JONES, LACKKEY, AND TEAGUE

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ABSTRACT

In a recent, high-profile ruling, a federal court finally recognized that a substantial delay in executing a death row inmate violated the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishments. Courts have repeatedly rejected these so-called “Lackey claims,” making the federal court’s decision in Jones v. Chappell all the more important. And yet it was deeply flawed. This paper focuses on one of the major flaws in the Jones decision that largely escaped attention: the application of the non-retroactivity rule from Teague v. Lane. By comprehensively addressing the merits of the Teague bar as applied to Lackey claims, and making the case for applying the bar, this paper adds to, and challenges, the existing literature on capital punishment, Lackey claims, and Teague doctrine. This paper dissects the Jones ruling on the application of Teague, examining the Supreme Court’s “new rule” case law and concluding that Lackey claims, when viewed at the appropriate level of generality, propose a new rule. It then addresses the more complicated aspect of applying Teague in this context, recognizing that the first Teague exception poses the most likely basis for avoiding the Teague bar on a Lackey claim. At a minimum, Lackey claims (like Miller v. Alabama claims, now the subject of substantial Eighth Amendment litigation on collateral review) sit at the intersection of procedural and substantive rules. Nonetheless, this paper makes the case for viewing the claim as procedural and therefore Teague-barred. Ultimately, then, this paper emphasizes a point that could substantially influence existing litigation: litigators and federal judges should take the Teague bar more seriously when considering Lackey claims on federal habeas review, particularly when viewed in light of modern habeas rules and doctrine that limit relief and protect the interests of the states. But the paper also emphasizes an important point about death penalty policy and politics: if the state is to have a death penalty at all, it should be prepared, and willing, to ensure that death sentences are actually carried out.
I. INTRODUCTION

The use of courts to attack the legality – and often the political wisdom or desirability – of capital punishment is hardly novel. Although capital punishment opponents have never been able to secure a majority of votes on the Supreme Court for the proposition that the death penalty is itself and in all circumstances unconstitutional, they have been able to use litigation to substantially narrow the death penalty’s availability and to shape the procedures available in capital cases.¹ Yet, courts give and courts take away – or to be more accurate, sometimes they reject completely. One claim, though popular in the academic literature on capital punishment,² has consistently fallen upon deaf judicial ears: that the death penalty is unconstitutional where the state fails to carry out the execution quickly enough.³ Not unlike other claims that have

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³ See Smith v. Mahoney, 611 F.3d 978, 998-99 (9th Cir. 2010); Allen v. Ornoski, 435 F. 3d 946, 960 (9th Cir. 2006); Stafford v. Ward, 59 F.3d 1025, 1028 (10th Cir. 1995); Fearance v. Scott, 56 F. 3d 633, 636-40 (5th Cir. 1995); Parker v. State, 873 So.2d 270, 294 (Fla. 2004); People v. Massie, 967 P.2d 29 (Cal. 1998).
failed over and over again, however, this strange claim has recently found a friend not just in the abolition-friendly confines of academia or the capital defense bar, but in the federal judiciary.

It is not unfair to describe the claim as “strange.” After all, the execution-delay claim is raised by the very inmates and capital defense lawyers who deliberately engage in litigation that produces delays in carrying out executions.\(^4\) This is not to say that such litigation should be forbidden; it should not. The criminal justice system and the well-being of the political community are better served by a process that allows for rigorous, if carefully circumscribed, review of capital convictions and sentences. But however legitimate or well-intentioned, extensive capital litigation quite obviously delays executions. Surely, inmates and their lawyers will file their legal challenges to conviction and sentence with the expectation that the litigation will to some degree prolong the inmate’s life. So it seems indeed bizarre that an inmate filing the claims designed to protect and prolong his life would simultaneously claim that the state is acting unlawfully by not killing him sooner.\(^5\) How, one might imagine, would death row inmates and opponents of capital punishment react if the State affirmatively took steps to \textit{accelerate} post-conviction review and pending executions?\(^6\) How, moreover, would this unusual argument – made, and rejected, time and again – ultimately prevail in court?

\(^4\) See, \textit{e.g.}, \textit{Fearance}, 56 F.3d at 639 (“What [the record] shows is that Fearance was not the unwilling victim of a \textit{Bleak House}-like procedural system hopelessly bogged down; at every turn, he, without complaining about the accumulating period on death row, sought extensions of time, hearings, and reconsiderations.”).

\(^5\) See \textit{Thompson v. McNeil}, 556 U.S. 1114 (2009) (Thomas, J., concurring in the denial of certiorari) (“I remain ‘unaware of any support in American constitutional tradition or in this Court’s precedent for the proposition that a defendant can avail himself of the panoply of appellate and collateral procedures and then complain when his execution is delayed.’”) (quoting \textit{Knight v. Florida}, 528 U.S. 990 (1999) (Thomas J., concurring in denial of certiorari)); \textit{Free v. Peters}, 50 F.3d 1362 (7th Cir. 1995) (denying \textit{Lackey} claim because delays were attributable to defendant’s own conduct).

\(^6\) Note, for example, that 28 U.S.C. § 2261 \textit{et seq.} provides for expedited federal habeas review for jurisdictions that satisfy the fast-track “opt-in” criteria. This provision has never had much effect, in part because of questions about which jurisdictions satisfy the criteria and in part because of protracted efforts by the Department of Justice to issue implementing regulations. Still, some groups advocating greater legal protections for death row
A federal court in California recently gave us an example. In *Jones v. Chappell*, the district court ruled that California violated the federal Constitution by maintaining a system in which inmates languished on death row for inordinately long periods of time without being executed.⁷ According to the court in *Jones*, the delays in California were attributable not primarily to inmates seeking relief but to the State’s “dysfunctional post-conviction review process,” where litigation takes too long to resolve and where there is little chance that a death row inmate will ever actually be executed.⁸ Such a system violates the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishments, the court said, because it results in arbitrariness in imposing the death penalty and serves no legitimate penological goal.⁹ The *Jones* holding attracted substantial media attention and commentary,¹⁰ and has already found its way into legal scholarship on the death penalty.¹¹

Though it has never ruled on the merits of this kind of claim, the Supreme Court has consistently declined to even hear one on its certiorari review. The most notable rejection came

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⁸ Id. at 18.

⁹ Id. at 19-26.


in *Lackey v. Texas*\(^\text{12}\) (thus producing the “*Lackey claim*”). And yet in that case, Justices Stevens and Breyer, in a memorandum respecting the denial of certiorari, signaled that he would be willing to entertain the argument on its merits.\(^\text{13}\) Those same justices later articulated the same rationale in subsequent cases.\(^\text{14}\) But the Court has never subscribed to those minority views. The *Lackey* claim, then, has consistently failed, at the Supreme Court and in the lower courts.\(^\text{15}\) Until now.

A mountain of sound reasons exist to reject *Lackey* claims on the merits and to conclude that *Jones* was wrong. The opinion seems to misunderstand retribution,\(^\text{16}\) for example, and it utterly fails to give any precise guidance as to how long of a stay on death row is too long for the Eighth Amendment to tolerate. Moreover, had the district court found that the petition was subject to the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), the claim could easily have been rejected using the deference provisions of that law, which permit federal habeas relief only where a state court judgment on the merits was contrary to, or an unreasonable application of, clearly established law.\(^\text{17}\) These concerns are the tip of the iceberg, and others have more

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\(^\text{13}\) See *id.* (Stevens & Breyer, JJ., respecting denial of certiorari).


\(^\text{15}\) See, e.g., Valle v. Florida, 132 S. Ct. 1 (2011); Johnson v. Bredesen, 130 S. Ct. 541, 544 (2009); Thompson, 129 S. Ct. at 1299; *Foster*, 537 U.S. at 990. See also *supra* n.2 (citing lower court cases rejecting *Lackey* claims).

\(^\text{16}\) See *Jones*, slip op. at 21-22.

