Gone But Not Forgotten: How Section 212(c) Relief Continues To Divide Courts Presiding over Indictments for Illegal Reentry

Anthony Distinti

Recommended Citation
Anthony Distinti, Gone But Not Forgotten: How Section 212(c) Relief Continues To Divide Courts Presiding over Indictments for Illegal Reentry, 74 Fordham L. Rev. 2809 (2006).
Available at: http://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/lr/vol74/iss5/6
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: HOW SECTION 212(C) RELIEF CONTINUES TO DIVIDE COURTS PRESIDING OVER INDICTMENTS FOR ILLEGAL REENTRY

Anthony Distinti*

INTRODUCTION

In 1982, twelve-year-old Richard Copeland immigrated to the United States from Jamaica and became a lawful permanent resident. He lived with his grandmother and showed academic promise. In high school, Copeland began dating a female United States citizen. The couple eventually moved in together and had two children, whom Copeland helped support.

Copeland’s life had a darker side, however. By 1995, he had been convicted of four New York State crimes: disorderly conduct, attempted criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the third degree, and criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree. Furthermore, the circumstances behind Copeland’s fourth conviction were extremely violent. Copeland had pulled a man from a car at gunpoint, demanded money, and shot the man in the throat when he tried to escape. Each time the police arrested Copeland, he gave false names, social security numbers, or birth dates. Based on Copeland’s conviction for attempted criminal sale of a controlled substance,

* J.D. Candidate, 2007, Fordham University School of Law. Thanks to Professor Jennifer Gordon and to Dan Kesselbrenner, Director of the National Immigration Project, for their extremely helpful guidance. Thanks to those close to me for their support and patience during the writing process.


2. Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 62.


4. Id. at 279, 319.

5. Id. at 319-20.


7. Id. at 63.

8. Id. at 62.
the Immigration and Naturalization Service ("INS")\textsuperscript{9} initiated deportation\textsuperscript{10} proceedings against him.\textsuperscript{11} Copeland's deportation hearings took place before an immigration judge ("IJ") in August and November of 1996.\textsuperscript{12}

Before September 30, 1996, an immigrant in Copeland's situation could have applied for a type of relief from deportation commonly called "section 212(c) relief." To receive section 212(c) relief, an alien in a deportation proceeding had to (1) demonstrate that social and humane considerations outweighed his undesirability as a permanent resident and (2) convince an IJ to make the discretionary decision to grant the relief.\textsuperscript{13} If granted, section 212(c) relief entitled the alien to remain in the United States as a lawful permanent resident ("LPR").\textsuperscript{14} When Copeland's case came before an IJ in November 1996,\textsuperscript{15} however, the status of section 212(c) relief in cases such as his was in doubt.\textsuperscript{16} The confusion began earlier that year when Congress passed two amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act\textsuperscript{17} ("INA"): the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996\textsuperscript{18} ("AEDPA") and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996\textsuperscript{19} ("IIRIRA") (collectively, "the 1996 Amendments"). The U.S. Attorney General insisted that the amendments retroactively eliminated section 212(c) relief, but some courts disagreed.\textsuperscript{20} The IJ overseeing Copeland's deportation proceeding took the Attorney General's position and refused to consider Copeland for section 212(c) relief.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{10} The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 ("IIRIRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-208, 110 Stat. 3009-546 (codified as amended in various sections of 8 and 18 U.S.C.), changed the word "deportation" to "removal." INS v. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. 289, 315 (2001); see also Anna Marie Gallagher, Immigration Consequences of Criminal Convictions: A Primer on What Crimes Can Get Your Client into Trouble, in 1 Immigration and Nationality Law Handbook 132, 132 (Randy P. Auerbach et al. eds., 2003). Because this Note discusses immigration law before and after the passage of IIRIRA, the word "deportation" will be used throughout the Note for consistency.

\textsuperscript{11} Copeland I, 376 F.3d at 63.

\textsuperscript{12} Id.


\textsuperscript{14} St. Cyr, 533 U.S. at 295. For a brief definition of an LPR, see supra note 1.

\textsuperscript{15} Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 63-64. The waiver was called "section 212(c) relief" after its section in the Immigration and Nationality Act ("INA"), Pub. L. No. 414, 66 Stat. 163, 187 (1952) (codified as amended at 8 U.S.C. § 1182(c) (1994)) (repealed 1996).

\textsuperscript{16} Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 64-65.

\textsuperscript{17} 66 Stat. 163.


\textsuperscript{20} See Copeland I, 376 F.3d at 64-65.

\textsuperscript{21} Id. at 64.
Copeland was subsequently deported, and he returned to the United States in 1999 without permission from the government. As a result, Copeland was indicted for the crime of illegal reentry pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1326. By the time Copeland appeared in federal court to face the charge, however, the U.S. Supreme Court had held in INS v. St. Cyr that AEDPA and IIRIRA did not retroactively eliminate section 212(c) relief. It was thus apparent that the IJ presiding over Copeland’s original deportation proceeding in 1996 had incorrectly interpreted the law and that Copeland should have been considered for relief. Consequently, the federal district court presiding over Copeland’s 1999 case faced two pressing questions: Could Copeland claim successfully that the IJ’s failure to consider him for section 212(c) relief made his earlier deportation order unfair? If so, should the court vacate his indictment for illegal reentry because the indictment depends on an unfair administrative order?

These questions have not been unique to Richard Copeland’s case. Since the Supreme Court’s St. Cyr decision, several courts have grappled with them and have produced different answers. Part I of this Note describes the legislation underlying these questions and how the passage of AEDPA and IIRIRA created confusion in criminal reentry cases where the Board of Immigration Appeals (“BIA”) or an IJ failed to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief during his deportation. Part II explains the different conclusions of circuit courts trying to resolve whether an alien indicted for criminal illegal reentry can collaterally attack his deportation order by arguing that a failure to consider him for section 212(c) relief was fundamentally unfair under § 1326(d)(3). Part III argues that such a failure should be considered fundamentally unfair, so long as the alien can prove that he had a plausible ground for relief at the time of his deportation. If the alien satisfies this burden, a court should vacate his indictment for illegal reentry.

I. THE BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT QUESTIONS ABOUT SECTION 212(C) RELIEF

Some background information is necessary to understand how section 212(c) relief, which was eliminated almost ten years ago, continues to trouble courts presiding over criminal reentry cases. Accordingly, Part I.A offers relevant immigration law, including the basic principles behind deportation, the deportation procedures for criminal aliens such as Richard

---

22. Id.
26. Id. at 325-26.
27. See Copeland II, 276 F.3d at 71.
28. See id. at 70-71 (citing circuit court cases confronting these questions).
Copeland, and the penalties for reentry after deportation. Part I.B then specifies how section 212(c) was applied before its elimination and how a past failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief creates problems for courts today.

A. Relevant Immigration Law

The following summaries focus on areas of immigration law that have a large impact on aliens such as Richard Copeland. Part I.A.1 describes the basic principles behind deportation. Part I.A.2 provides some of the basic deportation procedures for criminal aliens. Part I.A.3 summarizes the crime of illegal reentry.

1. The Basic Principles Behind Deportation

Congress determines immigration law and has plenary power to do so: """"[O]ver no conceivable subject is the legislative power of Congress more complete."""" Congress first began restricting immigration in 1875, and it granted the executive the responsibility for administering immigration laws. The executive has established agencies to accomplish this task, and as a result, deportations are regulated by both federal laws and agency regulations.

A deportation is a civil proceeding, and consequently, deportable aliens do not possess the same due process protections as criminal defendants. The Supreme Court views deportation not as a punishment, but as a prospective look at an alien's """"right to remain in this country in the future."""" Historically, the Court has been very deferential toward Congress's immigration power, but the Court's deference has not been


31. See Chisam & Divine, supra note 9, § 2-1, at 2-1.


35. See, e.g., Fiallo v. Bell, 430 U.S. 787, 792 (1977) (""""Our cases 'have long recognized the power to expel or exclude aliens as a fundamental sovereign attribute exercised by the Government's political departments largely immune from judicial control.'"""" (quoting Shaughnessy v. Mezei, 345 U.S. 206, 210 (1953), and citing, among other cases, Fong Yue Ting v. United States, 149 U.S. 698 (1893), and The Chinese Exclusion Case, 130 U.S. 581 (1889))); see also Legomsky, supra note 29, at 926.
absolute in recent decades. For example, the Court has held that aliens residing in the United States and resident aliens returning to the country are entitled to certain procedural due process rights not accorded to aliens seeking initial admission. In *Kwong Hai Chew v. Colding*, the Supreme Court held that a resident alien who faces a deportation proceeding is entitled to notice of the nature of the deportation charge, a hearing at least before an executive or administrative tribunal, and a fair opportunity to be heard. In *United States v. Mendoza-Lopez*, the Court held that an alien indicted for criminal illegal reentry has the right to collaterally attack his initial deportation order. If the alien proves that the deportation order violated his rights, the court must throw out the indictment for illegal reentry. *Mendoza-Lopez* also recognized that a deportation hearing might contain procedural errors “so fundamental that they may functionally deprive the alien of judicial review, requiring that the result of the hearing in which they took place not be used to support a criminal conviction.” The Court, however, expressly declined to enumerate those procedural errors.

36. Legomsky, *supra* note 29, at 926 (“In the early years, this principle of plenary congressional authority over immigration was often expressed in absolute terms; the suggestion was that courts had literally no power to review the constitutionality of Congress’s actions. In later years the Court began to hedge, leaving open the possibility of some judicial role in assessing the constitutionality of federal immigration statutes.”); cf. Stephen H. Legomsky, *Fear and Loathing in Congress and the Courts: Immigration and Judicial Review*, 78 Tex. L. Rev. 1615, 1616 (2000) (suggesting that there is a “clear though qualified pattern of genuine discomfort—on the parts of both Congress and the judiciary—with the notion of a significant judicial role in immigration matters” and noting that under Congress’s plenary immigration power, “when someone challenges the constitutionality of an immigration statute, the courts accord Congress unusually great deference, at or approaching nonreviewability”).

37. *See* Landon v. Plasencia, 459 U.S. 21, 32 (1982); T. Alexander Aleinikoff, *Federal Regulation of Aliens and the Constitution*, 83 Am. J. Int'l L. 862, 867 (1989) (“Under current doctrine, aliens seeking to enter the United States for the first time are entitled only to those procedures Congress decides to provide; resident aliens whom the Government seeks to deport, however, are accorded fairly substantial due process protections.”). *But see* Raquel Aldana & Sylvia R. Lazos Vargas, “*Aliens* in Our Midst Post-9/11: Legislating Outsiderness Within the Borders”, 38 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 1683, 1700 (2005) (book review) (noting the argument that the Supreme Court “has steadily chopped away at the constitutional protections of U.S. citizens who seem to have a ‘foreign appearance’”).

