

## INTRODUCTION

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June 26, 2013 was an impossibly long day. At the time, I was living and interning in Kathmandu, Nepal, which is ten hours and forty-five minutes ahead of Washington, D.C. and the Supreme Court. I awoke to reports of Wendy Davis's ongoing filibuster in Texas and ran two miles, through monsoon puddles, wearing my own pink sneakers, all the way to my office, where I could use the more reliable internet to stream coverage.<sup>1</sup> I did not even attempt to explain the procedures of a filibuster to my officemate, saying simply that there was a woman in the United States breaking barriers for reproductive rights.

June 26, 2013 was the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.<sup>2</sup> By mid-morning, the filibuster had ended, my sodden pink sneakers were drying in a corner, and I needed to accomplish some real work. After finishing my first year at Columbia Law School and becoming an editor of this Journal, I had traveled to Nepal to set my newly trained legal mind to work at a human rights NGO. That night, my office was releasing its annual torture report on Nepal's criminal justice system, headlined by the statistic that 22.3% of interviewed detainees had been subjected to torture or ill-treatment.<sup>3</sup> The report was titled "Is the Government Unable or Unwilling to Prevent and Investigate Torture?"

June 26, 2013 was also the final day of the Supreme Court's term—the day when the Justices would have to announce their decision in *United States v. Windsor*.<sup>4</sup> I made it home that evening just as news reports began stating that the decision was

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1 On June 25, 2013, State Senator Davis of Texas held a filibuster to block Senate Bill 5, which included restrictive abortion regulations. The bill ultimately passed in a second session.

2 G.A. Res. 52/149, ¶ 2, U.N. Doc. A/Res/52/149 (Feb. 18, 1998).

3 Advocacy Forum – Nepal, "Is the Government Unable or Unwilling to Prevent and Investigate Torture?" 13 (2013).

4 133 S. Ct. 2675 (2013).

imminent. I miraculously had both electricity and internet access that night, and while the city fell asleep around me, I refreshed my browser continuously until I saw the news: DOMA was dead.

Though the events of my day had spanned two days in the United States, I found it fitting that I experienced them together. Linking the heroism of a State Senator and the success of a long-fought court battle, linking reproductive rights and marriage equality, was the pointed question: if citizens are not treated justly, is it because their government is unable or unwilling to protect them?

In the United States we benefit from electing politicians to protect our interests. When federal and state governments debate laws, we can contact our representatives, share our concerns, tell our stories. Once laws are passed, they are not static. If laws violate our rights, we can challenge them, go to court, and argue for justice. We have systems in place that give our government the power to protect everyone, and so the work comes in making the government use its power to pass, amend, and overturn laws in pursuit of equality.

June 26, 2013 was a day of justice. The Court recognized that a law treated people unfairly and struck it down—the federal government was able and willing to protect married couples more equally. With success comes momentum, hope for the future, and also an opportunity to reflect: how did this happen; what messages resonated; when did the balance shift; why did it finally work? Discovering answers to these questions is necessary because they will inform the next fight.

February 28, 2014 was a day of reflection. Attorneys, activists, and academics came together at the Columbia Law School Center for Gender & Sexuality Law's Symposium on Marriage Equality and Reproductive Rights: Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead. They came to discuss reproductive rights and marriage equality. They shared their stories and their strategies, their fears and their goals, and they gave an auditorium full of people hope.

Only a week earlier, I had been elected the Editor-in-Chief of this Journal. I knew that one of my largest tasks would be capturing the wisdom shared on that February morning at Columbia and presenting it to a wider audience. The same

force that pushed me to run to work in my pink sneakers that June morning and to stay awake that night long after my neighborhood was engulfed in darkness has propelled me and my staff this year. In publishing this Symposium, we are celebrating the successes and sharing the insights of leading advocates. We are playing our own role in the monumental campaigns for reproductive justice and marriage equality.

The work done by the authors of this Symposium to change hearts, minds, and laws is extensive. I am grateful to them for speaking at Columbia Law School; I am humbled by their willingness to publish their work in this Journal; and I am thankful that they have made our government more able and willing to protect its citizens.

