

## Syllabus

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

## SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

## Syllabus

FLORIDA *v.* THOMAS

## CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

No. 00–391. Argued April 25, 2001– Decided June 4, 2001

While officers were investigating marijuana sales and making arrests at a Florida home, respondent Thomas drove up, parked in the home's driveway, and walked toward the back of his car. An officer met him there and asked his name and whether he had a driver's license. After a check of Thomas' license revealed an outstanding warrant, the officer arrested him, handcuffed him, and took him inside the home. The officer then went back outside, alone, and searched Thomas' car, finding several bags containing methamphetamine. Thomas was charged with possession of that drug and related offenses. The trial court granted his motion to suppress the evidence of narcotics and narcotic paraphernalia. The Second District Court of Appeal reversed, finding the search valid under *New York v. Belton*, 453 U. S. 454, in which this Court established a "bright-line" rule permitting an officer who has made a lawful custodial arrest of a car's occupant to search the car's passenger compartment as a contemporaneous incident of the arrest. Holding that *Belton* did not apply, the Florida Supreme Court reversed, but remanded for the trial court to determine whether the vehicle search was justified under *Chimel v. California*, 395 U. S. 752. This Court granted certiorari to consider whether, as the State Supreme Court had held, *Belton's* bright-line rule is limited to situations where the officer initiates contact with a vehicle's occupant while that person remains in the vehicle.

*Held:* The Court lacks jurisdiction to decide the question on which certiorari was granted. Although the parties did not raise the issue in their briefs on the merits, this Court must first consider whether it has jurisdiction to decide this case. See *Duquesne Light Co. v. Barasch*, 488 U. S. 299, 306. Title 28 U. S. C. §1257(a) authorizes this Court to review "[f]inal judgments . . . by the highest court of a State . . . where any . . . right . . . is specially set up or claimed under the Constitu-

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tion.” In a criminal prosecution, finality generally is defined by a judgment of conviction and the imposition of a sentence. *Fort Wayne Books, Inc. v. Indiana*, 489 U. S. 46, 54. However, in certain circumstances, the Court has treated state-court judgments as final for jurisdictional purposes even though further proceedings were to take place in the state court. *Flynt v. Ohio*, 451 U. S. 619, 620–621. In *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*, 420 U. S. 469, 479–483, the Court divided cases of this kind into four categories: (1) cases in which there are further proceedings, even entire trials, yet to occur in the state courts, but where the federal issue is conclusive or the outcome of further proceedings preordained; (2) cases in which the federal issue, finally decided by a State’s highest court, will survive and require decision regardless of the outcome of future state-court proceedings; (3) cases in which the federal claim has been finally decided, with further proceedings on the merits in the state courts to come, but in which later review of the federal issue cannot be had, whatever the ultimate outcome of the case; and (4) cases in which the state courts have finally decided the federal issue with further proceedings pending in which the party seeking review in this Court might prevail on the merits on nonfederal grounds, thus rendering unnecessary review of the federal issue by this Court, and where reversal of the state court on the federal issue would be preclusive of any further litigation on the relevant cause of action rather than merely controlling the nature and character of, or determining the admissibility of evidence in, the state proceedings still to come. Because none of those categories fits the Florida Supreme Court’s judgment in this case, the judgment is not final. Pp. 2–6.

Certiorari dismissed for want of jurisdiction. Reported below: 761 So. 2d 1010.

REHNQUIST, C. J., delivered the opinion for a unanimous Court.