38. 344 U.S. 590 (1953).
39. *Id.* at 597-98.
41. *Id.* at 837-39.
42. *Id.* at 842.
43. *Id.* at 839 n.17.
44. *Id.* For a list of other procedural due process rights established by the U.S. Supreme Court in the context of deportations, see Julie K. Rannik, Comment, *The Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996: A Death Sentence for the 212(c) Waiver*, 28 U. Miami Inter-Am. L. Rev. 123, 132 n.52 (1996).
2. Basic Deportation Procedures for Criminal Aliens

To understand the procedural history of a case such as Copeland's, it is necessary to review some of the history and practices of the agencies responsible for executing deportations. When Copeland appeared before an IJ, the INS was the executive agency responsible for deporting aliens. It was part of the Department of Justice, headed by the Attorney General, and it was charged with enforcing immigration laws. The Homeland Security Act of 2002, however, dissolved the INS. The act charged the newly created Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") with the task of deporting aliens, but the Attorney General retained some of his immigration responsibilities. Among these responsibilities is overseeing the Executive Office for Immigration Review ("EOIR"). The EOIR includes the BIA and the Office of the Chief Immigration Judge, which manages the nation's immigration courts and judges. The Attorney General is also the ultimate authority for interpreting "all questions of law" in immigration matters.

Once an alien such as Copeland has been convicted of a deportable criminal offense, deportation proceedings are to begin "as expeditiously as possible." Deportable crimes "have historically been defined broadly."

46. Id. §§ 2-2, at 2-1 to 2-2(f), at 2-8.
51. Id. § 2-2, at 2-2 n.6.
52. See INA § 239(d)(1), 8 U.S.C. § 1229(d)(1) (2000) ("In the case of an alien who is convicted of an offense which makes the alien deportable, the Attorney General shall begin any removal proceedings as expeditiously as possible after the date of the conviction."). If the DHS or the Attorney General does not discover that the alien is deportable, the alien can continue to live in the United States once he is released from prison. Chisam & Divine, supra note 9, § 11-3(h), at 11-23.
If an alien must serve time for his conviction, the DHS can deport him once he completes his term of imprisonment. Certain nonviolent offenders, however, can be deported earlier than their release dates. Most deportation proceedings are overseen by an IJ. In general, the government bears the burden of showing deportability by "clear, convincing and unequivocal evidence." An alien has no right to counsel during a deportation proceeding, but an IJ owes special duties to pro se aliens. Within thirty days of an IJ’s decision, either party may appeal to the BIA. Consisting of eleven board members, the BIA is the highest administrative body responsible for interpreting and applying immigration
The BIA reviews an IJ's factual findings under the "clearly erroneous" standard and reviews an IJ's conclusions of law de novo. The Attorney General names the BIA board members, defines its jurisdiction, possesses the power to dissolve it, and can reverse any of its decisions.

At the time of Copeland's deportation, federal court review of a BIA decision was often available. Under certain circumstances, an alien could appeal a BIA decision directly to the court of appeals of the circuit in which the IJ held the proceeding. An incarcerated alien could also file a habeas petition in the district court, so long as the petition asserted only certain claims.

3. A Potential Consequence of Returning to the United States After Deportation: Prosecution for the Crime of Illegal Reentry

Immigration law prohibits deported aliens such as Richard Copeland from returning to the United States without the permission of the Attorney General. As Part I.A.3.a discusses, aliens who reenter the country without permission can face severe consequences. Nevertheless, as Part I.A.3.b describes, the Supreme Court has allowed aliens to defend against these consequences by collaterally attacking their deportation orders.

a. Illegal Reentry as a General Matter

If a previously deported alien is found in the United States without the permission of the Attorney General, he is subject to both civil and criminal
penalties. The civil penalties occur immediately and include detention and deportation.\textsuperscript{69} The criminal penalties are triggered if the alien is prosecuted successfully for illegal reentry, which is governed by 8 U.S.C. § 1326.\textsuperscript{70} If an alien is convicted of illegal reentry, § 1326 imposes, at a minimum, fines and/or imprisonment for two years.\textsuperscript{71} Reentering aliens convicted of certain crimes before deportation can suffer higher penalties.\textsuperscript{72} For example, because Richard Copeland committed an aggravated felony\textsuperscript{73} before his deportation, a conviction for illegal reentry could have earned him up to twenty years in prison.\textsuperscript{74}

Having now introduced illegal reentry, Part I.A.3.b describes a potential defense against such a charge.

\textsuperscript{69} See Chisam & Divine, \textit{supra} note 9, § 10-6(f), at 11-67 to -68 (describing how an alien may be deported for past immigration-related violations, such as reentering after a prior deportation); \textit{id.} § 11-3(f), at 11-16 (describing how the DHS may detain a potentially deportable alien).

\textsuperscript{70} For a summary of the historical development of the crime of illegal reentry, see Brent S. Wible, \textit{The Strange Afterlife of Section 212(c) Relief: Collateral Attacks on Deportation Orders in Prosecutions for Illegal Reentry After St. Cyr}, 19 Geo. Immigr. L.J. 455, 457 (2005).

\textsuperscript{71} The statute provides the following:

\begin{quote}
[A]ny alien who—

(1) has been denied admission, excluded, deported, or removed or has departed the United States while an order of exclusion, deportation, or removal is outstanding, and thereafter

(2) enters, attempts to enter, or is at any time found in, the United States, unless (A) prior to his reembarkation at a place outside the United States or his application for admission from foreign contiguous territory, the Attorney General has expressly consented to such alien's reapplying for admission; or (B) with respect to an alien previously denied admission and removed, unless such alien shall establish that he was not required to obtain such advance consent under this chapter or any prior Act,

shall be fined under title 18, or imprisoned not more than 2 years, or both.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{72} For example,

\begin{quote}
(b) Criminal penalties for reentry of certain removed aliens

Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, in the case of any alien described in such subsection—

(1) whose removal was subsequent to a conviction for commission of three or more misdemeanors involving drugs, crimes against the person, or both, or a felony (other than an aggravated felony), such alien shall be fined under title 18, imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both;

(2) whose removal was subsequent to a conviction for commission of an aggravated felony, such alien shall be fined under such title, imprisoned not more than 20 years, or both . . . .
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{73} See \textit{supra} note 54 for a discussion of aggravated felonies.

b. Mendoza-Lopez and § 1326(d): Providing a Defense Against an Indictment for Criminal Illegal Reentry

In *United States v. Mendoza-Lopez*, the Supreme Court held that a deported alien indicted for criminal illegal reentry has a constitutional right to defend against the indictment by collaterally attacking the validity of his underlying deportation order. The Court reasoned that because deportation is an element establishing a violation of a criminal offense, "there must be some meaningful review" of the deportation proceeding, where the alien alleges that defects in the proceeding "effectively eliminate[d] the right of the alien to obtain judicial review." If the alien's collateral attack demonstrates that the deportation proceeding violated his right to judicial review, the indictment for criminal illegal reentry must be dismissed.

Congress responded to *Mendoza-Lopez* by codifying the elements of a collateral attack and appending them to § 1326. The resulting subsection, § 1326(d), provides that an alien indicted for illegal reentry cannot challenge the validity of his deportation order unless:

1. the alien exhausted any administrative remedies that may have been available to seek relief against the order;
2. the deportation proceedings at which the order was issued improperly deprived the alien of the opportunity for judicial review; and
3. the entry of the order was fundamentally unfair.

Congress listed these three elements in the conjunctive, and thus the alien must prove all of them to mount a successful collateral attack.

With a background of deportation and illegal reentry established by Part I.A, Part I.B focuses on how section 212(c) affected aliens such as Richard Copeland.

B. Section 212(c): Its Purpose, Its Repeal, and Its Lingering Effect

Richard Copeland is among the aliens who defended against his indictment for illegal reentry by collaterally attacking his original deportation order. The particular basis for his attack was the failure of an IJ to consider him for section 212(c) relief. To understand his arguments, it is necessary to review the history and nature of section 212(c). Part I.B.1 describes the purpose of section 212(c) relief and how IJs and the BIA

---

76. Id. at 838-39.
77. Id. at 842.
79. 8 U.S.C. § 1326(d).
81. See supra notes 22-27 and accompanying text; see also infra notes 171-95 and accompanying text (describing the Second Circuit's decision in Copeland's case).
determined whether to grant this relief. Part I.B.2 recounts the reasons why Congress eliminated section 212(c) relief. Part I.B.3 specifies how section 212(c) relief continues to be an issue for courts presiding over indictments for illegal reentry.

1. The Purpose of Section 212(c): Relief from Deportation

Part I.B.1.a summarizes how section 212(c) affected potentially deportable aliens, and Part I.B.1.b describes how decision makers determined whether an alien’s case merited an exercise of section 212(c) relief.

a. The Function and Application of Section 212(c)

Before its repeal, section 212(c) of the INA was very important to aliens facing deportation proceedings. Before the passage of the 1996 Amendments, section 212(c) afforded the Attorney General “broad discretion” to waive deportation orders for aliens who committed deportable offenses. An alien could request this relief in immigration court if she had maintained an “unrelinquished domicile of seven consecutive years” in the United States and would prevail if she convinced the IJ that her circumstances merited an exercise of discretion. If, however, the alien had committed one or more aggravated felonies and had served a sentence of at least five years, she was ineligible for section 212(c) relief. The alien carried the burden of proving her eligibility.

82. See INS v. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. 289, 295 (2001) (“The extension of § 212(c) relief to the deportation context has had great practical importance . . . .”); Nancy Morawetz, INS v. St. Cyr: The Campaign to Preserve Court Review and Stop Retroactive Application of Deportation Laws, in Immigration Stories 279, 281 (David A. Martin & Peter H. Schuck eds., 2005) (“[R]elief under section 212(c) . . . served as the principle defense for LPRs who faced deportation due to a criminal conviction.”).

83. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. at 294-95; see also Rannik, supra note 44, at 124 (noting that section 212(c) provided “the most common form of discretionary relief available to criminal aliens” (footnote omitted)).

84. Codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1182(c), section 212(c) provided as follows:

Aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence who temporarily proceeded abroad voluntarily and not under an order of deportation, and who are returning to a lawful unrelinquished domicile of seven consecutive years, may be admitted in the discretion of the Attorney General . . . . The first sentence of this subsection shall not apply to an alien who has been convicted of one or more aggravated felonies and has served for such felony or felonies a term of imprisonment of at least 5 years.

INA § 212(c), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(c) (1994) (repealed 1996). Section 212(c) was literally applicable to exclusion proceedings, but the BIA consistently interpreted it to allow any deportable permanent resident alien to apply for relief so long as she had maintained an unrelinquished domicile for seven consecutive years. Rannik, supra note 44, at 134.

85. See INA § 212(c), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(c); Trinh, supra note 54, at 553 (“[T]o be eligible for the section 212(c) waiver, the LPR must not have committed a crime fitting the pre-1996 definition of an aggravated felony, nor have served more than five years in prison.”).