\(^\text{17}\) See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d). The court found that AEDPA did not apply because the state court never reached the merits of *Jones’s* Eighth Amendment delay-in-execution claim. See *Jones*, slip op. at 27 n.23.
carefully articulated the lack of merit in the Jones opinion. The one ground for disposing of the issue, however, that largely escaped attention in the wake of the Jones ruling is based on the Supreme Court’s 1989 decision in Teague v. Lane. Indeed, in the Fifth Circuit litigation of Clarence Allen Lackey’s delay-in-execution claim, it was Teague that principally served as the barrier to habeas relief. Other courts have followed suit. The Teague doctrine, ever complicated but now well-developed over twenty-five years, states that new rules of constitutional criminal procedure – those that were not dictated by precedent when the conviction became final – are barred from recognition on federal post-conviction collateral review. This general law of non-retroactivity for new rules has two notable exceptions: when the new rule is substantive, rather than procedural; or when the new rule is a watershed rule of procedure that is implicit in the concept of ordered liberty and essential to ensuring the fairness and accuracy of trial and punishment.

Teague developed at a time when the Court was engaged in the process of narrowing the ability of inmates to use federal habeas corpus litigation as a means for benefitting from the

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20 See Lackey v. Scott, 52 F.3d 98 (5th Cir. 1995).

21 Smith v. Mahoney, 611 F.3d 978, 998-99 (9th Cir. 2010) (rejecting Lackey claim on Teague grounds); White v. Johnson, 79 F.3d 432, 439 (5th Cir. 1996) (same).

22 Teague, 489 U.S. at 299-301.

23 Id. at 311.

24 Id.
explication of new constitutional norms. Federal habeas petitioners should not have the benefit of those new norms in federal court, *Teague* held, when previous decisions faithfully applied the law that existed at the time of conviction, sentence, and finality. Along with exhaustion and procedural default doctrines, as well as the more government-friendly standard for harmless error review on habeas, *Teague* fit nicely into a habeas doctrine that was now emphasizing important differences between direct review and federal habeas review. Habeas doctrine, by the 1980s, was also now giving greater primacy to state court adjudication on collateral review of state convictions and sentences. In so doing, it emphasized the roles of the state courts in the federal system and the limits of federal jurisdiction when reviewing the decisions of a sovereign entity responsible for the definition, enforcement, and administration of its own criminal laws.

In its *Teague* jurisprudence in particular, the Court connected the purposes of the writ to the protection of good-faith (even if incorrect) action on the part of state courts. “Foremost among” these purposes, the Court said, “is ensuring that state courts conduct criminal proceedings in

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26 *See Teague*, 489 U.S. at 309-10.


accordance with the Constitution as interpreted at the time of those proceedings.”  

This means that the habeas court “need only apply the constitutional standards that prevailed at the time the original proceedings took place.” Congress took that emphasis a step further when it adopted the deference provisions of the AEDPA, which arguably codified *Teague*.  

Still, *Teague* stands independent of AEDPA and its strictures differ slightly from those under the habeas statute.  It applies even in cases that are not governed by AEDPA (like, arguably, *Jones*).  

*Teague*, then, is another of the modern habeas rules that promote comity, finality, and federalism during federal adjudication of a state prisoner’s claims.  

Unlike AEDPA’s legislative mandate, though, *Teague* and its sister doctrines are judicially-enforced constraints on federal court power.  And they formed an important, if less-noticed, part of the Rehnquist Court’s larger effort to revive judicially-enforced federalism.  

As it relates to *Teague*, the *Jones* opinion is notable in two ways.  First, California did not raise the *Teague* bar as a defense.  The district court therefore did not have the benefit of

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32 *Teague*, 489 U.S. at 306.
34 In *Jones*, the court found that AEDPA deference did not apply because the state court never adjudicated Jones’s *Lackey* claim in the merits.  See *Jones*, slip op. at 27 n. 23.
37 *See Jones*, slip op. at 27.  California has now appealed the judgment in *Jones* to the Ninth Circuit, and has asserted the *Teague* bar in its briefing.  *See Appellant’s Opening Brief, Jones v. Davis*, No. 14-56373 at 33-37 (9th Cir. filed Dec. 1, 2014).  The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation has filed an amicus brief siding with California, and has also raised *Teague* in its briefing.  *See Brief of Criminal Justice Legal Foundation as Amicus Curiae in Support
reasoned briefing and argument from the State that would have explained how Teague operated to bar Jones’s Lackey claim. And second, the State’s failure notwithstanding, Judge Carney addressed the Teague problem 

sua sponte 

and, in a single paragraph, found that Teague did not apply.38 The rule that Jones sought, according to the court, was “that the state may not arbitrarily inflict the death penalty” and that rule “is not new. Rather, it is inherent in the most basic notions of due process and fair punishment embedded in the core of the Eighth Amendment.”39 The opinion cites the concurring opinions of Justice Brennan and Douglas in Furman v. Georgia for that proposition,40 then states that the rule is “‘so deeply embedded in the fabric of due process that everyone takes it for granted.’”41

This article challenges the Teague-based conclusion in Jones and offers an argument – the one that California could have made (and should also have made in its appellate briefing) and that states defending themselves against execution delay claims in future cases should make – for why Lackey claims are Teague-barred. In doing so, this article seeks to offer a deeper and more nuanced assessment of Teague in the Lackey context than the few existing cases do. The article first contends that, contrary to the Jones opinion, an inmate raising a Lackey claim is asking for a new rule. Next, because the claim would not fit the Court’s understanding of a watershed rule, the article grapples with the more complicated problem of whether the rule is procedural or substantive, and offers a plausible argument for why the rule is procedural. At a minimum, this

38 Jones, slip op. at 27-28.
39 Id. at 27.
40 Id.
41 Id. at 28.
article concludes, federal courts hearing Lackey claims should take the Teague bar seriously, and afford Teague doctrine more careful consideration than it was given in the Jones litigation. The article also demonstrates why Eighth Amendment claims can be subject to the Teague bar, and are not subject to wholesale exemption from Teague’s general rule of non-retroactivity.

II. LACKEY CLAIMS AS NEW RULES

The threshold consideration in determining whether Teague applies to a delay-in-execution claim is whether the petitioner is seeking the benefit of a “new rule.” The core sentiment expressed in the Jones opinion is that delay-in-execution claims do not propose new rules.42 This is wrong.

According to Judge Carney’s opinion, the Lackey claim is based on the application of a well-established principle from Furman v. Georgia, that the death penalty cannot be imposed arbitrarily and must serve legitimate penological goals.43 Teague is no bar where the petitioner seeks to have a settled precedent simply apply to a new set of facts, but does nothing more and imposes no additional obligations on the government.44 Therefore, the argument runs, the rule upon which a Lackey claimant relies is simply a logical extension of settled Eighth Amendment principle.

But this is not, and cannot be, correct. At least, it cannot be correct based upon the Supreme Court’s extensive “new rule” jurisprudence. This kind of analysis – which, it is important to note, also ignores Ninth Circuit precedent finding that a Lackey claim proposes a

42 Id. at 27.
43 Jones, slip op. at 27-28.
44 See Teague, 489 U.S. at 307.
new rule, precedent that should have bound the district court in Jones – fails to properly apply the standard for “new rules” and exists at a level of generality that is too high to enable the Teague doctrine to function effectively.

The Court has kept the definition of a “new rule” broad, and the key to the analysis is whether the rule was dictated by precedent at the time the conviction became final. In Butler v. McKellar, the Court stated that a rule is new if it “breaks new ground or imposes a new obligation on the States or the Federal Government.” This standard helps to validate “reasonable, good-faith interpretations of existing precedents made by state courts even though they are shown to be contrary to later decisions.” A rule does not avoid the non-retroactivity bar merely because it is “within the logical compass of” or even “controlled by” a prior decision. Rather, upon surveying the legal landscape as it existed when the conviction became final, if reasonable judicial minds could debate whether the rule was mandated by precedent, then it is by definition “new.” The Court has said that Teague “serves to ensure that gradual developments in the law over which reasonable jurists may disagree are not later used to upset the finality of state convictions when entered.” If the conviction and sentence complied with existing federal law at the time of finality, then, the emergence of a new doctrine should not be used to permit continued reexamination of the state’s judgment. Teague, the Court has said,

45 See Smith v. Mahoney, 611 F.3d 978, 998-99 (9th Cir. 2010).
47 Id. at 414.
48 Id. at 415.
“asks state court judges to act reasonably, nor presciently.”52 If the unlawfulness of the conviction would not be “apparent to all reasonable jurists” – that is, if there is any other reasonable interpretation – then the rule is new and can only be applied retroactively if it meets one of the two exceptions.53

Consequently, arguments like the one that the court makes in Jones – that the rule articulated there is based on the Eight Amendment’s prohibition on arbitrary death penalties, per Furman – exist at a level of abstraction that is too high to satisfy Teague. Indeed, if the new rule standard was meant to be understood at such a level of generality, one would be hard-pressed to imagine how the Court’s “new rule” jurisprudence would have developed as it has. Unsurprisingly, the Court has rejected similar efforts.

