Table of Contents, Volume 43, Number 3, Spring 2005

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Examining the application of racial restrictions to grants of citizenship along with the emergence of the bundle-of-rights conception of property, this article explores a panoply of naturalization claims in which courts discussed a petitioner's eligibility for citizenship as a "free white person." To lend a measure of credibility and resolve to those naturalization determinations, federal and state courts relied upon the protocols of a nineteenth century object-centered, conception of property. Consequently, the emergence of a new, relational property paradigm — the bundle-of-sticks notion — compelled the judiciary to adopt a series of shifting standards for establishing race and citizenship, ranging from physical appearance and geographic origin to the ethnography of family lineage. In order to stabilize the legal meaning of white identity, however, the courts ultimately determined race by reference to a petitioner's reputation in the local and national community. By relying on reputation to signify whiteness, the judiciary both reflected the new relational regime of property and extended the reach of that regime by adopting a modern discourse that rendered personal identity not as inherent, but as a condition of the community. The writer's interpretation of
these naturalization claims moves beyond the standard observation that the law constructed race to suggest, instead, a formative role for the competing conceptions of property in understanding judicial deliberations on whiteness and national identity.

Comments

THE COMPENSATION OF ERRONEOUSLY CONVICTED INDIVIDUALS IN PENNSYLVANIA
Christine L. Zaremski................................................................. 429

AN OVERVIEW OF PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING LITIGATION IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS
Heather Lamparter ................................................................. 455

Recent Decisions

THE FACT OF A PRIOR CONVICTION DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PROVEN BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT TO A JURY TO LENGTHEN A SENTENCE BEYOND THE STATUTORY MAXIMUM: COMMONWEALTH V. APONTE
Sarah J. Cottrill ................................................................. 465

A PARENT WITH PRIMARY CUSTODY OF THE COUPLE'S CHILDREN MAY BE ORDERED TO PAY CHILD SUPPORT TO A PARENT WITH PARTIAL CUSTODY UNDER PENNSYLVANIA LAW: COLONNA V. COLONNA
Jill Lipman ................................................................. 481

WHERE PARTIES HAVE MANIFESTED THEIR INTENTIONS IN A FINAL, EXCLUSIVE, AND FULLY INTEGRATED AGREEMENT, THAT WRITING WILL BE THE ONLY EVIDENCE OF THEIR AGREEMENT: YOCCA V. THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS SPORTS, INC.
Matthew A. Meyers ................................................................. 497