86. Rannik, supra note 44, at 134.
An alien who received a discretionary waiver of deportation remained in the United States as a permanent resident. Consequently, prior to 1996, many aliens charged with deportable offenses negotiated plea agreements so that their sentences remained below five years and they became eligible for section 212(c) relief. Under 8 C.F.R. § 242.17(a), an IJ had a duty to inform a deportable alien of her apparent eligibility for any relief provided by statute—including section 212(c) relief—and to give her an opportunity to apply for the relief during a deportation hearing. From 1989 to 1995, the BIA and IJs collectively "granted [section 212(c)] relief to more than half of those who applied." 

b. How the BIA or an IJ Determined Whether to Grant Section 212(c) Relief

In 1978, the BIA opinion Matter of Marin established a test governing whether the BIA or an IJ was to grant section 212(c) relief. The opinion instructed the decision maker to weigh "the adverse factors evidencing an alien's undesirability as a permanent resident with the social and humane considerations presented in his behalf." Adverse factors included: the nature and circumstances of the grounds for the alien's deportation; the presence of additional immigration law violations; the existence of a criminal record and its nature, recency, and seriousness; and the presence of other evidence indicative of an alien's bad character or undesirability as a permanent resident. Favorable considerations included: family ties within this country; residence of long duration in this country; arrival in the country at a young age; evidence of hardship to the alien and to the alien's family upon deportation; U.S. Armed Forces service; employment history; community service; property or business ties; evidence attesting to good character, such as affidavits; and, in the case of an alien convicted of criminal conduct, proof of genuine rehabilitation. Applications for relief were to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. If the alien faced deportation proceedings because he had two or more narcotics convictions,

87. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. at 295.
88. See, e.g., id. at 325-26.
89. See 8 C.F.R. § 242.17(a) (1997) (repealed 1998); see also Rannik, supra note 44, at 129 ("M]ost criminal aliens who were deemed deportable were eligible to petition the immigration judge for a waiver of deportation. Immigration judges were required to conduct hearings for discretionary relief in a fundamentally fair manner and were not permitted to refuse to consider discretionary relief where the alien was prima facie eligible for such relief. Thus, in addition to due process protections, criminal aliens in deportation proceedings were also afforded an extra level of protection. Former Section 212(c) of the INA provided a second chance to aliens with significant ties to the United States.").
92. Id. at 584.
93. Id.
94. Id. at 584-85.
95. Rannik, supra note 44, at 136.
or because he committed a violent crime, he might be required to demonstrate "unusual or outstanding countervailing equities to obtain a waiver of deportation."96

2. The Repeal of Section 212(c): The Enactment of AEDPA and IIRIRA

The 1990s witnessed a growing societal resentment toward aliens in the United States.97 The animosity spiked after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1996 Oklahoma City bombing.98 Congress reacted to public pressure by passing AEDPA99 and IIRIRA.100 AEDPA was enacted on April 24, 1996,101 and IIRIRA was enacted on September 30, 1996.102

The 1996 Amendments dramatically affected the availability of section 212(c) relief. For example, AEDPA included a new, broad list of offenses that precluded section 212(c) relief.103 Congress intended AEDPA to simplify the prosecution of accused terrorists and to facilitate the deportation of noncitizen criminals,104 but several government officials quickly realized that AEDPA generated "problems with enforcement and efficiency in deportation proceedings."105 Even President Bill Clinton

97. See, e.g., Tallman, supra note 30, at 886-87 (describing a wave of "anti-immigrant sentiment" which resulted in Proposition 187 and other exclusionary legislation).
98. See Trinh, supra note 54, at 548 ("There has long been a negative sentiment toward immigrants based on the belief that they are responsible for social problems . . . . Often, these beliefs are shown to be unfounded, but the animosity towards immigrants remains. The resentment escalated when it was revealed that illegal aliens were responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993, which killed six people and injured more than 1000 others. After the bombing of Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, anti-immigration sentiment reached a new peak though it was later revealed that two U.S. citizens were responsible for the attack." (footnotes omitted)).
101. 110 Stat. 1214.
102. 110 Stat. 3009-546.
103. See INS v. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. 289, 295 n.4, 297 (2001). Section 440(d) of AEDPA also precluded relief for any LPR convicted of an aggravated felony or convicted of two or more crimes of moral turpitude. See Trinh, supra note 54, at 553 ("Under section 440(d) of the AEDPA, it was impossible for LPRs convicted of any crimes classified as 'aggravated felonies' to petition for a section 212(c) waiver regardless of the sentence imposed or time served."); see also Rannik, supra note 44, at 129 ("AEDPA enhanced the ability of immigration officers to deport criminal aliens by eliminating judicial review for aliens deemed deportable for committing aggravated felonies. AEDPA also went a step further and recategorized most crimes involving moral turpitude as aggravated felonies, thereby eliminating Section 212(c) relief for all but the most minor criminal offenses." (footnote omitted)).
104. Trinh, supra note 54, at 548.
105. Id. at 549-50 (noting several criticisms of AEDPA); see also Rannik, supra note 44, at 124-25 ("Following the enactment of AEDPA, members of Congress recognized that 'there might be certain rare circumstances we had not contemplated, when the removal of a particular alien might not be appropriate.'" (quoting 142 Cong. Rec. S12,294-01, S12,294 (daily ed. Oct. 3, 1996) (statement of Sen. Hatch))).
acknowledged that AEDPA made "major, ill-advised changes in our immigration laws having nothing to do with fighting terrorism."106

To address the problems remaining after the passage of AEDPA, Congress enacted IIRIRA only a few months later.107 IIRIRA completely repealed section 212(c) relief.108 The amendment created a new form of discretionary relief for LPRs under section 240A(a) of the INA called "Cancellation of Removal,"109 but this relief was available for a very narrow class of aliens: "Congress explicitly stated that [section 240A(a)] relief is intended only for ‘highly unusual cases involving outstanding aliens.""110 IIRIRA, along with AEDPA, created more than fifty new deportable offenses.111

3. The Lingering Effect of Section 212(c): Confusion About the Application of AEDPA and IIRIRA

AEDPA and IIRIRA placed different restrictions on section 212(c) relief, and as each amendment became effective, a complicated question arose: If an alien was convicted of a deportable crime and was eligible for section 212(c) relief before the amendment went into effect, yet the alien’s deportation proceeding began or the case came before an IJ after the amendment went into effect, was the alien still eligible for section 212(c) relief? That is, did the provisions of AEDPA or IIRIRA retroactively eliminate an alien’s eligibility for section 212(c) relief? The BIA interpreted the 1996 Amendments as having this effect,112 but in 2001, the

106. Trinh, supra note 54, at 549-50.
107. 110 Stat. 3009-546; Trinh, supra note 54, at 549 (“Shortly after AEDPA was passed, Congress launched an effort to address problems with enforcement and efficiency in deportation proceedings. Consequently, IIRIRA was enacted on September 30, 1996.” (footnote omitted)).
108. See 110 Stat. 3009-597.
(1) has been an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence for not less than 5 years,
(2) has resided in the United States continuously for 7 years after having been admitted in any status, and
(3) has not been convicted of any aggravated felony.
INA § 240A(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1229b(a).
111. Trinh, supra note 54, at 552.
112. Copeland II, 376 F.3d 61, 64 (2d Cir. 2004). On February 21, 1997, the Attorney General issued an order interpreting AEDPA as applying retroactively. See Daniel P. Derechin, AEDPA Amends Section 212(c): Alien Who Is Deportable Under Sections 241(a)(2)(A)(iii) and (B)(i) of the INA Is Ineligible for a Waiver of Inadmissibility Under Section 212(c) of the Act When the Waiver Is Requested Alone or in Conjunction with an Application for Adjustment of Status, 11 Geo. Immigr. L.J. 922, 922-23 (1997). Consequently, the BIA interpreted the 1996 Amendments as stripping eligibility for section 212(c) relief from any LPR who had pled guilty to an aggravated felony, regardless of when the LPR entered his plea. See Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 64. Several federal courts, however, disagreed with the BIA’s interpretation and held that the 1996 Amendments did not have a
Supreme Court disagreed. In *INS v. St. Cyr*, the Court held that "§ 212(c) relief remains available for aliens... whose convictions were obtained through plea agreements and who... would have been eligible for § 212(c) relief at the time of their plea under the law then in effect." In other words, notwithstanding the effective dates of AEDPA or IIRIRA, each amendment’s restrictions on section 212(c) relief do not affect an alien’s eligibility for that relief so long as (1) the alien pled guilty to a deportable crime and (2) the alien was eligible for section 212(c) relief at the time of his plea.

Unlike Richard Copeland, the noncitizen in *St. Cyr* had not been deported; he was only ordered deported. However, St. Cyr’s deportation proceedings were quite similar to Copeland’s. St. Cyr had been an LPR in the United States. On March 8, 1996—before the passage of the 1996 Amendments—St. Cyr pled guilty to the aggravated felony of selling a controlled substance. The INS initiated deportation proceedings against him on April 10, 1997—after the passage of the 1996 Amendments. An IJ denied St. Cyr’s application for section 212(c) relief, and the BIA affirmed the IJ’s decision, reasoning that IIRIRA had eliminated his eligibility for relief. Unlike Copeland, St. Cyr subsequently filed a habeas petition, arguing that the BIA improperly failed to consider him for section 212(c) relief. The district court accepted St. Cyr’s argument, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed, and the Supreme Court granted certiorari.

The Court determined that the 1996 Amendments did not eliminate St. Cyr’s eligibility for section 212(c) relief based on two analyses. The first retroactive effect. *Id.* at 65 (citing, as examples of opinions that rejected the Attorney General’s interpretation, *Goncalves v. Reno*, 144 F.3d 110, 133 (1st Cir. 1998), and *Mojica v. Reno*, 970 F. Supp. 130, 182 (E.D.N.Y. 1997)). For further details about this debate immediately after the passage of AEDPA, see Morawetz, *supra* note 82, at 283-87.

114. *Id.* at 326. Before reaching this decision, the Court held that the 1996 Amendments did not eliminate the Court’s jurisdiction to hear the claims asserted by St. Cyr’s habeas petition. *See generally Id.* at 298-314.
115. Although the Court’s holding meant that AEDPA did not retroactively eliminate section 212(c) relief for aggravated felons, the Court did not address whether AEDPA’s new lists of aggravated felonies could be applied retroactively to make aliens who committed those crimes before AEDPA deportable. So far, AEDPA has indeed had this effect. *See* Tracey Topper Gonzalez, *Individual Rights Versus Collective Security: Assessing the Constitutionality of the USA Patriot Act*, U. Miami Int’l & Comp. L. Rev., Fall 2003, at 75, 92 ("AEDPA provides for retroactive and prospective deportation of aliens convicted of certain listed ‘aggravated felonies’... ’); *Trinh, supra* note 54, at 545 ("[The 1996 Amendments] apply retroactively to punish LPRs for past crimes. Since the implementation of AEDPA and IIRIRA, many LPRs with criminal records find themselves facing deportation regardless of the severity of their crimes or how well they have rehabilitated.").
117. *Id.*
118. *Id.*
120. *St. Cyr*, 533 U.S. at 293.
121. *Id.*
analysis was a statutory interpretation of IIRIRA. The Court acknowledged that “Congress has the power to enact laws with retrospective effect,” but the Court also noted that a statute can have a retrospective effect only where Congress clearly intended it. The Court then found that the language of IIRIRA was ambiguous about retroactively eliminating section 212(c) relief, leading the Court to conclude that such retroactive elimination would be “impermissible” when applied to defendants like St. Cyr, who entered into plea agreements in the hopes of obtaining relief from deportation.

The second basis for the Court’s holding was a fairness analysis. The Court frequently cited a statistic that from 1989 to 1995, 51.5% of section 212(c) waivers were granted. This statistic indicated to the Court that “the class of aliens whose continued residence in this country has depended on their eligibility for § 212(c) relief is extremely large, and not surprisingly, a substantial percentage of their applications for § 212(c) relief have been granted.” The heavy reliance of aliens like St. Cyr on the availability of section 212(c) relief when entering their pleas was especially persuasive to the Court that retroactive application of the 1996 Amendments was unfair:

Now that prosecutors have received the benefit of these plea agreements, agreements that were likely facilitated by the aliens’ belief in their continued eligibility for § 212(c) relief, it would surely be contrary to “familiar considerations of fair notice, reasonable reliance, and settled expectations[...].” To hold that IIRIRA’s subsequent restrictions deprive them of any possibility of such relief.