As Kent Scheidegger has properly explained, the Court has confronted the level-of-generality problem in the Teague context and has favored specificity rather than appeals to general Eighth Amendment (or other constitutional) principles.54 Scheidegger helpfully cites Sawyer v. Smith,55 which posed the question of whether the Court’s holding in Caldwell v. Mississippi – which prohibits prosecutors from arguing to the sentencing jury that responsibility for the defendant’s sentence lies with others56 – was a “new rule.” In describing the case, the brutality of Sawyer’s actions should not be overlooked. Sawyer and an accomplice beat Frances

\[52\] O’Dell, 521 U.S. at 166.


\[54\] See Kent Scheidegger, Why Jones v. Chappell is Wrong, Part 3 – Teague v. Lane, posting at Crime and Consequences Blog (July 22, 2014). See also CJLF Brief, supra note __, at 14 (arguing that the Supreme Court has consistently rejected efforts to avoid the “new rule” standard by merely invoking broad constitutional principles).


Arwood, dragged her naked body into a bathroom, kicked her into the bathtub, and scalded her with hot water. Sawyer then kicked her in the chest and caused her head to strike something in the bathroom, which left her unconscious. After beating her more, Sawyer doused her body (including her genital area) with lighter fluid and set her on fire. Sawyer argued that the Louisiana prosecutor in his case violated *Caldwell*, which was decided a year after Sawyer’s conviction became final, when the prosecutor informed the jury that other decision-makers in the system would review the jury’s decision. To establish that *Caldwell* was not a new rule, Sawyer argued that *Caldwell* fit within the scope of prior Eighth Amendment cases that generally require reliability in the capital sentencing decision. The Court rejected this kind of argument by requiring a more specific level of abstraction in order to establish his claim. “In petitioner’s view, *Caldwell* was dictated by the principle of reliability in capital sentencing. But the test would be meaningless if applied at this level of generality.” The Court had never decided, prior to *Caldwell*, that a prosecutor’s argument to a capital sentencing jury violated the Eighth Amendment. Consequently, a state court reviewing Sawyer’s claim at the time would not have

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57 *Sawyer*, 497 U.S. at 229-30.
58 *Id.* at 230.
59 *Id.* An even fuller account of the events is contained in the Louisiana Supreme Court’s original decision on direct review, affirming the conviction and sentence. *See State v. Sawyer*, 422 So.2d 95 (La. 1982), *vacated by Sawyer v. Louisiana*, 463 U.S. 1223 (1983). The state supreme court’s opinion referred to the conduct of Sawyer and his accomplice as “bizarre,” “frightful,” and “sadistic.” *Id.* at 97-98. In its opinion on remand, the court described the facts as “gruesome and depraved.” *State v. Sawyer*, 442 So.2d 1136 (La. 1983).
60 *Sawyer*, 497 U.S. at 232.
61 *Id.* at 235-36.
62 *Id.* at 236 (citing *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635 (1987)(concerning qualified immunity standard “[i]f the test of ‘clearly established law’ were to be applied at this level of generality, . . . plaintiffs would be able to convert the rule of qualified immunity . . . into a rule of virtually unqualified liability simply be alleging violation of extremely abstract rights”)).
63 *Id.* at 236.
felt compelled to find the prosecutor’s argument constitutionally problematic under the Eighth Amendment.\textsuperscript{64} Scheidegger is therefore correct in asserting that Sawyer fundamentally undermines Judge Carney’s effort to ground the Lackey claim in a highly abstract version of Eighth Amendment rights.

Other examples in the Court’s Teague jurisprudence lend further support to this point, which is fatal to Judge Carney’s Teague analysis. In O’Dell v. Netherland, a federal habeas petitioner – who had been convicted of capital murder, rape, and sodomy in Virginia, after physically and sexually assaulting a woman and strangling her “with such violence that bones in her neck were broken and finger imprints were left on her skin”\textsuperscript{65} – argued that he was entitled to relief under a line of Supreme Court decisions that culminated in Simmons v. South Carolina.\textsuperscript{66} That case, decided in 1994, held that a capital defendant may inform the sentencing jury that he is not parole-eligible under existing state law, where the prosecution introduces evidence of the defendant’s future dangerousness.\textsuperscript{67} Eight years earlier, in Skipper v. South Carolina, the Court held that, where the prosecutor had argued that the defendant would pose disciplinary problems in prison and would likely rape other prisoners, the defendant was entitled under the Eighth Amendment to have the jury consider evidence that he would not be a danger to others if incarcerated.\textsuperscript{68} Still nine years earlier, in Gardner v. Florida, a plurality of the Court held that it was unconstitutional to impose the death sentence on the basis of information that the defendant

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Id. at 237.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} 521 U.S. 151, 153 (1997).
  \item \textsuperscript{66} 512 U.S. 154 (1994).
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} 476 U.S. 1 (1986).
\end{itemize}
had no opportunity to deny or explain (there, the judge imposed the death sentence based on a presentence report that was not available to Gardner).\textsuperscript{69} O’Dell, who also was denied an opportunity to introduce evidence of his parole ineligibility if sentenced to life and whose conviction became final in 1988, argued that \textit{Simmons} applied retroactively to his case because it was “merely a variation of the facts of \textit{Skipper},”\textsuperscript{70} which in turn relied upon \textit{Gardner}, and thus was not a new rule.\textsuperscript{71}

The Supreme Court disagreed. \textit{Simmons}, it turns out, was a problematic case for finding a legal mandate because it was merely a plurality opinion and the separate opinions articulated views ranging from Justice Blackmun’s due process holding for the plurality to the Eighth Amendment view expressed by Justices Souter and Stevens.\textsuperscript{72} “The array of views expressed in \textit{Simmons} itself suggests that the rule announced there was, in light of this Court’s precedent, ‘susceptible to debate among reasonable minds.’”\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Simmons} was thus “an unlikely candidate for ‘old-rule’ status.”\textsuperscript{74} Still, neither \textit{Gardner} nor \textit{Skipper} dictated the result in \textit{Simmons}, because other Supreme Court decisions – \textit{California v. Ramos} and \textit{Caldwell} – complicated the legal landscape relative to the information that must be made available to the sentencing jury.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{69} 430 U.S. 349 (1977).
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{O’Dell}, 521 U.S. at 161.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Id}.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Id}. at 159.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Id}. at 159-60.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Id}. at 159.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Id}. at 162-63.
Reasonable judges at the time of O’Dell’s case “could have drawn a distinction between information about a defendant and information concerning the extant legal regime.”

Based on the Court’s observation in O’Dell about the status of Simmons, it is apparent that reliance on Furman for a Lackey claim poses a similar problem for a habeas petitioner. Furman was a per curiam opinion which stated only the conclusion (with no reasoning) that the sentence of death in the relevant cases constituted Cruel and Unusual Punishment. Beyond that, Furman included separate opinions from each Justice that expressed a similarly wide array of views about the precise legal problem created by the then-existing capital punishment regimes at issue. Justice Stewart’s opinion focused on the arbitrariness of the death penalty by likening it to being struck by lightning. Justice Douglas alluded to the arbitrariness of the death penalty with respect to race and poverty. Justice White said that “there is no meaningful basis for distinguishing the few cases in which [the death penalty] is imposed from the many cases in which it is not.” Justices Brennan and Marshall would have found the death penalty unconstitutional in all circumstances (the only two justices to hold that view). It is undoubtedly true, then, the arbitrariness and caprice were a consistent theme of the Furman majority. To say, however, that a majority of the Furman Court indisputably held that “a state may not

76 Id. at 165.
78 Id. at 309-10 (Stewart, J., concurring).
79 Id. at 242-52 (Douglas, J., concurring).
80 Id. at 313 (White, J., concurring).
81 Id. at 279-280 (Brennan, J., concurring); id. at 324 (Marshall, J., concurring).
arbitrarily inflict the death penalty,“and that this holding necessarily means that lengthy stays on death row are unconstitutionally arbitrary, is to overstate Furman’s reach. To draw such a lesson from what is merely a connected theme of five separate opinions is to describe Furman’s reach at a level of generality that Teague simply does not countenance.

