

Syllabus

NOTE: Where it is feasible, a syllabus (headnote) will be released, as is being done in connection with this case, at the time the opinion is issued. The syllabus constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court but has been prepared by the Reporter of Decisions for the convenience of the reader. See *United States v. Detroit Timber & Lumber Co.*, 200 U. S. 321, 337.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Syllabus

DECK v. MISSOURI

CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSOURI

No. 04–5293. Argued March 1, 2005—Decided May 23, 2005

Petitioner Deck was convicted of capital murder and sentenced to death, but the Missouri Supreme Court set aside the sentence. At his new sentencing proceeding, he was shackled with leg irons, handcuffs, and a belly chain. The trial court overruled counsel’s objections to the shackles, and Deck was again sentenced to death. Affirming, the State Supreme Court rejected Deck’s claim that his shackling violated, *inter alia*, the Federal Constitution.

Held: The Constitution forbids the use of visible shackles during a capital trial’s penalty phase, as it does during the guilt phase, unless that use is “justified by an essential state interest”—such as courtroom security—specific to the defendant on trial. *Holbrook v. Flynn*, 475 U. S. 560, 568–569. Pp. 3–10.

(a) The law has long forbidden routine use of visible shackles during a capital trial’s guilt phase, permitting shackling only in the presence of a special need. In light of *Holbrook*, *Illinois v. Allen*, 397 U. S. 337, early English cases, and lower court shackling doctrine dating back to the 19th century, it is now clear that this is a basic element of due process protected by the Federal Constitution. Thus, the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments prohibit using physical restraints visible to the jury absent a trial court determination, in the exercise of its discretion, that restraints are justified by a state interest specific to the particular defendant on trial. Pp. 3–6.

(b) If the reasons motivating the guilt phase constitutional rule—the presumption of innocence, securing a meaningful defense, and maintaining dignified proceedings—apply with like force at the penalty phase, the same rule will apply there. The latter two considerations obviously apply. As for the first, while the defendant’s conviction means that the presumption of innocence no longer applies, shackles at the penalty phase threaten related concerns. The jury,

Syllabus

though no longer deciding between guilt and innocence, is deciding between life and death, which, given the sanction's severity and finality, is no less important, *Monge v. California*, 524 U. S. 721, 732. Nor is accuracy in making that decision any less critical. Yet, the offender's appearance in shackles almost inevitably implies to a jury that court authorities consider him a danger to the community (which is often a statutory aggravator and always a relevant factor); almost inevitably affects adversely the jury's perception of the defendant's character; and thereby inevitably undermines the jury's ability to weigh accurately all relevant considerations when determining whether the defendant deserves death. The constitutional rule that courts cannot routinely place defendants in shackles or other restraints visible to the jury during the penalty phase is not absolute. In the judge's discretion, account may be taken of special circumstances in the case at hand, including security concerns, that may call for shackling in order to accommodate the important need to protect the courtroom and its occupants. Pp. 6–10.

(c) Missouri's arguments that its high court's decision in this case meets the Constitution's requirements are unconvincing. The first—that that court properly concluded that there was no evidence that the jury saw the restraints—is inconsistent with the record, which shows that the jury was aware of them, and overstates what the court actually said, which was that trial counsel made no record of the *extent* of the jury's awareness of the shackles. The second—that the trial court acted within its discretion—finders on the record, which does not clearly indicate that the judge weighted the particular circumstances of the case. The judge did not refer to an escape risk or threat to courtroom security or explain why, if shackles were necessary, he did not provide nonvisible ones as was apparently done during the guilt phase of this case. The third—that Deck suffered no prejudice—fails to take account of *Holbrook's* statement that shackling is “inherently prejudicial,” 475 U. S., at 568, a view rooted in this Court's belief that the practice will often have negative effects that “cannot be shown from a trial transcript,” *Riggins v. Nevada*, 504 U. S. 127, 137. Thus, where a court, without adequate justification, orders the defendant to wear shackles visible to the jury, the defendant need not demonstrate actual prejudice to make out a due process violation. The State must prove “beyond a reasonable doubt that the [shackling] did not contribute to the verdict obtained.” *Chapman v. California*, 386 U. S. 18, 24. Pp. 10–12.

136 S. W. 3d 481, reversed and remanded.

BREYER, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which REHNQUIST, C. J., and STEVENS, O'CONNOR, KENNEDY, SOUTER, and GINSBURG, JJ., joined. THOMAS, J., filed a dissenting opinion, in which SCALIA, J., joined.