Finally, the Court noted that the discretionary nature of section 212(c) relief “does not affect the propriety of [the Court’s] conclusion” because “[t]here is a clear difference, for the purposes of retroactivity analysis, between facing possible deportation and facing certain deportation.” For all of these reasons, St. Cyr held that aliens who pled guilty to crimes before the effective dates of the 1996 Amendments in order to remain eligible for section 212(c) relief could still be considered for that relief. After the

122. Id. at 316 (citations omitted).
123. Id. at 318-20.
124. Id. at 320.
125. See id. at 296 & n.5 (pointing out that “in the period between 1989 and 1995 alone, § 212(c) relief was granted to over 10,000 aliens”); id. at 323 (noting “the frequency with which § 212(c) relief was granted in the years leading up to AEDPA and IIRIRA”); id. at 325 (“Prior to AEDPA and IIRIRA, aliens like St. Cyr had a significant likelihood of receiving § 212(c) relief.”).
126. Id. at 295-96; see supra note 125.
127. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. at 323-24 (citation omitted).
128. Id. at 325.
129. Id. at 326.
Court’s decision, St. Cyr had a hearing before an IJ and received section 212(c) relief.130

The Supreme Court’s decision in St. Cyr had a large impact on the defense strategies of many aliens indicted for criminal illegal reentry. Aliens like Richard Copeland could now argue that their deportation orders were defective because the BIA or an IJ applied the 1996 Amendments retroactively before St. Cyr and failed to consider the aliens for section 212(c) relief.131 Courts thus had to decide whether to vacate an alien’s indictment for illegal reentry because the failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider the alien for section 212(c) relief rendered the deportation order fundamentally unfair within the meaning of § 1326(d)(3).132 As Part II of this Note discusses, the circuit courts split over the resolution of this issue.

II. HOW COURTS CONTINUE TO GRAPPLE WITH SECTION 212(C) RELIEF

As of October 2005, several circuits have questioned whether a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief renders a deportation proceeding fundamentally unfair under § 1326(d)(3). As Part II.A describes, the majority of the circuits that have considered the question have held that such a failure does not render a deportation proceeding fundamentally unfair. The Second and Ninth Circuits are the only jurisdictions to disagree, both holding that a deportation proceeding can be fundamentally unfair so long as the alien proves that he was prejudiced by the BIA’s or IJ’s failure to consider him for relief. Parts II.B and II.C outline the reasonings of the Second and Ninth Circuits, respectively. These parts also detail, however, how the Second and Ninth Circuits disagree about the appropriate prejudice standard. The Second Circuit holds that the alien must show a “reasonable probability” of relief at his deportation to demonstrate prejudice; the Ninth Circuit holds that the alien must only show a “plausible ground” for relief. Part II.D describes how district courts have responded to the Second and Ninth Circuits’ prejudice standards.

A. Interpretation One: A Failure to Consider an Alien for Section 212(c) Relief Is Not Fundamentally Unfair

All of the decisions holding that a failure to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief is not fundamentally unfair involve an alien with the same basic immigration history as Richard Copeland. The alien in each case pled guilty to a crime prior to the passage of the 1996

130. Morawetz, supra note 82, at 306. Morawetz also notes that “[b]y 2001, when the Supreme Court issued its decision in St. Cyr[,] . . . thousands had been deported and would not reap the benefit of the decision.” Id. at 280.
131. See supra notes 22-27 and accompanying text; see also infra notes 171-95 and accompanying text (describing the Second Circuit’s decision in Copeland’s case).
132. The question assumes that the alien can meet the requirements of § 1326(d)(1) and (2).
Amendments with the belief that doing so preserved the possibility of applying for section 212(c) relief; the alien was found deportable at proceedings that took place after the effective dates of the 1996 Amendments but before St. Cyr; the BIA or an IJ incorrectly failed to consider the alien for section 212(c) relief; the alien was deported; and after his deportation, the alien reentered the United States, was indicted for the crime of illegal reentry, and attempted to collaterally attack his deportation order based on the BIA's or IJ's failure to consider him for relief. The cases described below delineate the various reasons why courts have rejected such a collateral attack, holding that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief is not fundamentally unfair.

1. United States v. Wilson

In United States v. Wilson, the Fourth Circuit held that to establish "fundamental unfairness" under § 1326(d)(3), an alien had to show that "(1) his due process rights were violated by defects in his underlying deportation proceeding, and (2) he suffered prejudice as a result of the defects." The Fourth Circuit then relied on one of its previous cases, Smith v. Ashcroft, to hold that the alien in question could not prove fundamental unfairness because there was no due process right to section 212(c) relief. In Smith, the court had held that "to advance a due process claim, [the defendant must have] a property or liberty interest at stake." For a statute to create such a liberty or property interest, the statute must satisfy two elements: First, it must "direct" that the individual possesses "entitlement to the benefit;" and second, the statute must limit meaningfully the discretion of decision makers. Regarding the establishment of entitlement to a benefit, the
Smith court insisted that even where a state has frequently granted statutory, discretionary relief, this tendency does not create a right protected by the Due Process Clause.\textsuperscript{140} The statute "must confer more than a mere expectation (even one supported by consistent government practice) of a benefit" to create a protected due process right.\textsuperscript{141} The Smith court then reasoned that the discretionary nature of section 212(c) relief kept section 212(c) from reaching this standard.\textsuperscript{142} Regarding meaningful limitations on the decision maker's discretion, the court cited St. Cyr's observation that the "Attorney General [had] broad discretion to admit excludable aliens"\textsuperscript{143} to argue that section 212(c) relief did not limit the discretion of decision makers.\textsuperscript{144} Thus finding that section 212(c) did not meet the two requirements to establish a liberty or property interest, the Smith court held that consideration for section 212(c) relief was not a due process right.\textsuperscript{145} Based on this decision, the Wilson court concluded that a failure to consider an alien for relief did not render a deportation proceeding "fundamentally unfair" under § 1326(d)(3).\textsuperscript{146}

2. United States v. Lopez-Ortiz

The Fifth Circuit rejected an alien's collateral attack for similar reasons in United States v. Lopez-Ortiz.\textsuperscript{147} The court asserted that St. Cyr was "not grounded in § 212(c) relief having the status of a constitutionally protected interest; rather, [St. Cyr] was based on the Court's interpretation of IIRIRA."\textsuperscript{148} The court also argued that "[a]s a piece of legislative grace, [section 212(c)] conveyed no rights, it conferred no status, and its denial does not implicate the Due Process clause."\textsuperscript{149} Ultimately, like the Fourth Circuit's Wilson decision, Lopez-Ortiz held that section 212(c) does not establish a liberty or property interest, and thus the failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief cannot be a due process violation amounting to fundamental unfairness.\textsuperscript{150}

3. United States v. Torres

In United States v. Torres,\textsuperscript{151} the Third Circuit shared the Fourth and Fifth Circuit's view that "discretionary relief is necessarily a matter of grace

\textsuperscript{140} Id. at 430.
\textsuperscript{141} Id. at 429.
\textsuperscript{142} Id. at 429-30.
\textsuperscript{144} Smith, 295 F.3d at 430.
\textsuperscript{145} Id. at 431.
\textsuperscript{146} United States v. Wilson, 316 F.3d 506, 510 (4th Cir. 2003).
\textsuperscript{147} 313 F.3d 225 (5th Cir. 2002).
\textsuperscript{148} Id. at 231.
\textsuperscript{149} Id. (quoting Alfarache v. Cravener, 203 F.3d 381 (5th Cir. 2000) (internal quotations omitted)).
\textsuperscript{150} Id.
\textsuperscript{151} 383 F.3d 92 (3d Cir. 2004).
rather than of right."\textsuperscript{152} However, the court acknowledged that there was "superficial support" for the notion that an alien retained a due process interest in being considered for section 212(c) relief.\textsuperscript{153} The court noted that there is a difference between the right to be considered for discretionary relief and the right to a favorable exercise of that relief.\textsuperscript{154} Citing Greenholtz \textit{v. Inmates of Nebraska Penal \& Correctional Complex},\textsuperscript{155} the court observed that a prisoner may have a due process right to consideration of parole, even though a prisoner has no right to the favorable exercise of that relief.\textsuperscript{156} In Greenholtz, the Supreme Court held that the "mere hope" of parole is not protected by due process.\textsuperscript{157} "Where, however, a state creates a parole system that statutorily mandates release unless specified conditions are met, a prisoner eligible for parole consideration may be entitled to certain due process protections."\textsuperscript{158} Thus, the Torres court conceded that discretionary relief can amount to a due process right under certain circumstances.

To distinguish the immigration case before it from Greenholtz, however, the Torres court argued that section 212(c) uses no ""explicit mandatory language"" to create a due process right in consideration for section 212(c) relief and that thus the statute offers a ""mere hope ... of relief."\textsuperscript{159} The court also found that section 212(c) does not create a presumption in favor of relief\textsuperscript{160} and that the possibility of relief was "speculative at best."\textsuperscript{161} Based on these interpretations, the court concluded that a failure during a deportation proceeding to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief could not be fundamentally unfair.\textsuperscript{162}

4. \textit{United States v. Aguirre-Tello}

In \textit{United States v. Aguirre-Tello},\textsuperscript{163} the Tenth Circuit issued an en banc opinion similarly rejecting an alien's argument that a failure to consider him for section 212(c) relief was fundamentally unfair.\textsuperscript{164} While the courts in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Id. at 104.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Id. at 105.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979).
  \item \textsuperscript{156} Torres, 383 F.3d at 105.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} Greenholtz, 442 U.S. at 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Torres, 383 F.3d at 105 (citing, along with some circuit court cases, \textit{Greenholtz}, 442 U.S. at 12); see Greenholtz, 442 U.S. at 12 ("We can accept respondents' view that the expectancy of release provided in this statute is entitled to some measure of constitutional protection. However, we emphasize that this statute has unique structure and language and thus whether any other state statute provides a protectible entitlement must be decided on a case-by-case basis.").
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Torres, 383 F.3d at 105.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Id. at 104.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Id. at 106.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} 353 F.3d 1199 (10th Cir. 2004).
  \item \textsuperscript{164} The en banc opinion reversed a panel decision, \textit{United States v. Aguirre-Tello}, 324 F.3d 1181 (10th Cir. 2003), \textit{rev'd}, Aguirre-Tello, 353 F.3d 1199.
\end{itemize}
Wilson, Lopez-Ortiz, and Torres based their decisions on a narrow interpretation of section 212(c) relief, the Tenth Circuit relied on a limited interpretation of deportation due process rights in general. The court began by recognizing that deportations are civil procedures not associated with the same constitutional protections as criminal proceedings. The court then asserted that beyond this principle, "[t]he Supreme Court has not... defined what fundamental fairness requires in a civil deportation proceeding context, but [the Court] has suggested that [fundamental fairness] prohibits 'procedural errors... so fundamental that they may functionally deprive the alien of judicial review.'" The Tenth Circuit cited its own opinions defining due process for deportable aliens as "'an opportunity to be heard at a meaningful time and in a meaningful manner.'" This narrow view of due process for deportations led the court to conclude that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief does not amount to a constitutional violation. Moreover, the Tenth Circuit questioned the predictive value of the statistic—relied on by the Supreme Court in St. Cyr—that 51.5% of relief applications were granted:

[The statistic] does not show... what proportion of those successful waiver applicants were convicted of serious violent felonies comparable to Aguirre-Tello's conviction for attempted murder. Without any indication that any of those successful applicants were similarly situated to Aguirre-Tello, the conclusion that he had at least a 50% chance of receiving a discretionary waiver is pure speculation, if not actually misleading.