The better articulation of Furman is to say that a majority of the Court held that the Eighth Amendment forbids arbitrary infliction of the death penalty through a system that gives the sentencer unbridled discretion to impose death without meaningful consideration of the particularized circumstances of the case. This, in fact, is the way that the joint opinion in Gregg v. Georgia describes Furman, and that opinion was written by two of the Justices in the Furman majority – Justices Stewart and Stevens (Justice Powell also wrote the joint opinion, but he was a dissenter in Furman). Notice the difference in the level of generality. Had the Court in O’Dell applied Teague at the level of abstraction that Judge Carney employed in Jones, surely Teague would not have barred O’Dell’s Simmons claim. It would have been enough to say that as of 1988, the Court’s prior decisions had set forth a well-settled general principle that a jury must be permitted to consider evidence of the defendant’s character and background. That statement, as such, would be accurate. In fact, it could even fall within the kind of sweeping description of Eighth Amendment law after Furman that we see in Judge Carney’s Jones opinion. But it would not capture the more narrow, and more nuanced, claim that Simmons and O’Dell were attempting to make.

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83 Jones, slip op. at 27.

Another example that undermines the Jones analysis is Saffle v. Parks. There, the defendant Parks was convicted of first-degree murder in Oklahoma, after shooting and killing a gas station employee because Parks believed the employee would tell police that Parks had used a stolen credit card to buy gas. During the penalty phase of trial, the trial court instructed the jury that in determining the appropriate punishment it had to “avoid any influence of sympathy” for the defendant. Parks argued that this was tantamount to telling the jury it could not make effective use of his mitigating evidence, and thus violated the Eighth Amendment. In response to the State’s invocation of Teague, Parks argued that the Eighth Amendment rule he proposed was not “new” because it was merely an extension of Eighth Amendment principles established by Lockett v. Ohio and Eddings v. Oklahoma. Together those cases held that the Eighth Amendment requires that a defendant be permitted to offer mitigating evidence and that the State not forbid jurors from considering it. These were two of the early cases giving effect to the even more general Eighth Amendment principle, derived from Court’s decisions in Woodson v. North Carolina and Roberts v. Louisiana, that the Eighth Amendment requires the jury to

86 Id. at 486.
87 Id. at 487.
88 Id.
89 Id. at 489.
90 See Eddings v. Oklahoma, 455 U.S. 104 (1982) (“Just as the State may not by statute preclude the sentence from considering any mitigating factor, neither may the sentence refuse to consider, as a matter of law, any relevant mitigating evidence.”); Lockett v. Ohio, 438 U.S. 586 (1978) (“the sentencer, in all but the rarest kind of capital case, [may] not be precluded from considering, as a mitigating factor, any aspect of defendant’s character or record and any of the circumstances of the offense that the defendant proffers as a basis for a sentence less than death.”).
91 428 U.S. 280 (1976) (plurality opinion).
92 428 U.S. 325 (1976) (plurality opinion).
give individualized consideration to the facts and circumstances of the defendant's case in deciding whether to impose the death penalty.

At the level of generality employed by Judge Carney in Jones, Parks would have prevailed in avoiding the Teague bar. Yet he did not. The Court held that although the Lockett-Eddings rule prohibits the State from barring the consideration of mitigating evidence, it does not impose a rule regarding how jurors consider and weigh mitigation. Nor could Parks make use of the Court’s decision in California v. Brown, which actually upheld another anti-sympathy instruction against an Eighth Amendment challenge on direct appeal. Consequently, Parks was asking for a rule of law that was not dictated by any Eighth Amendment precedent, and was therefore new.

The Court’s most recent decision on non-retroactivity makes this point, as well, and would have been an important case for the Jones opinion to consider despite the fact that it was not an Eighth Amendment case. In Chaidez v. United States, the Court held that its 2010 ruling in Padilla v. Kentucky was not retroactive to cases on collateral review. Padilla applied the settled ineffective assistance of counsel test from Strickland v. Washington and held that an attorney performs in a constitutionally deficient manner if he fails to provide accurate advice to a

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93 Saffle, 494 U.S. at 490-91.
94 Id. at 493.
95 Id. at 493-94.
96 Id. at 489.
97 133 S. Ct. 1103 (2013).
client about the immigration consequences of a conviction arising from a guilty plea.\textsuperscript{98} Again, viewed at a relatively high level of generality, one could have said (as did Chaidez) that \textit{Padilla} merely applied the general principle of \textit{Strickland} to a new set of facts.\textsuperscript{99} But, Justice Kagan’s opinion for the Court found, \textit{Padilla} “did something more.”\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Padilla} also concluded as a threshold matter that legal advice about deportation consequences – which are typically viewed as collateral consequences and not direct ones – was subject to the \textit{Strickland} ineffective assistance standard, a matter that prior decisions had left unresolved.\textsuperscript{101} This special nuance in the claim thus made \textit{Padilla}’s rule new. Reasonable jurists could have (and did) disagree about the ineffective assistance rule that \textit{Padilla} adopted.\textsuperscript{102} \textit{That} more specific rule was not “dictated” by precedent.\textsuperscript{103}

Based on this understanding of the Court’s “new rule” cases, the \textit{Lackey} claim proposes a new rule. Particularly in light of the Court’s repeated rejection of the claim, a reasonable jurist would not feel compelled by \textit{Furman} or any other precedent to conclude that the Eighth Amendment bars imposition of the death penalty upon an inmate whose execution has not been carried out within a particular (as yet unstated) time period. It is true that some commentators have argued that the Eighth Amendment prevents imposition of the sentence after inordinate

\textsuperscript{98} 559 U.S. 356 (2010). \textit{Strickland} v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668, 694 (1984), held that to prove ineffective assistance of counsel, the inmate must prove objectively deficient performance by the attorney and that counsel’s performance prejudiced the inmate.

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{See} Chaidez, 133 S. Ct. at 1111.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Id.} at 1108.

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Id.} at 1110.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Id.} at 1111.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Id.}
delay. But this, combined with consistent judicial rejection of the claim, merely reinforces the point that reasonable minds could differ as to whether Furman and its progeny require the rule. As in Chaidez, the fact that courts have uniformly rejected Lackey claims until Jones demonstrates why the rule is new: the right that Jones recognized was not “apparent to all reasonable jurists.” The district court’s opinion in Jones wholly fails to consider any of these relevant new rule cases, which are fatal to the court’s analysis.

III. WHETHER THE LACKEY CLAIM IS PROCEDURAL OR SUBSTANTIVE

Having established that Lackey claims propose “new” rules, the next inquiry is whether the claim falls under one of the two exceptions to the general principle of non-retroactivity for new rules.

The second exception is far easier to dispose of. The Court has said that new rules can be applied on collateral review if they are “watershed rules” of criminal procedure. The Court has also said, however, that this exception is “extremely narrow” and has consistently rejected every effort to characterize a new rule as a watershed one. To qualify, the rule must create an “‘impermissibly large risk’” of an inaccurate conviction, as well as “‘alter our understanding of the bedrock procedural elements essential to the fairness of a proceeding.’” Here, the delay-in-execution claim (assuming it is a procedural one, which is the subject of the following

104 See supra note 2.
105 See Lambrix, 520 U.S. at 527-28.
106 See Teague, 489 U.S. at 311.
107 See Whorton v. Bockting, 549 U.S. 406, 417-18 (2007) (listing cases in which the claim was rejected).
108 Id. at 418 (quoting Schriro v. Summerlin, 542 U.S. 348, 356 (2004)).
discussion) has nothing to do with the accuracy of the conviction or the fairness of the trial mechanism. Therefore, it is quite clearly not a watershed rule.109

Instead, the first Teague exception presents a far more complicated problem for the government than determining whether the rule is new.

