before sentencing them, significantly narrowing the class of juvenile homicide offenders who are likely to receive sentences of life without parole, and eliminating sentences of mandatory life without parole for juveniles in their entirety—it is hard to imagine how the Court could deem \textit{Miller} anything but a “substantive” rule. That \textit{Miller} is, in most respects, a classic proportionality rule only bolsters this conclusion, because denying relief to those, like Quantel Lotts, whose sentences are, at the very least, likely to be disproportionate is to undermine the very principles of proportionality on which such rules rest.

Understandably, the question of \textit{Miller}'s retroactivity has preoccupied jurists, advocates, and scholars for the last two and a half years. Once this question is resolved, however, attention will move to \textit{Miller}'s mandates. If juveniles can no longer be sentenced “as though they are not children,” what then will become of the forty-year minimums established by states like North Carolina and Texas in \textit{Miller}'s wake? These lengthy fixed term sentences will likely become the next frontier for those challenging the proportionality of juvenile punishment. As this happens, the ideological pendulum will continue to swing back toward the original purpose of the juvenile court, and, in doing so, bring this country more fully in line with the rest of the western world. The United States is also among just 16\% of countries worldwide that try to sentence children as adults, a practice that many countries flatly ban, and remains the only country in the world to sentence a juvenile to life without parole in practice. In fact, the majority of countries prescribe sentences for juvenile offenders to a maximum of twenty-five years. Indeed, the vast majority of countries have long recognized that “kids are different.” As our scientific understanding of adolescent difference becomes even more refined, “substantive” mandates about the minimum age of culpability, adult transfer, and the limits of adolescent sentencing under the Eighth Amendment are sure to emerge.

\textsuperscript{346} Miller v. Alabama, 132 S. Ct. 2455, 2466 (2012).
\textsuperscript{347} See \textit{Cruel and Unusual: U.S. Sentencing Practices in a Global Context}, UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, CTR. FOR L. AND GLOBAL JUST. 59 (May 2012) (noting that eight countries have been identified as having laws that could allow for a sentence of juvenile life without parole, but there are no known cases of the sentence being imposed).
\textsuperscript{348} Id. at 55–56.
\textsuperscript{349} Id. at 58.
\textsuperscript{350} Id. at 49.
And with these mandates will come the inevitable questions about whether they apply retroactively.