In the Tenth Circuit's view, the Supreme Court's mistake of relying on the statistic bolstered the Tenth Circuit's holding that a failure to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief is not fundamentally unfair.

B. Interpretation Two: A Failure to Consider an Alien for Section 212(c) Relief Can Be Fundamentally Unfair, So Long as the Alien Demonstrates that There Was a Reasonable Probability of Relief

Richard Copeland's case was the occasion on which the Second Circuit became one of two circuits to hold that a failure to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair. As discussed in the Introduction, Copeland was deportable for criminal offenses, was told by an IJ that there was no relief available to him, and was

165. Aguirre-Tello, 353 F.3d at 1204.
166. Id. (quoting United States v. Mendoza-Lopez, 481 U.S. 828, 839 n.17 (1987)).
167. Id. at 1204-05 (quoting Aguilera v. Kirkpatrick, 241 F.3d 1286, 1292 (10th Cir. 2001)).
168. Id. at 1205. The court also established "reasonable likelihood" as the standard for prejudice and applied the facts to this standard in dicta. Id. at 1209-10.
169. Id. at 1210.
170. See id.
ordered deported.  

Copeland did not appeal the IJ's decision to the BIA within the mandated thirty-day limit, but in September 1998, Copeland filed a motion to reopen his deportation proceeding, alleging that the IJ "breached his obligation under 8 C.F.R. § 242.17(a) to inform Copeland of his eligibility for Section 212(c) relief." The same IJ denied Copeland's motion, and although Copeland appealed this decision to the BIA, Copeland was deported before the BIA considered his appeal. After Copeland reentered the country, he was arrested and indicted for the crime of illegal reentry. A federal district court dismissed the indictment based on the IJ's failure to inform Copeland of his eligibility for section 212(c) relief, and on appeal, the Second Circuit agreed. In United States v. Copeland (Copeland II), the Second Circuit reached two conclusions: First, a "failure to advise a potential deportee of a right to seek Section 212(c) relief can, if prejudicial, be fundamentally unfair within the meaning of Section 1326(d)(3);" and second, to prove prejudice, the alien must demonstrate that he had a "reasonable probability" of receiving relief.

In deciding the first point—that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair—the court noted that an alien can only demonstrate fundamental unfairness by showing a fundamental procedural error. The court then challenged the decisions holding that an IJ's failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief is not a fundamental error. First, the Second Circuit focused on the language of § 1326(d)(3), pointing out that "fundamental unfairness" becomes very apparent in cases where an alien with a high chance of relief was not considered for it:

To be sure, relief under Section 212(c) is not constitutionally mandated and is discretionary. It does not follow, however, that where an alien is erroneously denied information regarding the right to seek such relief, and the erroneous denial of that information results in a deportation that likely would have been avoided if the alien was properly informed, such error is not fundamentally unfair within the meaning of Section 1326(d)(3). The unfairness of such cases, the court reasoned, is especially striking because IJs owe special duties to aliens to develop the records of their deportations and to inform them of any available relief. Second, the
court criticized the decisions not finding fundamental unfairness for collapsing the distinction between a right to seek relief and a right to the relief itself: Such decisions "incorrectly assume that, because the grant of Section 212(c) relief is itself discretionary, the denial of a Section 212(c) hearing cannot be a fundamental procedural error."\(^{183}\) The court embraced \(St. Cyr\)'s finding that section 212(c) relief was granted in a "'substantial percentage'" of cases,\(^{184}\) and the court read \(St. Cyr\) as denying that the right to seek discretionary relief can be revoked.\(^{185}\) Thus, the court concluded that the "denial of an established right to be informed of the possibility of [section 212(c)] relief can, if prejudicial, be a fundamental procedural error."\(^{186}\)

After determining that Copeland could collaterally attack his deportation order, the court addressed Copeland's burden to demonstrate prejudice. Borrowing the prejudice test for ineffective assistance of counsel claims from \(Strickland v. Washington,^{187}\) the court held that "prejudice is shown where there is a reasonable probability that, but for the IJ's unprofessional errors, the alien would have been granted Section 212(c) relief."\(^{188}\) The Second Circuit reasoned that the \(Strickland\) standard "is close-fitting because the denial of an opportunity to apply for Section 212(c) relief will generally be the result either of a lawyer having caused an eligible alien to fail to apply . . . or of an IJ, owing special duties to a \textit{pro se} alien, having failed to give notice of such an opportunity."\(^{189}\)

The Second Circuit explained that its "reasonable probability" standard makes the determination of prejudice "akin to a trial within a trial."\(^{190}\) The adjudicating court must gather all the facts relevant to the determination of relief for the alien, balance the factors stated in \(Matter of Marin,^{191}\) and take into account similar cases.\(^{192}\) The court further instructed that "'[w]here . . . an alien is deportable by reason of two narcotics convictions, the alien must make a showing of unusual or outstanding countervailing equities to obtain a waiver of deportation.'"\(^{193}\) The court instructed that

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{183}\) \textit{Id.} at 72.
\item \(^{184}\) \textit{Id.} at 73 (citing INS v. St. Cyr, 533 U.S. 289, 296 (2001)).
\item \(^{185}\) \textit{Id.}
\item \(^{186}\) \textit{Id.} at 72.
\item \(^{187}\) 466 U.S. 668, 694 (1984) (noting that prejudice is shown where "there is a reasonable probability that, but for counsel's unprofessional errors, the result of the proceeding would have been different").
\item \(^{188}\) \textit{Copeland II,} 376 F.3d at 73.
\item \(^{189}\) \textit{Id.} (citation omitted).
\item \(^{190}\) \textit{Id.}
\item \(^{191}\) See supra Part I.B.1.b (describing the \textit{Marin} factors).
\item \(^{192}\) \textit{Copeland II,} 376 F.3d at 74.
\item \(^{193}\) \textit{Id.} (quoting Lovell v. INS, 52 F.3d 458, 461 (2d Cir. 1995)). In \textit{United States v. Scott,} 394 F.3d 111 (2d Cir. 2005), the Second Circuit also suggested that a "lengthy criminal history" might require a defendant-alien to show "unusual or outstanding equities" in his favor. \textit{Id.} at 120-21 (quoting Burbano, 20 I. & N. Dec. 872, 875 (B.I.A. 1994)).
\end{itemize}
Copeland's criminal record at the time of his deportation was relevant.\textsuperscript{194} Because the court felt that the record did not contain enough information about any factors in Copeland's favor, the court remanded the case to the district court to determine "whether Copeland was prejudiced by the IJ's failure to advise him of his right to seek Section 212(c) relief."\textsuperscript{195}

C. Interpretation Three: A Failure to Consider an Alien for Section 212(c) Relief Can Be Fundamentally Unfair, So Long as the Alien Demonstrates that There Was a Plausible Ground for Relief

The Ninth Circuit is the only other circuit besides the Second to hold that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can constitute fundamental unfairness. Several Ninth Circuit cases have addressed this issue. For example, in \textit{United States v. Ubaldo-Figueroa},\textsuperscript{196} as in other Ninth Circuit cases, the court's holding had two points: First, a failure by the BIA or an IJ to consider a potentially qualified alien for section 212(c) relief is, if prejudicial, fundamentally unfair; and second, to demonstrate prejudice, an alien must show that he had a "plausible ground" for obtaining section 212(c) relief at the time of his deportation proceeding.\textsuperscript{197}

The alien in \textit{Ubaldo-Figueroa} was deported after pleading guilty on separate occasions to one count of attempted first degree burglary of a dwelling, three counts of disorderly conduct, and driving under the influence.\textsuperscript{198} During Ubaldo-Figueroa's deportation proceeding, an IJ failed to advise him of his eligibility for section 212(c) relief.\textsuperscript{199} After being deported, Ubaldo-Figueroa reentered the United States and was indicted for criminal illegal reentry under § 1326.\textsuperscript{200} The Ninth Circuit vacated his indictment, reasoning that his deportation proceeding could be fundamentally unfair because section 212(c) relief was "at least one plausible legal challenge to his removal order."\textsuperscript{201} Ubaldo-Figueroa's burden required that he demonstrate prejudice from the IJ's failure to consider him for relief, and thus Ubaldo-Figueroa had to show that he had a "plausible ground" for relief at the time of his deportation.\textsuperscript{202} The court

\textsuperscript{194} Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 74; see also Scott, 394 F.3d at 119 (emphasizing this instruction and instructing that courts cannot consider any positive or negative factors occurring after the time of the deportation).

\textsuperscript{195} Copeland II, 376 F.3d at 74–75. For a discussion of other recent Second Circuit decisions relevant to criminal illegal reentry cases, see Wible, suprano note 70, at 475.

\textsuperscript{196} 364 F.3d 1042 (9th Cir. 2004).

\textsuperscript{197} Id. at 1050. For cases with similar holdings, see United States v. Gonzalez-Valerio, 342 F.3d 1051, 1054 (9th Cir. 2003); United States v. Leon-Leon, 35 F.3d 1428, 1432 (9th Cir. 1994) ("An alien's due process rights are adequately protected if . . . he can establish in a later criminal case that the defects in the deportation hearing actually prejudiced him.").

\textsuperscript{198} Ubaldo-Figueroa, 364 F.3d at 1046 & n.5.

\textsuperscript{199} Id. at 1048.

\textsuperscript{200} Id. at 1047.

\textsuperscript{201} Id. at 1050.

\textsuperscript{202} Id.; cf. Gonzalez-Valerio, 342 F.3d at 1054 ("Once [the alien] makes a prima facie showing of prejudice, the burden shifts to the government to demonstrate that the procedural violation could not have changed the proceedings' outcome."); United States v. Higareda-
found that he satisfied this burden, but the court did not do so by explicitly balancing the factors listed in Matter of Marin. Rather, the court held that Ubaldo-Figueroa had a plausible ground for relief because of the "significant" equities in his favor: gainful employment since he came to the United States; "substantial family ties in the United States, including a United States citizen wife and two United States citizen children"; and an active role in his children's education and upbringing. Considering these favorable factors, and not juxtaposing them to any negative factors, the court concluded that Ubaldo-Figueroa had been prejudiced by the IJ's failure to advise him of eligibility for section 212(c) relief.

The Ninth Circuit's "plausible ground" standard is more generous than the "reasonable probability" standard of the Second Circuit. The Ninth Circuit's prejudice standard, however, has not allowed every illegal reentry defendant to argue successfully that his deportation proceeding was fundamentally unfair. Two circumstances in particular have prevented some aliens from demonstrating a plausible ground for relief. The first circumstance has occurred where the alien committed a deportable offense after the 1996 Amendments took effect. For example, the defendant in

Ramirez, 107 F. Supp. 2d 1248, 1253 n.7 (D. Haw. 2000) ("The 'prejudice' requirement imposed in... cases involving direct judicial review of decisions of the Board of Immigration Appeals is identical to the 'prejudice' requirement imposed on a defendant who collaterally attacks a deportation order in a subsequent criminal prosecution for unauthorized re-entry after deportation." (citing United States v. Jimenez-Marmolejo, 104 F.3d 1083, 1086 (9th Cir. 1996)).

