

HANDOUT 1 - UPDATE

11. In 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples are entitled to “the benefits and protections afforded persons of the opposite sex who choose to marry.” In 2000, the Vermont Legislature passed the nation’s first “civil unions” Act. However, the Act was written as a compromise and civil unions remain separate and unequal to civil marriage.
12. In November 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Commonwealth “failed to identify any constitutionally adequate reason for denying civil marriage to same-sex couples.” In February 2004, State Legislators were unable to pass a constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriages.

HANDOUT 3 - UPDATE

Civil and religious marriage has long existed side by side. Regardless of any change in civil marriage law, each religion will remain free to determine its own rules for marriage. Think about other issues that have been divided along secular/religious lines. Can we reasonably expect civil law to reflect varied religious perspectives?

HANDOUT 4 - UPDATE

How do we define civil rights?

“Civil rights are any of the civil liberties guaranteed by the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution and by the Civil Rights Acts. Most often, civil rights refer to protections against discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, and in some cases, sexual orientation. Civil rights laws, in general, apply to public institutions such as public housing, government employment, or public accommodations, and not to private institutions or individuals, unless they are acting under government authority.”¹

Given the inclination of modern Western law, and the definition above, would you consider civil marriage a civil right?

The Massachusetts Constitution states that, “all people are born free and have certain natural, essential and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned . . . that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness. Equality under the law shall not be denied or abridged because of sex, race, color, creed or national origin.”

1. “Civil Rights Law.” [Legal Database.com](http://www.legal-database.com/civil-rights-overview.htm). 25 Feb. 2004 <http://www.legal-database.com/civil-rights-overview.htm>.