It also requires capital litigators and reviewing courts to dig somewhat deeper than the Ninth Circuit did in Smith v. Mahoney, where it applied the Teague bar solely on the ground that the Lackey claim proposed a new rule but did not ask whether the rule was substantive or procedural.110 Judge Fletcher’s dissent, to its credit, at least argued that Teague did not apply because it was substantive, though her analysis was conclusory and did not fully explore the matter.111 Her dissent merely repeated the language of the first Teague exception.112 Still, Judge Fletcher seemed to be targeting the right kind of argument and analysis. Whether her legal conclusion was ultimately correct is a different matter. A few other lower federal court judges have considered the question, but their analyses also do not quite capture the nuance and depth of the problem.113

109 See CJLF Brief, supra note __, at 17 (arguing that Jones is not asking for a watershed rule). For interesting commentary on application of the second exception in other constitutional contexts, see Ezra Landes, A New Approach to Overcoming the “Watershed Rule” Exception to Teague’s Collateral Review Killer, 74 MO. L. REV. 1 (2009) (arguing that watershed rules can develop from lines of cases taken together). See also Eric Schab, Departing From Teague: Miller v. Alabama’s Invitation to the States to Experiment with New Retroactivity Standards, 12 OHO ST. J. CRIM. L. 213 (2014) (arguing for Miller v. Alabama retroactivity based on the “watershed” rule exception, where the case is taken together with other similar cases).

110 611 F.3d 978 (9th Cir. 2010).

111 Id. at 1005 (Fletcher, J., dissenting).

112 Id.

113 See, e.g., Lackey v. Scott, 52 F.3d 98, 100 (5th Cir. 1995); White v. Johnson, 79 F.3d 432 (5th Cir. 1996); McKenzie v. Day, 57 F.3d 1461, 1479 (9th Cir. 1995)(Norris, J., dissenting).
The Supreme Court’s procedural-versus-substantive jurisprudence is less developed than its new rule cases. But the Court has had occasion to apply the framework. Reiterating Justice Harlan’s separate opinion in *Mackey v. United States*, the Court has explained that applying the rule of non-retroactivity to procedural, but not substantive, rules helps to ensure that the criminal law’s interest in finality is properly protected. Rules are substantive when they “prohibit a certain category of punishment for a class of defendants because of their status or offense.” So if the rule would categorically forbid punishment for a class of offenders, it matters not what procedure the state follows – the Constitution always disallows the punishment. A new rule is also considered substantive where it “alters the range of conduct or class of persons that the law punishes.” Finally, the Court has said that a new rule is substantive when it “narrows the scope of a criminal statute by interpreting its terms.” So if the rule would, in light of the new interpretation of the statute, forbid imposition of criminal punishment for the defendant’s act, then the defendant ought to benefit from the new interpretation.

In most of the Court’s “new rule” cases, it was clear that the rule was procedural rather than substantive. But the cases that have grappled with the issue provide only limited guidance.

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116 *Id.* at 329-30.
117 See *Saffle v. Parks*, 494 U.S. at 495.
119 See *id.* at 351 (2004).
for a Lackey claim. In *Schriro v. Summerlin*, the Court held that its decision in *Ring v. Arizona* announced a new procedural rule. Summerlin sexually assaulted his victim, crushed her skull, and wrapped her body in a bedspread from his own home. His mother-in-law was his initial accuser and he later made incriminating statements to his wife. After an Arizona jury convicted Summerlin on charges of first-degree murder and sexual assault, the trial court – pursuant to then then-existing capital sentencing procedure in Arizona – found two aggravating factors and no mitigating factors, and sentenced Summerlin to death. During his federal habeas proceedings, the Court decided *Ring*, which held that the Sixth Amendment requires that aggravating factors in a capital case be proven to the jury beyond a reasonable doubt. In finding *Ring* to have announced a procedural rule, the Court emphasized that procedural rules “do not produce a class of persons convicted of conduct that the law does not make criminal, but merely raise the possibility that someone convicted with use of the invalidated procedure might have been acquitted otherwise.” If a rule regulates “only the manner of determining the defendant’s culpability,” it is procedural and not substantive. *Ring*, according to the Court, did not change the conduct for which Arizona could seek the death penalty, nor did it entirely

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120 *Id.*
121 536 U.S. 584 (2002).
122 *Id.* at 350.
123 *Id.*
124 *Id.*
125 *Ring*, 530 U.S. at 603.
126 *Summerlin*, at 352.
127 *Id.* at 353.
forbid the death penalty. Rather, it simply determined how the fact-finder could constitutionally determine whether the defendant’s conduct makes him death-eligible. “Rules that allocate decisionmaking authority in this way are prototypical procedural rules,” the Court held.

The mere fact that the rule implicates the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishments is not enough to make the rule substantive. In *Graham v. Collins*, a Texas death row inmate claimed that he was entitled to federal habeas relief because the Texas “special issues” – questions that the sentencing jury must answer affirmatively in order to impose capital punishment – were inadequate to allow the jury to give effect to mitigating evidence of Graham’s youth and good character traits. Graham relied upon *Penry v. Lynaugh* and other cases which found that the defendant’s mitigating evidence was beyond the effective reach of the sentencer. But the Court found that Graham’s evidence was placed before the jury and the jury was not forbidden from considering it as mitigating under the existing special issues. At a minimum, reasonable jurists in 1984 could have disagreed about whether the Eighth Amendment required a new instruction for Graham’s mitigating evidence. So Graham sought a new rule

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128 *Id.*
129 *Id.*
130 *Id.*
133 *Graham*, 506 U.S. at 465.
134 *Id.* at 475.
135 *Id.* at 477.
because neither *Penry* nor its predecessors dictated the rule that Graham sought.\(^\text{136}\) Moreover, the Court found that the rule was procedural because it neither decriminalized a class of conduct nor did it prohibit imposition of the death penalty upon a class of persons.\(^\text{137}\) The Court used similar language three years earlier when it decided *Saffle v. Parks*, concluding that Parks’s proposed new rule – that an anti-sympathy instruction violated the Eighth Amendment because it effectively prohibited the jury from giving effect to his mitigating evidence – was also procedural.\(^\text{138}\)

The difficulty of drawing the substantive/procedural line, particularly in Eighth Amendment cases, is apparent in the ongoing litigation over the retroactivity of the Court’s holding in *Miller v. Alabama*.\(^\text{139}\) There the Court held that the Eighth Amendment forbids mandatory imposition of life in prison without the possibility of parole for a homicide that the defendant committed before reaching age eighteen.\(^\text{140}\) Rather, although the state may impose such a sentence, it can only be done under a discretionary sentencing regime where the trial court weighs a variety of factors in arriving at the sentence.\(^\text{141}\) Whether the case applies retroactively on collateral review has confounded the lower courts and been the subject of scholarly commentary.\(^\text{142}\) The Court recently granted certiorari in a *Miller* retroactivity case,\(^\text{143}\) which

\(^{136}\) Id.

\(^{137}\) Id.

\(^{138}\) *Saffle*, 494 U.S. at 494.


\(^{140}\) Id. at 2469.

\(^{141}\) Id.

\(^{142}\) See, e.g., Ex Parte Maxwell, 424 S.W.3d 66, 75 (Tex. Crim. App. 2014) (stating the question is “a close call”). For scholarly treatment of the issue, see Schab, *supra* note __, at 215 (arguing for *Miller’s* retroactivity); Brandon Buskey & Daniel Korobkin, *Elevating Substance Over Procedure: The Retroactivity of Miller v. Alabama*
would have allowed the opportunity to resolve the dilemma over whether Miller announced a substantive or procedural rule. Because that case has now become moot, however, the Court must await another case in order to resolve the issue.