204. Ubaldo-Figueroa, 364 F.3d at 1050-51.
205. Id. at 1051. Unlike the Second Circuit’s opinion in Copeland II, Ubaldo-Figueroa and other recent Ninth Circuit opinions do not explain in detail the basis for the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard. See, e.g., United States v. Interian-Mata, 118 F. App’x 223 (9th Cir. 2004); United States v. Gonzalez-Valerio, 342 F.3d 1051 (9th Cir. 2003). One possible explanation for this is that the Ninth Circuit developed its prejudice standard over two decades ago. Several years before the Supreme Court’s decision in Mendoza-Lopez, the Ninth Circuit held that an alien indicted for illegal reentry could collaterally attack his underlying deportation. See, e.g., United States v. Barraza-Leon, 575 F.2d 218 (9th Cir. 1978). In United States v. Calderon-Medina, 591 F.2d 529 (9th Cir. 1979), the Ninth Circuit responded to an alien’s collateral attack by holding that a “[v]iolation of a[n immigration] regulation does not invalidate a deportation proceeding unless the regulation serves a purpose of benefit to the alien.” Id. at 531. The court concluded by remanding the case to the district court and instructing that

[o]n remand the aliens should be allowed the opportunity to demonstrate prejudice resulting from the INS regulation violations. The district courts will determine whether [a] violation... harmed the aliens’ interests in such a way as to affect potentially the outcome of their deportation proceedings. Any such harm should be identified specifically. If either alien shows such prejudice, the indictment against him may be dismissed.

Id. at 532. The language in Calderon-Medina, warning against violations that could “affect potentially the outcome of... deportation proceedings,” id., might have planted the seed that eventually produced the "plausible ground" standard.

206. For an argument that the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard can be interpreted “as granting defendants in illegal reentry cases the benefit of the doubt, even if they have a borderline claim of prejudice, as long as they establish that their deportation proceeding was procedurally deficient,” see Wible, supra note 70, at 475.
United States v. Gonzalez-Valerio had been convicted prior to the enactment of the 1996 Amendments of committing a lewd act upon a child. This crime alone did not bar him from consideration for section 212(c) relief, but after the 1996 Amendments took effect, he was convicted of battering his spouse. Therefore, the Ninth Circuit found that when Gonzalez-Valerio faced deportation proceedings after these two convictions and the IJ failed to consider him for section 212(c) relief, Gonzalez-Valerio was not prejudiced "because his 1997 conviction for [battering his] spouse statutorily barred him from receiving § 212(c) relief." As the court explained, "If [Gonzalez-Valerio] is barred from receiving relief, his claim is not 'plausible.'"

The second circumstance preventing an alien from demonstrating a plausible ground for relief has occurred where the alien has a serious criminal history. The BIA has required that such aliens demonstrate "unusual or outstanding equities in order to receive relief." Serious criminal histories usually involve convictions for multiple crimes. For example, individual aliens have faced the "unusual or outstanding equities" doctrine due to convictions for lewd acts on a child, spousal abuse, and resisting arrest; convictions for several drug transactions; convictions for DUls, petty theft, second degree burglary, and corporal injury on a spouse; and convictions for one drug offense and multiple driving infractions. If an alien with a serious criminal history cannot show

---

207. 342 F.3d 1051 (9th Cir. 2003).
208. Id. at 1052.
209. Id. at 1053.
210. Id. at 1054.
211. Id. at 1056. For other decisions in which the Ninth Circuit did not find prejudice on similar grounds, see United States v. Garcia-Martinez, 228 F.3d 956, 964 (9th Cir. 2000) ("[The defendant] must demonstrate actual prejudice."); United States v. Leon-Leon, 35 F.3d 1428, 1432 (9th Cir. 1994) ("Leon-Leon argues prejudice should be presumed. . . . [Nevertheless,] Leon-Leon failed to refute the fact that he is clearly deportable.").
213. Id. ("Gonzalez's claim of prejudice is further undermined by the requirement that an applicant for § 212(c) relief who has a serious criminal history must demonstrate unusual or outstanding equities in order to receive relief.").
214. Gutierrez-Chavez v. INS, 298 F.3d 824, 825-27, 830 (9th Cir. 2002) (approving of the district court's finding that the defendant failed to "make a showing of unusual or outstanding equities" because of the seriousness of his offense, which involved participating in ten drug transactions over six months).
216. Ayala-Chavez v. INS, 944 F.2d 638, 641 (9th Cir. 1991) ("The outstanding equities standard is rationally related to the statutory scheme. . . . [T]he immigration laws clearly reflect strong Congressional policy against lenient treatment of drug offenders." (citations and internal quotation omitted)). For a district court arguing that a conviction for forcible rape warrants the heightened standard, see United States v. Interian-Mata, 363 F. Supp. 2d 1246, 1249 (S.D. Cal. 2005).
unusual or outstanding equities in his favor, he has no plausible ground for relief.\textsuperscript{217}

D. District Court Responses to the Second and Ninth Circuit Prejudice Standards

Several of the district courts applying the Second Circuit’s or the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard have criticized these standards.

1. United States v. Copeland

After the Second Circuit remanded \textit{Copeland II}\textsuperscript{218} for a determination of whether Copeland had a reasonable probability of relief during his deportation, the District Court for the Eastern District of New York responded with a decision (\textit{Copeland III})\textsuperscript{219} opining that there should be no prejudice standard. The district court felt uncomfortable with the broad discretion granted to courts to determine prejudice, arguing that the “reasonable probability” standard forced courts to do the “nearly impossible” task of determining what a hypothetical immigration judge would have decided.\textsuperscript{220} In \textit{Copeland III}, the district court proposed that decisions in cases such as Copeland’s should focus not on \textit{Strickland}’s should focus not on \textit{Strickland}’s prejudice requirement, but on “the seriousness of the due process denial.”\textsuperscript{221} That is, \textit{Copeland III} argued that courts should decide fundamental unfairness by a categorical approach rather than an individual approach\textsuperscript{222}: “[A] readily applied—and probably fairer—test would require the defendant to prove only that his deportation resulted from a due process denial serious enough to make ‘the entry of the [deportation] order... fundamentally unfair.’”\textsuperscript{223} The court explained that the Second Circuit’s order “to take into account actual cases in the context of decisions by [IJs] and the Board of Immigration Appeals poses a substantial challenge” because the majority of IJ decisions are unavailable, unless a party seeks them through discovery.\textsuperscript{224} Furthermore, the BIA only reviews a small percentage of the cases heard by IJs.\textsuperscript{225} “This presents a skewed sample

\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{217} See, e.g., Gonzalez-Valerio, 342 F.3d at 1056-57; Gutierrez-Chavez, 298 F.3d at 825-27.  \\
\textsuperscript{218} 376 F.3d 61 (2d Cir. 2004).  \\
\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Copeland III}, 369 F. Supp. 2d 275, 311-12 (E.D.N.Y. 2005).  \\
\textsuperscript{220} See \textit{id}. at 309-11, 334 (“This is a troubling case, in part because it involves a non-citizen with a serious criminal record. More troubling still is that the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit has asked the district court to determine—not what did happen, or what likely happened—but what might have happened had the defendant been permitted to seek section 212(c) relief.”).  \\
\textsuperscript{221} \textit{id}. at 311.  \\
\textsuperscript{222} \textit{id}.  \\
\textsuperscript{223} \textit{id}. at 278-79 (quoting 8 U.S.C. § 1326(d)(3) (2000)).  \\
\textsuperscript{224} \textit{id}. at 305.  \\
\textsuperscript{225} \textit{id}.  \\
\end{tabular}
because non-citizens satisfied with the results of an IJ's decision, in cases where the government did not seriously object, were never appealed.\textsuperscript{226}

Despite these criticisms, the Copeland III court recognized that it had to follow the "reasonable probability" standard established by the Second Circuit.\textsuperscript{227} Before deciding whether Copeland met the burden of proving prejudice, however, the court stated that it would be useful to quantify Copeland's burden, "given the difficulty of assessing what another adjudicator would have done when applying complex and subjective criteria."\textsuperscript{228} As a result, the court required Copeland to prove that his probability of obtaining relief was at least twenty percent at the time of his deportation.\textsuperscript{229} The court settled on twenty percent because the number represents "the approximate inverse of 'clear, unequivocal and convincing evidence'" and it "represents a sensible and enforceable standard, considering that deportation often has such serious consequences for the deportee and his or her family."\textsuperscript{230} After balancing the Marin factors, the court concluded that Copeland had failed to show a "reasonable probability" of obtaining relief, and the court reinstated his indictment.\textsuperscript{231}

2. District Courts in the Ninth Circuit

Like the Copeland III court, some district courts in the Ninth Circuit are critical of applying a prejudice standard to determine whether a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider an alien for section 212(c) was fundamentally unfair. The opinions of these courts have been skeptical of the generosity of the Ninth Circuit's standard, which requires that the alien only demonstrate a "plausible ground" for relief. For example, in United States v. Higareda-Ramirez,\textsuperscript{232} the district court commented that "[a] showing of prejudice [under the 'plausible ground' standard] is essentially a demonstration that the alleged violation affected the outcome of the proceedings."\textsuperscript{233} In United States v. Andrade-Partida,\textsuperscript{234} the district court opined,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{226} Id.
  \item \textsuperscript{227} Id. at 312.
  \item \textsuperscript{228} See id. at 286.
  \item \textsuperscript{229} Id. at 288.
  \item \textsuperscript{230} Id. at 287; cf. United States v. Russo, No. 02CR482, 2005 WL 1243311, at *9 n.8 (E.D.N.Y. May 25, 2005) ("This court shares the view that the reasonable probability standard provides district courts with little guidance. This is so both because an alien bears the burden of demonstrating that his application merits favorable consideration, ... while leaving the determination to the broad discretion of the IJ, and because of the paucity of published decisions of IJs and the BIA that would aid the court in its analysis. ... While the court is not prepared to opine as to the quantum of proof necessary to establish a reasonable probability, the court understands defendant's burden to be not insubstantial, requiring more than a mere plausible claim for relief." (internal quotations omitted)).
  \item \textsuperscript{231} Copeland III, 369 F. Supp. 2d at 344.
  \item \textsuperscript{232} 107 F. Supp. 2d 1248 (D. Haw. 2000).
  \item \textsuperscript{233} Id. at 1253; see also id. at 1254, 1256 (holding that the defendant was prejudiced during his deportation order because he had no interpreter or attorney, and because the case's record was inadequate).
\end{itemize}
One can only guess at what might have occurred had the IJ not neglected his mandatory duty . . . . The only conclusion that the [c]ourt can reach with certainty is that the IJ's error deprived defendant of the opportunity to apply for certain relief, the denial of which may have created an issue for appeal in federal circuit court.235

In United States v. Saldivar-Vargas,236 the court commented that in following Ninth Circuit precedent, the court "[w]as constrained . . . to find that [the defendant] . . . was deprived of his right to judicial review because the IJ failed to inform him that he was entitled to apply for § 212(c) relief."237 Perhaps as a reaction to the generosity of the "plausible ground" standard and as a desire to ground their decisions, district courts in the Ninth Circuit are more prone than appellate courts to consider the Marin factors when determining prejudice.238

Part II of this Note has summarized the three different holdings of circuit courts deciding whether a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief is fundamentally unfair under § 1326(d)(3). Part II has also described some of the negative reactions of the district courts applying the holdings. Part III of the Note considers the judicial opinions described above and argues that the Ninth Circuit offers the best solution: A failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief should be fundamentally unfair, so long as the alien can prove that she had a plausible ground for relief.

III. A FAILURE TO CONSIDER AN ALIEN FOR SECTION 212(c) RELIEF SHOULD BE FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR, SO LONG AS THE ALIEN DEMONSTRATES A PLAUSIBLE GROUND FOR RELIEF

This Note has focused on whether a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief can render a deportation proceeding fundamentally unfair under § 1326(d)(3). Although this issue is narrow, it has generated tremendous confusion and disagreement. Several circuit courts have held that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can never amount to fundamental unfairness and thus never be a basis for collaterally attacking a deportation order.239

235. Id. at 1271.
237. Id. at 1214. In a footnote, the court went on to add as follows: "[A]t oral argument the government appeared to concede, as it must, that this court is constrained to follow Ninth Circuit precedent regardless of whether this court agrees with it or whether such precedent might be altered by the Supreme Court sometime in the future." Id. at 1214 n.3.
238. Compare United States v. Interian-Mata, 363 F. Supp. 2d 1246, 1249 (S.D. Cal. 2005), Saldivar-Vargas, 290 F. Supp. 2d at 1214, and Andrade-Partida, 110 F. Supp. 2d at 1267 (all using the Marin factors to determine whether the defendant-alien was prejudiced), with United States v. Aragon-Aviles, No. 03-50327, 2005 WL 2250763, at *1 (9th Cir. Sept. 16, 2005), United States v. Ubaldo-Figueroa, 364 F.3d 1042, 1050-51 (9th Cir. 2004), and United States v. Jimenez-Marmolejo, 104 F.3d 1083, 1085-86 (9th Cir. 1996) (all not using the Marin factors to determine whether the defendant-alien was prejudiced).
239. See supra Part II.A.
The Second Circuit and Ninth Circuit disagree with this stance, both holding that a failure to consider an alien for relief can be fundamentally unfair, so long as the alien demonstrates that the failure was prejudicial. Furthermore, the Second and Ninth Circuits disagree with each other about the requirements of the prejudice standard. Part III of this Note makes two arguments. First, Part III.A posits that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair, so long as the alien proves that she was prejudiced by this failure. Second, Part III.B argues that the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard is the most workable: An alien’s burden for demonstrating prejudice should require her to show that she had a “plausible ground” for section 212(c) relief.

A. A Failure to Consider an Alien for Section 212(c) Relief Can Be Fundamentally Unfair

When an alien collaterally attacks her original deportation order, a court must determine whether the alien meets the requirements of § 1326(d)(1), (2), and (3). If the alien argues that the BIA or an IJ improperly failed to consider her for section 212(c) relief, and if the alien satisfies § 1326(d)(1) and (2), the court then has the discretion to decide whether the BIA or IJ’s failure was “fundamentally unfair” under § 1326(d)(3). A majority of the circuits to rule on this issue have held that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief cannot be fundamentally unfair. As Part II.A of this Note discussed above, the basis for their decisions is a particular interpretation of section 212(c), one that views the statute as a “legislative grace” granting the Attorney General and his agents broad discretion to decide whether to grant relief from deportation to an alien. The majority circuits maintain that in light of this broad discretion, a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can never be fundamentally unfair because the statute does not establish a liberty or property right deserving due process protection. The majority circuits’ instinct seems to be that due process does not protect a benefit that is entirely discretionary. As the scholar D.J. Galligan observed,

There may be... difficulties in making rights dependent upon discretionary assessments. ... [A]s the discretionary element widens, the value of the right is reduced; there may even come a point where its content is so dependent on discretionary assessments that the very coinage of rights is debased.

240. See supra Part II.B and II.C for summaries of the Second Circuit’s and Ninth Circuit’s holdings, respectively.
241. For a description of the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard, see supra notes 196-203 and accompanying text. For an argument that the Second Circuit’s prejudice standard is the correct approach, see Wible, supra note 70, at 485-92.
242. See supra notes 78-80 and accompanying text.
Nevertheless, the majority circuits’ interpretation misses a critical distinction between the right to section 212(c) relief itself (here, undeniably discretionary) and the right to be considered for the relief, which the Supreme Court in another context has held potentially protected by a due process interest even where the relief itself is not. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Greenholtz v. Inmates of Nebraska Penal & Correctional Complex*\(^{244}\) indicates that although someone may have only a “mere hope” in the exercise of discretionary relief, consideration for that relief may become protected by due process if other statutes so mandate. *Greenholtz* held that a Nebraska statute could elevate consideration for parole from a mere hope to a due process right.\(^{245}\) The majority circuits should acknowledge that federal statutes, BIA precedent, and Supreme Court holdings similarly elevated consideration for section 212(c) relief from an exercise of unguided discretion to a mandatory, established liberty interest so important to deportable aliens that it deserves due process protection.\(^{246}\) Therefore, as the Second and Ninth Circuits hold, a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair under § 1326(d)(3).\(^{247}\)

The first factor elevating consideration for section 212(c) relief from a mere hope to an established liberty interest is federal legislation. Although section 212(c) clearly granted discretionary power to the Attorney General, Congress did not make the consideration of relief discretionary: Under 8 C.F.R. § 242.17(a) (repealed in 1998) and § 212.3(e)(1), an IJ had a duty to inform an alien of any right to discretionary relief and thereafter conduct a hearing to determine whether to grant that relief if requested.\(^{248}\) Congress did not place further limits on the Attorney General’s discretion, but a second factor did: the BIA’s decision in *Matter of Marin*,\(^ {249}\) which provided guidelines for the Attorney General’s agents exercising his discretion. Consideration of the *Marin* factors was an established procedure

---

244. 442 U.S. 1 (1979).
245. *Id.* at 12 (“We can accept respondents’ view that the expectancy of release provided in this statute is entitled to some measure of constitutional protection.”); *see supra* notes 155-58 and accompanying text (discussing the Third Circuit’s interpretation of *Greenholtz* in United States v. Torres, 383 F.3d 92 (3d Cir. 2004)).
246. For a discussion of Supreme Court decisions besides *Greenholtz* that distinguish a right to consideration for relief from a favorable exercise of that relief, see Wible, *supra* note 70, at 486-88 (discussing Jay v. Boyd, 351 U.S. 345 (1956); United States ex rel. Accardi v. Shaughnessy, 347 U.S. 260 (1954)).
247. For a discussion of the Second and Ninth Circuits’ holdings, see *supra* Part II.B and II.C, respectively.
248. *See Copeland II*, 376 F.3d 61, 72 (2d Cir. 2004). Congress has “sweeping power to enact retroactive laws,” but as counsel for St. Cyr noted during oral arguments before the Supreme Court, “this power [is] all the more reason to apply the Court’s rigorous clear statement rule before imposing a harsh retroactive consequence.” *Morawetz*, *supra* note 82, at 303.
and acted as a limit on the arbitrariness of the Attorney General’s 
discretionary power.²⁵⁰

The third factor elevating consideration for section 212(c) relief to an 
established liberty interest is Supreme Court decisions. Both Mendoza-
Lopez²⁵¹ and St. Cyr²⁵² protected the rights of aliens, and these decisions 
indicate that consideration for section 212(c) relief is a protected due 
process right. Mendoza-Lopez is frequently cited for its general warning 
that courts should nullify deportation orders based on procedural errors “so 
fundamental that they may functionally deprive the alien of judicial 
review.”²⁵³ This case also held, however, that fairness during deportation 
proceedings requires considering an alien for any possible discretionary 
relief.²⁵⁴ The defendants in Mendoza-Lopez were indicted for illegal 
reentry and argued that they should be allowed to collaterally attack their 
original deportations.²⁵⁵ The aliens had two bases for their attack: An IJ 
had inadequately advised them about obtaining counsel, and the IJ had 
failed to obtain knowing waivers of the aliens’ right to apply for a type of 
discretionary relief called “suspension of deportation.”²⁵⁶ After 
determining that the aliens could collaterally attack their deportation order, 
the Court held that

²⁵⁰ See supra notes 91-96 and accompanying text (discussing the Marin factors). To 
understand how federal statutes and BIA precedent limited the discretionary aspect of 
section 212(c) relief to make consideration for it an established right, it is useful to compare 
another form of discretionary relief, the presidential pardon power. See U.S. Const. art. II, § 
2, cl. 1 (“The President shall . . . have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses 
against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.”). The President’s power to 
pardon is almost completely discretionary: The only mandatory limits are the Constitution’s 
provisions that (1) the President possesses this power and (2) the power cannot be used to 
pardon an impeachment. See Paul J. Haase, Note, “Oh My Darling Clemency”: Existing or 
Possible Limitations on the Use of the Presidential Pardon Power, 39 Am. Crim. L. Rev. 
1287, 1292-93 (2002). Congress has attempted to provide some limits on the President’s 
pardoning power, see, e.g., 28 C.F.R. §§ 0.35-36 (2005); 28 C.F.R. §§ 1.1-10 (2005), but 
these limits are advisory rather than mandatory. Haase, supra, at 1298. Thus, “a pardon 
‘need not satisfy any strict legal set of requirements, [a pardon] can be [granted] for no 
reason at all or for a coin flip, and in the end [a pardon] rests upon the exercise of boundless 
discretion.’” Id. (alterations in original) (quoting L. Anthony Sutin, If Only You Asked: Trust 
No one could reasonably argue that he or she is entitled to a presidential pardon and that a 
failure to consider someone for a presidential pardon amounts to “fundamental unfairness.” 
This is precisely because there is no statutory or customary guidance for, or limits on, the 
presidential pardon power. In contrast, the Attorney General’s discretionary power had to 
operate within the bounds of section 212(c)’s language, 8 C.F.R § 242.17(a), 8 C.F.R. § 
212.3(e)(1), and the factors enumerated in Matter of Marin. The establishment of such 
requirements indicates that our government took consideration for section 212(c) relief very 
seriously and that the consideration was an established right deserving due process 
protection.