Those courts that have applied Miller retroactively have described the holding as forbidding life without parole for juveniles in the absence of individualized consideration – that is, forbidding mandatory life without parole as a distinct sentence. Viewed this way, the rule is substantive because it forbids the imposition of the relevant punishment – life without parole – on a class of defendants (the relevant class being those juveniles who have not received individualized consideration). Some have also assumed that Miller was retroactive because its companion case – Jackson v. Hobbs – was brought on collateral review and the petitioner there received the benefit of the Miller holding.

Those courts that have found Miller not to be retroactive have focused on the argument that Miller was based on reasoning more akin to the individualized sentencing strand of cases in

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*Under* Teague v. Lane, 18 CUNY L. REV. ____ (forthcoming 2015) (arguing that Miller was not about process but rather substantive sentencing outcomes for juvenile offenders).


The petition in the case has been dismissed, as the defendant has now been released from custody. See [http://www.supremecourt.gov/docketfiles/14-6381.htm](http://www.supremecourt.gov/docketfiles/14-6381.htm) (listing dismissal on docket entry).

See Aiken v. Byars, 765 S.E.2d 572 (S.C. 2014); State v. Mares, 335 P.3d 487 (Wyo. 2014); Jones v. State, 122 So.3d 698 (Miss. 2013); State v. Ragland, 836 N.W.2d 107, 116 (Iowa 2013); People v. Davis, 6 N.E.3d 709 (Ill. 2014).

See Mares, 335 P.3d at 508; Aiken, 765 S.E.2d at 572; Ragland, 836 N.W.2d at 116. This is a dubious conclusion, and others have explained why it is problematic. See, e.g., People v. Carp, 828 N.W.2d 685, 713 (Mich. 2014) (explaining that the State did not raise non-retroactivity as a defense in Jackson); Craig S. Lerner, *Sentenced to Confusion: Miller v. Alabama and the Coming Wave of Eighth Amendment Cases*, 20 GEO. MASON L. REV. 25, 29 n.32 (2012) (speculating that “perhaps the Court was oblivious to the retroactivity issue” in Miller and Jackson, but concluding that “I, like others, assume the Court intends to apply Miller retroactively.”).
the Supreme Court’s capital punishment jurisprudence. The Michigan Supreme Court, for example, recently held that *Miller* was not retroactive under *Teague* because it did not bar a particular penalty for a particular class of offenders or a type of crime (i.e., it left life without parole intact as a punishment for juvenile homicide defendants), it did not foreclose the punishment that the defendants were serving (life without parole), and it did not rest on statutory interpretation grounds, thus making the third type of substantive rule inapplicable. The court also found it significant that the Court’s language in *Miller* tended to employ the rhetoric of non-retroactivity, noting that the *Miller* Court stated multiple times that it was not announcing a “categorical bar” and that it was only requiring “that a sentencer follow a certain process.”

*Lackey* claims, like *Miller* claims, sit at the intersection of the substantive/procedural divide. Neither seems to neatly fit into either category.

A sensible argument exists that the rule sought on a *Lackey* claim is a substantive one that fits the first *Teague* exception. The claim, one might argue, relates to an entire system of

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147 See Carp, 828 N.W.2d at 716; Chambers v. State, 831 N.W.2d 311 (Minn. 2013); State v. Tate, 130 So.3d 829 (La. 2013); Commonwealth v. Cunningham, 81 A.3d 1 (Pa. 2013).

148 Carp, 828 N.W.2d at 710.

149 Id. at 723.

150 Id. at 708.

151 Id. at 701.

152 See Schab, supra note __, at 214 (noting cases in which lower courts have struggled to place *Miller* claims into either category). For one example, see State v. Mantich, 842 N.W.2d 716, 731 (Neb. 2014) (characterizing the claim as “more substantive than procedural”).

153 See McKenzie v. Day, 57 F.3d 1461, 1479 (9th Cir. 1995)(Norris, J., dissenting). See also Flynn, supra note __, at 317-18 (arguing that under *Teague*, *Lackey* claims are substantive because an entire class of prisoners are rendered ineligible for the death penalty); Root, supra note __, at 333 (suggesting that *Lackey* claims could fall within first *Teague* exception); Simmons, supra note __, at 1264 (same).
imposing capital punishment that results in arbitrary infliction of death. A select few may be executed, most will not be, and everyone on death row must live under a system in which the legal machinery of the State operates so slowly and with such disregard as to the importance of bringing the sentence to finality that the ultimate fate of any given inmate is merely a product of happenstance rather than reasoned judgment about achieving legitimate penological goals. Death as a punishment cannot exist in such a system, the argument runs, and also be consistent with the Eighth Amendment. The State therefore is forbidden from imposing capital punishment upon anyone so long as it maintains a system of imposing punishment that functions with such extraordinary delays. To demonstrate the appeal of this argument, consider the capital cases that have imposed substantive rules that would apply retroactively – for example, Atkins v. Virginia, which held that state cannot impose the death penalty on those who are mentally disabled;\textsuperscript{154} Roper v. Simmons, which said the state cannot impose the death penalty upon a person who committed the offense before reaching age eighteen;\textsuperscript{155} or Kennedy v. Louisiana, which held that the state cannot impose the death penalty for a non-homicide crime against the person.\textsuperscript{156} In those cases, there is no procedure the state could adopt that would make anyone in those categories death-eligible. Similarly, one could argue, a Lackey claim involves a class of persons who have already spent so much time awaiting execution that their death sentence is now a product of an arbitrariness that renders the sentence itself cruel and unusual, and there is now no procedure that the state could follow or adopt to turn back the clock as to that class of death row inmates. Consequently, because the rule here would “prohibit the imposition of capital

\textsuperscript{154} 536 U.S. 304 (2002).
\textsuperscript{155} 543 U.S. 551 (2005).
\textsuperscript{156} 554 U.S. 407 (2008).
punishment on a particular class of persons,”\textsuperscript{157} it is, the argument goes, quintessentially substantive. This is easily the most compelling ground for finding that a delay-in-execution claim survives the \textit{Teague} bar.

But alluring as this argument for a substantive new rule might be, it is less compelling once one considers how the ruling would apply. To fall within the first \textit{Teague} exception, the rule would have to apply to all persons on death row who fall into the same class as the inmate proposing the rule. But how, in the case of a \textit{Lackey} claim, could we possibly determine what the relevant classification is?\textsuperscript{158} If the \textit{Jones} court is saying that the systemic delays in California render the entire system unconstitutional, then the State could not impose the death penalty upon anyone. And every inmate on death row could file a habeas petition alleging a \textit{Lackey} claim and be entitled to relief, even if that person had been on death row for only a very short time. Surely that cannot be correct. The essence of the \textit{Lackey} claim, for it to be taken at all seriously as an Eighth Amendment matter, is that it should be reserved only for extraordinary delays not attributable to the inmate. Some delay, after all, is both inevitable and desirable, so as to allow for thorough judicial and executive review of a given capital conviction and death sentence. Therefore, only those on death row for extremely long periods could even qualify for relief. But what, exactly, is the minimum length of time that would implicate the Eighth Amendment? The \textit{Jones} court is unclear on this, as is virtually every other commentary that would permit relief on

\textsuperscript{157} Saffle v. Parks, 494 U.S. 484, 495 (1990).

\textsuperscript{158} See White v. Johnson, 79 F.3d 432, 438 (5th Cir. 1996) (holding that the claim does not fit first \textit{Teague} exception because, \textit{inter alia}, it does not place defendant in a class of offenders for whom the death penalty could not apply).
such a claim. That is as it should be, for there seems to be no way – textually, historically, structurally, or by reference to precedent – to accurately determine the maximum time on death row that the Eighth Amendment would tolerate.

So one reason why the claim might best be characterized as procedural rather than substantive is because it does not ultimately seek to identify a particular class of persons who cannot be subjected to the death penalty because of their status or class. It does not establish a categorical ban. Rather, the claim is actually directed at the State, and in particular, the malfunction in its processes for carrying a death sentence to finality in a timely way. Some death row inmates will have had their executions delayed for reasons that do not implicate the Eighth Amendment, such as their own repeated attempts to litigate their claims on appellate and post-conviction review. Others will face delay not because of abusive or deliberately dilatory litigation tactics, but because courts have taken long periods to issue rulings. Still others may have had their executions delayed because of misconduct by the State, although this is far more rare. Yet surely, to the extent that Eighth Amendment relief should even be available for a delay-in-execution claim (a dubious assertion), those in the latter category would have a far greater claim to Eighth Amendment relief than those in the former category, who arguably should have no claim to relief whatsoever. The Lackey claim, if meritorious at all, would therefore not apply to an entire class of persons. Rather, it would apply only on a case-by-case

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159 But see Aarons, supra note __, at 207 (arguing that a delay-in-execution claim is ripe when the inmate has spent twice the national average of time on death row, and tying this standard to the Court’s standard for determining violations of the Sixth Amendment right to a speedy trial).

160 See CJLF Brief, supra note __, at 16 (arguing that Jones does not fall into a class or category of offenders for whom the law forbids capital punishment).

161 See Sharkey, supra note __, at 894-95 (distinguishing between various causes for delay, and concluding that an Eighth Amendment violation occurs only where the delay is caused by state misconduct or negligence).
basis to those few prisoners whose executions have been delayed to intolerable extremes because the State failed to follow procedures that would have ensured timely execution.

This leads to the next reason why the claim should be characterized as procedural and not substantive. That is, what distinguishes the *Lackey* claim is that, at bottom, it requires a *process* that the State must follow – its executive actors as well as its courts – in order to ensure timely execution and avoid an Eighth Amendment violation (assuming, again, such a violation exists). If the State follows such a process, then the prisoner has no Eighth Amendment claim for relief, even if his execution is substantially delayed. The *Jones* court’s effort to characterize this as a systemic problem in California that renders the entire system unconstitutional is grossly overstated. Rather, what matters is whether those systemic problems have resulted in inordinate delays that are not meaningfully attributable to the prisoner. An inmate who has been on death row for twenty-five years because of inexcusable judicial delay or because of misconduct on the part of the State simply does not have the same Eighth Amendment claim as an inmate who has been on death row for twenty-five years and has continually sought to stave off execution with multiple successive petitions, challenges to the execution procedure, or other litigation tactics.

In fact, notwithstanding some language suggesting that the ruling was substantive, the *Jones* opinion – in multiple places, including the statement of its holding – flatly contradicts any such conclusion.

First, Judge Carney’s reliance on *Furman* and the arbitrariness standard suggests a procedural rule. *Furman*, after all, was itself a *process* case.\(^{162}\) Only two of the five Justices in

\(^{162}\) See *Furman v. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238, 311 (1972) (White, J., concurring) (explaining that the issue before the Court is not whether the death penalty is per se unconstitutional but, rather, whether it is unconstitutional as applied to murder or rape where it is imposed infrequently); *id.* at 306 (Stewart, J., concurring) (finding it unnecessary to reach question of whether death penalty is per se unconstitutional, and limiting consideration to constitutionality of death penalty under a system in which it is “wantonly and freakishly imposed.”).
the *Furman* majority (Brennan and Marshall) were willing to go as far as to declare the death penalty cruel and unusual in all circumstances. The other three Justices in the majority – Stewart, White, and Douglas – did not. Rather, as the joint opinion in *Gregg* explained, those three *Furman* concurrences focused “on the procedures by which convicted defendants were selected for the death penalty rather than on the actual punishment inflicted.”

And *Furman’s* arbitrariness standard is the constitutional principle that ushered in a new era of judicially-enforced “super” process for capital cases. That is, it has since been invoked to ensure that a state’s capital punishment regime offers the kind of *procedural* protections necessary to avoid *Furman*-type arbitrariness – such as guided jury discretion and individualized consideration of aggravators and mitigators. Had the *Jones* court been applying a categorical ban, it would most likely have used the two-prong framework developed since *Coker v. Georgia* and applied in cases like *Atkins*, *Roper*, and *Kennedy*. That framework first evaluates the objective

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163 *Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153, 179 (1976) (joint opinion). See also *id.* at 188 (stating that “[the death penalty] could not imposed under sentencing procedures that created a substantial risk that it would be inflicted in an arbitrary and capricious manner.”).

164 See, e.g., *Gregg*, 428 U.S. at 196-200 (stating that, because *Furman* requires that sentencing discretion by channeled and limited, Georgia’s new statute was valid because it appropriately narrowed the class of death-eligible offenders, directed the sentence to the circumstances of the offense, and provided for automatic appeal); *Woodson v. North Carolina*, 428 U.S. 280, 302-04 (1976) (holding that North Carolina’s mandatory capital sentencing statute fails to provide procedural safeguards to satisfy *Furman’s* concerns about unbridled jury discretion and therefore requiring individualized consideration of each capital defendant’s case, character, and background); *Lockett v. Ohio*, 438 U.S. 586, 602-04 (1978) (holding that individualized sentencing, derived from *Furman’s* concerns, requires fact-finder to consider evidence in mitigation).


indicia of societal attitudes toward a particular death penalty practice, seeking evidence of a consensus in favor of or against that particular application of capital punishment.169 Having ascertained the objective evidence (which, it seems, is not enough to dispose of the case, regardless of what the evidence shows), the court then employs a subjective analysis as to whether the practice is consistent with the Eighth Amendment.170 This categorical exemption framework applies to cases challenging the death penalty for a particular crime (as in Coker, for rape of an adult woman, and Kennedy, for aggravated rape of a child) or for a particular class of capital defendant with reduced culpability (as in Atkins, for the mentally disabled, and Roper, for those who commit their crimes before age eighteen).171 Yet there is not even a hint of this framework in the Jones opinion. There is only reliance on the process cases like Furman and its progeny. Indeed, if one were to select an Eighth Amendment case establishing a guiding framework for substantive, categorical bans on capital punishment, Furman would be quite a poor choice.

But perhaps more starkly, the Jones court’s opinion stated that “the Court holds that where the State permits the post-conviction review process to become so inordinately and

169 See Roper, 543 U.S. at 564-67.
170 Id. at 563.
171 One might also include in this category the imposition of the death penalty for a non-triggerman accomplice to a criminal homicide. See Enmund v. Florida, 458 U.S. 782 (1982). Enmund, however, was subsequently limited by the holding in Tison v. Arizona, 481 U.S. 137 (1987), which found that the death penalty is not necessarily disproportionate for an accomplice who demonstrates reckless disregard for human life. Therefore, because the Enmund-Tison rule directs courts to consider the defendant’s culpable state of mind in determining whether the death penalty is proportionate, those cases might also fall into this second category of offenders, whose exemption from the death penalty is predicated upon reduced culpability. For a fuller discussion of this and other matters related to the consequences of the Court’s Eighth Amendment capital proportionality framework, see J. Richard Broughton, Kennedy and the Tail of Minos, 69 LOUISIANA L. REV. 593 (2009).
unnecessarily delayed that only an arbitrarily selected few of those sentenced to death are
executed, the State’s process violates the Eighth Amendment.”172 This language implicitly
recognizes that all death row inmates are not similarly situated as to the application of the
principle that the court set forth. The holding is not directed mainly at identifying a protected
class of inmates who are absolutely shielded from the imposition of the death penalty, but rather
is directed at the State, insisting that capital punishment is permissible but only when the State
follows certain procedures to ensure that the punishment is brought to finality in a timely
manner. Only those who are subjected to an “inordinate and unnecessary” delay (whatever that
is), that is the fault of the State and not substantially attributable to the inmate, would qualify for
relief. But where the State has implemented and followed a procedure that attempts to mitigate
extraordinary delays, the death sentence does not violate the Eighth Amendment. So when the
Jones court refers to the “system” that is “unconstitutional,”173 it apparently is referring to the
system as applied to those inmates who have languished for extreme periods of time not because
of their mere efforts to obtain post-conviction relief but because the State (and its courts) has not
followed such a procedure to ensure that post-conviction relief is adjudicated in a timely manner.
This kind of rule thus bears the hallmarks of a procedural rule, and not a substantive one,
pursuant to the Court’s Teague jurisprudence.

Of course, the remedy for an Eighth Amendment delay-in-execution claim might tell us
something about how to resolve the substantive/procedural dilemma. The district court in Jones

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172 Jones, slip op. at 26 (emphasis added).