²⁵³ Mendoza-Lopez, 481 U.S. at 839 n.17.
²⁵⁴ See supra notes 75-80 and accompanying text (describing Mendoza-Lopez).
²⁵⁵ Mendoza-Lopez, 481 U.S. at 831.
²⁵⁶ Id. “Suspension of deportation,” which was codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1254(a), was very 
similar to section 212(c) relief. See id. at 831 n.3.
[b]ecause respondents were deprived of their rights to appeal, and of any basis to appeal since the only relief for which they would have been eligible was not adequately explained to them, the deportation proceeding in which these events occurred may not be used to support a criminal conviction, and the dismissal of the indictments against them was therefore proper.257

In other words, the Court explicitly recognized in *Mendoza-Lopez* that if an alien was deprived of judicial review and was not considered for possible relief from deportation, her indictment could not survive. The Court's holding thus indicates that a failure to consider a potentially eligible alien for section 212(c) relief can be a fundamentally unfair procedural error justifying a collateral attack on a deportation order.258

The Supreme Court's decision in *St. Cyr* similarly indicates that a failure to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair.259 At the beginning of its opinion, the Court characterizes St. Cyr's entitlement to consideration for relief as "a substantive [question], concerning the impact of [the 1996 Amendments] on conduct that occurred before their enactment and on the availability of discretionary relief from deportation."260 The Court highlighted the importance of consideration for section 212(c) relief by discussing the basic unfairness of retroactively eliminating that relief.261 The Court posited that retroactive application of IIRIRA would be a "new disability" to aliens such as St. Cyr who entered into plea agreements in reliance of the availability of section 212(c) relief and that "[t]he potential for unfairness . . . is significant and manifest."262

As the Second Circuit noted in *Copeland II*, such assertions stand for the proposition that eligibility for section 212(c) relief cannot be lightly revoked.263 Furthermore, *St. Cyr* clearly stated that the discretionary nature of section 212(c) does not belittle its importance:

[T]he fact that § 212(c) relief is discretionary does not affect the propriety of our conclusion. There is a clear difference, for the purposes of retroactivity analysis, between facing possible deportation and facing certain deportation. Prior to AEDPA and IIRIRA, aliens like St. Cyr had a significant likelihood of receiving § 212(c) relief . . . . [R]espondent, and other aliens like him, almost certainly relied upon that likelihood . . . .264

Reliance on section 212(c) relief, and not the statute's discretionary nature, was thus determinative in the Court's holding that section 212(c) relief remains available to aliens like St. Cyr. Aliens presently indicted for illegal

---

257. *Id.* at 842.
259. See *supra* notes 113-29 and accompanying text (discussing *St. Cyr*).
261. See *supra* notes 125-29 (discussing *St. Cyr*'s fairness analysis).
262. *St. Cyr*, 533 U.S. at 323.
263. *Copeland II*, 376 F.3d 61, 73 (2d Cir. 2004); see also *supra* note 185 and accompanying text (discussing this point).
reentry, however, may have equally relied on section 212(c) relief, and the fact that these individuals have reentered the country without permission makes their earlier deportation orders no fairer than St. Cyr’s. Courts should not be allowed to eliminate the consideration for relief that St. Cyr guaranteed simply because an alien’s eligibility for section 212(c) relief is litigated at date later than her original deportation. St. Cyr, along with Mendoza-Lopez, represents the Supreme Court’s view that consideration for section 212(c) relief is not a haphazard, unguided “grace,” but an established procedure of incredible importance to aliens. Depriving an alien of the opportunity to seek relief should thus be “fundamentally unfair” under § 1326(d)(3), if—as discussed below—the alien proves that she was prejudiced by the failure.

B. Demonstrating a “Plausible Ground” for Relief Is the Proper Prejudice Standard

The Second and Ninth Circuits properly found that a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief can be fundamentally unfair. Both courts maintain that a collaterally attacking alien proves fundamental unfairness only if she was prejudiced by the failure. The Second Circuit held that an alien demonstrates prejudice if she shows that she had a “reasonable probability” of receiving relief from deportation. The Ninth Circuit held that an alien demonstrates prejudice by showing that she had a “plausible ground” for relief. Part III.B.1 argues that despite the criticisms of the district courts applying the Second or Ninth Circuits’ prejudice standards, some standard is necessary. Part III.B.2 argues that a collaterally attacking alien should bear a burden of showing prejudice and that this burden should require the alien to meet the Ninth Circuit’s “plausible ground” prejudice standard.

1. The Justification for a Prejudice Standard, Despite the Criticisms of Several District Court Opinions

Although several district courts have been critical of applying a prejudice standard to collateral attacks such as Richard Copeland’s, aliens should continue to bear some prejudice burden. The government and society would pay a high cost if aliens who were statutorily ineligible for section 212(c) relief or who had a miniscule chance of relief had their indictments

265. Cf. Morawetz, supra note 82, at 302 (describing an amicus brief filed on behalf of St. Cyr that “provided specific evidence of how criminal defense lawyers were trained to consider eligibility for 212(c) relief when negotiating a plea agreement”).

266. See supra Part II.B-C (discussing the Second Circuit’s and Ninth Circuit’s holdings, respectively).

267. See supra notes 187-95 and accompanying text (describing the Second Circuit’s prejudice standard).

268. See supra notes 202-05 and accompanying text (describing the Ninth Circuit’s prejudice standard).

269. See supra Part II.D (discussing these criticisms).
for illegal reentry automatically dismissed. Such dismissals would waste the considerable time and money already spent on prosecuting the aliens, as well as risk exculpating dangerous persons who deserve criminal sanctions. Therefore, federal courts should act as a filter, distinguishing aliens who had meritorious cases for section 212(c) relief from those who had no chance of relief. Furthermore, because an alien's burden of proving prejudice will require presenting factors in her favor, a determination of prejudice by a federal court will allow an alien with a sympathetic case more time to collect and prepare evidence for any future immigration proceedings.

270. See supra notes 91-96 and accompanying text (describing the Marin factors).

271. Although an alien may demonstrate prejudice and convince a federal court to vacate her indictment for illegal reentry, it is not certain that she will ultimately receive section 212(c) relief. Under 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(5), the federal government can reinstate an alien's prior deportation order "[i]f the Attorney General finds that [the] alien has reentered the United States illegally after having been removed." 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(5) (2000). Title eight, section 241.8 of the Code of Federal Regulations further describes how an alien has "no right to a hearing before an immigration judge in such circumstances" and how the reinstatement of the prior deportation order requires an "immigration officer" to make certain findings. 8 C.F.R. § 241.8 (2005). The Code of Federal Regulations allows an alien to submit an oral or written statement contesting an immigration officer's decision to reinstate a deportation, but the Code does not require the officer to determine whether the prior deportation order was fair or whether the alien should have been considered for some form of discretionary relief. See id. In fact, 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(5) commands that "the prior order of removal . . . is not subject to being reopened or reviewed, [and] the alien is not eligible and may not apply for any relief under this chapter." 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(5). As a result, if a federal court in a criminal proceeding finds that an alien's prior deportation order was "fundamentally unfair" and vacates her indictment for illegal reentry, the federal government could reinstate that same deportation order despite the court's fairness determination and proceed with a civil deportation. In light of the federal government's reinstatement power, an alien has limited options if she seeks section 212(c) relief after a court dismisses her indictment for illegal reentry. If an immigration officer reinstates the prior deportation order pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(5), the alien could submit a statement to the officer citing the federal court's determination that the prior deportation order was "fundamentally unfair." If the immigration officer declines to reverse the reinstatement, the alien could then appeal the reinstatement to the Court of Appeals for that jurisdiction. Nevertheless, under the REAL ID Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-13, 119 Stat. 231 (codified as amended in various sections of 2, 8, 10, 12, 22, 28, 30, 33, 37, 38, 40, 42 U.S.C.), the alien's claims on appeal are limited and the alien's burden of persuasion is significant. For example, Ramirez-Molina v. Ziglar, No. 03-50596, 2006 WL 62862 (5th Cir. Jan. 12, 2006), describes how the REAL ID Act limits an alien to asserting only constitutional or legal claims when appealing a reinstatement order and describes how the Fifth Circuit further requires an alien to show that she exhausted her administrative remedies and that her initial deportation order was a gross miscarriage of justice, id. at *4. An alien in the Ninth Circuit has an additional option, however. In 2004, the Ninth Circuit invalidated 8 C.F.R. § 241.8, holding that the section's provisions were ultra vires to INA § 240(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1229a(a) (2000), which requires that "[a]n immigration judge shall conduct proceedings for deciding the inadmissibility or deportability of an alien." Morales-Izquierdo v. Ashcroft, 388 F.3d 1299, 1302-04 (9th Cir. 2004); cf. Dinnall v. Gonzalez, 421 F.3d 247, 253 n.9 (3d Cir. 2005) (noting the Ninth Circuit's holding in Morales-Izquierdo). When a reinstatement hearing within the Ninth Circuit takes place before an IJ, the alien could collaterally attack the prior deportation order. During the hearing, however, the alien would have to demonstrate that "the prior order resulted in a gross miscarriage of justice." See Roman, 19 I. & N. Dec. 855, 856-57 (B.I.A. 1988) ("[A]n alien may collaterally attack a final order of exclusion or
2. Why the Prejudice Standard Should Require an Alien to Demonstrate a Plausible Ground for Relief

As discussed above, when an alien indicted in federal court for criminal illegal reentry collaterally attacks her deportation based on a failure of the BIA or an IJ to consider her for section 212(c) relief, the federal court should determine whether the alien was prejudiced. The purpose of the court's determination is to distinguish aliens who at least had a chance of receiving section 212(c) relief from those who had no chance of relief and should remain indicted. Consistent with this purpose, federal courts should apply the prejudice standard articulated by the Ninth Circuit: An alien should only have to demonstrate that she had a plausible ground for receiving section 212(c) relief. As noted by the district court in Copeland III, the determination of prejudice along any standard requires that a federal judge step into the shoes of a hypothetical IJ sitting before the passage of the 1996 Amendments. Several district courts have voiced concerns about this task, but so long as district courts must filter the aliens' cases to conserve judicial and administrative resources, the standard applied by the courts should be the least burdensome on both the courts and aliens. This seems to be the implication behind Copeland III's attempt to quantify prejudice as a showing that the alien had at least a twenty percent chance of receiving relief from deportation. The Copeland III court realized that because aliens with meritorious cases have already suffered an improper decision during their deportations, fairness to such aliens requires a low prejudice burden. Although the "plausible ground" standard is a generous standard, considerations such as statutory ineligibility and the "unusual or outstanding equities" doctrine will minimize the extent to which federal judges must act as hypothetical immigration judges. In sum, a prejudice standard requiring an alien to show a plausible ground for relief is the most efficient standard for conserving judicial and administrative resources and for exculpating aliens who were unfairly denied consideration for deportation relief.

---

272. See supra Part III.B.1.
273. See id.
274. For a description of the Ninth Circuit's prejudice standard, see supra note 202 and accompanying text.
275. See supra note 220 and accompanying text.
276. See supra Part II.D (discussing the district courts' criticisms).
277. See supra notes 227-31 and accompanying text.
279. See supra notes 96, 212-17 and accompanying text (discussing the "unusual or outstanding equities" doctrine).
CONCLUSION

Section 212(c) was incredibly important to deportable aliens because it provided an opportunity for relief from deportation. Federal laws,\textsuperscript{280} BIA precedent,\textsuperscript{281} and Supreme Court decisions\textsuperscript{282} have all recognized how numerous aliens came to rely on this relief to remain in the United States. If the BIA or an IJ failed to consider an alien for section 212(c) relief and the alien is subsequently indicted for illegal reentry, the court presiding over the prosecution for illegal reentry should determine whether the alien had a plausible ground for relief at the time of her deportation. If so, the indictment for illegal reentry should be thrown out, for the courts should not condone a conviction that relies on a flawed administrative proceeding. To allow such a conviction is fundamentally unfair, regardless of the defendant's citizenship status.

\textsuperscript{280} See supra note 248 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{281} See supra notes 249-50 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{282} See supra notes 251-65 and accompanying text.
Notes & Observations