173 Id. at 29.
purported to “vacate” Jones’s death sentence, but was otherwise silent about the precise nature and scope of the remedy for the constitutional violation that Jones supposedly suffered. What, then, is the sentence that Jones would have to serve for his conviction? Does the sentence default to life without parole? This has been suggested by some as the appropriate remedy. And if it is, it would go some distance toward establishing that the rule here is substantive and not procedural. But if that is the remedy, then it is a truly bizarre remedy. The claim here, after all, is that the State has taken too long to carry out the prisoner’s execution, thus forcing him to endure what is tantamount to life in prison. The prisoner is complaining about languishing in prison. And so the remedy is to give the prisoner . . . life in prison? How could that be a remedy for a complaint that the state has allowed the prisoner to languish in prison? The better remedy would be to order resentencing, which could include another capital sentence, which would have to be carried out according to procedures that do not cause inordinate delay. That remedy, incidentally, would mean functionally that the rule does not put Jones beyond the reach of California’s capital murder or capital sentencing law, and is therefore most likely procedural. The only way to avoid this result is to say that Jones can never be resentenced to death, even under a new procedural regime that mitigates extraordinary State-based delays. Yet the Jones

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174 Id. Scheidegger notes that Judge Carney’s vacatur was improper, and that all Judge Carney could do was to issue a conditional writ until Jones is resentenced. See Kent Scheidegger, Does A California District Attorney Have Standing to Intervene in a Federal Habeas Corpus Case?, Crime and Consequences Blog (posted July 28, 2014).

175 See McKenzie v. Day, 57 F.3d 1461, 1467 (9th Cir. 1995) (Norris, J., dissenting). See also Hedges, supra note __, at 607 (arguing that commutation to life is the proper remedy); Sharkey, supra note __, at 895 (same, but only where the delay is caused by state misconduct or negligence).

176 See Jones, slip op. at 17 (“For all practical purposes, then, a sentence of death in California is a sentence of life imprisonment with the remote possibility of death – a sentence no rational legislature or jury could ever impose.”).

177 See Aarons, supra note __, at 210 (stating that even if the delay in execution violates the inmate’s Eighth Amendment rights, the prosecution could still seek the death penalty in another proceeding).
court is not clear about the consequences of its ruling, which only complicates the present matter. But authority exists for the proposition that imposition of the death penalty upon resentencing, after an initial extended period on death row from the original sentencing, does not violate the Eighth Amendment. ¹⁷⁸

So the call is admittedly a close one. The *Lackey* claim seems to exist in some quasi-substantive/quasi-procedural jurisprudential purgatory. But resolution of the matter may come down to this: if the claim is that the Eighth Amendment bars the imposition of a death sentence upon *any person* who has been on death row for *x* number of years, then the claim is substantive. If, however, the claim is that the state’s post-conviction review processes have resulted in the prolonged delay of a *particular person’s* execution in violation of the Eighth Amendment, then the claim is procedural. Though it hints at both, *Jones* appears to create the latter rule, not the former. Still, in light of this *Teague* purgatory, the underlying goals of habeas review could serve as a kind of tiebreaker. And they militate in favor of finding that the rule is procedural. ¹⁷⁹ Again, the Court has, for the better part of the last two to three decades, consistently found that the habeas rules and doctrines should further the interests of comity, finality, and federalism. ¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *See* Hill v. State, 962 S.W.2d 762, 767 (Ark. 1998) (inmate initially spent 15 years awaiting execution after conviction, then resentsenced to death after remand from federal habeas proceedings).

¹⁷⁹ It has been argued that *Teague* should not apply at all to a *Lackey* claim because the claim arises solely post-conviction and could not have been raised on direct appeal. *See* McKenzie, 57 F.3d at 1463. *See also* Flynn, *supra* note __, at 316 (same). Other courts have disagreed with this, including the Ninth Circuit in *Smith v. Mahoney*, and have applied *Teague* to *Lackey* claims. But it is noteworthy that if this argument has merit, then it raises the question of whether a civil rights action under 42 U.S.C. section 1983, rather than a habeas petition, is the better vehicle for a *Lackey* claim. *But see* Johnson v. Bredesen, 558 U.S. 1067 (2009) (statement of Stevens, J., respecting denial of certiorari) (stating that habeas, and not section 1983, would be appropriate vehicle for consideration of *Lackey* claim). If the claim can be raised on habeas, then it is subject to the *Teague* analysis. Resolving this particular dispute is beyond the scope of this piece, which assumes, as other courts have, that *Lackey* claims can be raised on habeas and that they can be subjected to *Teague* analysis.

¹⁸⁰ *See* Broughton, *supra* note __, at 135-54.
Those interests also apparently motivated Congress in its creation of the AEDPA. The Teague doctrine fits neatly within this framework. Justice O’Connor’s Teague opinion noted the costs that are imposed upon the States not simply by federal habeas review but specifically by the retroactive application of new constitutional rules. “In many ways,” she wrote, “the application of new rules to cases on collateral review may be more intrusive than the enjoining of criminal prosecutions, for it continually forces the States to marshal resources in order to keep in prison defendants whose trials and appeals conformed to then-existing constitutional standards.” The Court has subsequently offered repeated variations on this same theme, connecting the rule of non-retroactivity to the broader purposes of habeas review and the protection of state interests there.  

As explained here, though the procedural/substantive question is a close one, the “new rule” question is not. In such a situation, the burdens that habeas review and relief would impose upon the States strongly suggest that the Lackey claim should be deemed procedural. After all, if the claim was subject to AEDPA deference under section 2254(d), it would (and should) likely fail. Consequently, finding that the rule is not only new but also procedural, and therefore Teague-barred, would be consistent with and best serve the interests that the Congress and the

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182 Broughton, supra note __, at 146-47.


184 Id.

185 See, e.g., Sawyer v. Smith, 497 U.S. 227, 234 (1990) (stating that habeas must “ensure that state convictions comply with the federal law in existence at the time the conviction became final” but does not “provide a mechanism for continued reexamination of final judgments based upon emerging legal doctrine.”); Lockhart v. Fretwell, 506 U.S. 364, 372 (1993) (stating that Teague “was motivated by a respect for a State’s strong interest in” finality). See also Higginbotham, supra note __, at 2452 (describing Teague favorably as being consistent with “the purposes of habeas and the role of lower federal courts in our constitutional scheme”).

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modern Court have repeatedly emphasized in limiting the scope of federal habeas relief. Perhaps as a way of incentivizing greater alacrity in processing and reviewing capital litigation, the death penalty states would be free to create an avenue of relief for a delay-in-execution claim. Absent that, however, and absent greater certainty on the Lackey claim as a substantive one, there is little good reason to penalize the government when its courts have shown fidelity to prevailing constitutional norms with respect to the timing of capital litigation and executions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Any state facing an Eighth Amendment challenge on federal habeas review to a death sentence based on inordinate delay has a range of sound arguments that should be sufficient to result in the denial of relief. But before proceeding to the merits, the state and the reviewing court should first carefully consider the application of Teague’s nonretroactivity rule to such a claim. The weight of authority strongly suggests that Teague bars relief. Yet for all of the problems – the Teague analysis included – in the Jones v. Chappell opinion, the decision at least has had the virtue of prompting a serious conversation about capital punishment reform in California and many other death penalty states where actual execution is a distant and increasingly unlikely event. Policymakers in active death penalty jurisdictions should give serious thought to statutory changes that would – without compromising a death row inmate’s ability to fairly and lawfully contest the validity of his conviction and death sentence – ensure more expeditious consideration of capital cases, as well as prompt resolution of claims. And the same should apply to federal courts, which sometimes also unnecessarily contribute to delays in

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186 See Sharkey, supra note __, at 892 (advocating model legislation to address delay-in-execution claims).
moving toward execution. But even where resolution is timely, government authorities responsible for carrying out executions should, once all legal impediments to execution have been removed, do just that. Though it selected the wrong form for doing so, *Jones* sends a message worth heeding: if the government is to have a death penalty at all, its actors must accept the realities that come with enforcing it. And that means actually executing killers who no longer have a claim to judicial relief or to mercy.