A SUBSTANTIVE RIGHT TO CLASS PROCEEDINGS: THE FALSE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FAA AND NLRA

Michael D. Schwartz*

In recent decades, the U.S. Supreme Court’s Federal Arbitration Act jurisprudence has greatly expanded the scope of enforceable arbitration agreements. In AT&T Mobility LLC v. Concepcion, decided in 2011, the Court held that a class arbitration waiver in a consumer contract was enforceable, despite state law to the contrary. In January 2012, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that, despite the Court’s holding in Concepcion, class waivers in employment arbitration agreements are unenforceable due to employees’ right under the National Labor Relations Act to engage in concerted activity. However, nearly all federal and state courts that have subsequently considered this question have declined to follow the NLRB and have enforced similar class waivers.

This Note argues that the NLRB was correct in declaring unenforceable class waivers in employment arbitration agreements. It concludes that because employees’ right to invoke class proceedings under the NLRA is a substantive rather than procedural right, the unwaivability of this right creates no conflict with the FAA, even under the Supreme Court’s broad interpretation of the statute.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................ 2946
I. STATUTES IN TENSION: THE FAA AND NLRA................................. 2948
   A. Arbitration ...................................................................................... 2949
   B. Class Action Litigation and Class Arbitration .............................. 2950
   C. The FAA and the Expanding Scope of Enforceable Arbitration Agreements ........................................... 2952
      1. The Federal Arbitration Act.......................................................... 2952
      2. The FAA and Employment Agreements......................................... 2953
      3. The FAA and Arbitrability of Statutory Claims ......................... 2954
      4. The FAA and Class Waivers.......................................................... 2958

* J.D. Candidate, 2014, Fordham University School of Law; B.A., 2009, University of Pennsylvania. Many thanks to Professor Howard M. Erichson for his guidance and for helping me to hone my thinking. Thanks as well to Professor James J. Brudney for his insight and suggestions and to Ester Murdukhayeva for her comments.
INTRODUCTION

The Federal Arbitration Act1 (FAA) makes contractual agreements to arbitrate, with limited exception, “valid, irrevocable, and enforceable.”2 In AT&T Mobility LLC v. Concepcion,3 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a consumer arbitration agreement requiring that claims be brought in the parties’ “individual capacity, and not as a plaintiff or class member in any purported class or representative proceeding,”4 was enforceable under the FAA.5 Further, the Court invalidated a California law that rendered such terms in an adhesion contract unconscionable.6 Because the Court enforced the agreement as written, the plaintiffs were barred from invoking classwide proceedings, whether in litigation or arbitration.

Concepcion seemingly opened the door for employers to structure their arbitration agreements, which currently cover millions of employees,7 to

---

2. Id. § 2.
4. Id. at 1744.
5. Id. at 1753.
6. Id.
exclude the use of class proceedings for the resolution of all future disputes. Recently, however, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that employees’ right under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) “to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection” includes an unwaivable, substantive right to utilize classwide procedures to resolve employment disputes.

The question, then, is how to reconcile the NLRA’s guarantee of employees’ right to invoke classwide proceedings with Concepcion’s requirement of enforcing arbitration agreements that waive this right. Put another way: is an arbitration agreement that precludes classwide procedures in an employment action enforceable?

This Note addresses the enforceability of class waivers in employment arbitration agreements. It argues that the NLRA’s protection of concerted activities, which includes the right to invoke classwide proceedings, renders such waivers unenforceable, because employees’ right to pursue concerted activity is a substantive right that cannot be waived in an arbitration agreement, not a procedural right that can properly be restricted in an arbitration agreement. The NLRB correctly reached this result, but its diffuse reasoning failed to home in on the critical distinction between substantive and procedural rights. Courts that have addressed this question, many of which hold class waivers enforceable, have also largely ignored this essential analysis.

This Note aims to fill that void and explain why the right to invoke classwide proceedings, while correctly viewed as a procedural right in other contexts, is nonetheless a substantive right in the context of employment contracts governed by the NLRA. This analysis is necessary to understand why the NLRA does not conflict with the FAA, the primary concern of the numerous courts that enforced class waivers.

8. See Kevin B. Leblang & Robert N. Holtzman, Waivers of Class and Collective Claims in Arbitration Agreements: Recent Developments, METRO. CORP. COUNS., Nov. 2012, at 22 (“It seems beyond dispute that the Supreme Court has been giving clear guidance that employers entering into arbitration agreements with their employees were permitted to include class and collective arbitration waivers in their agreements.”).


10. Id. § 157.


12. This Note’s thesis should not be confused with the argument that class waivers are invalid where class proceedings are necessary to vindicate a statutory right. The Supreme Court is currently hearing an appeal on this issue in American Express Co. v. Italian Colors Restaurant. In re Am. Express Merchants’ Litig., 667 F.3d 204 (2d Cir. 2012), cert. granted, 133 S. Ct. 594 (Nov. 9, 2012) (No. 12-133). In the case below, the Second Circuit held that a class waiver is unenforceable where “the practical effect of enforcement would be to preclude [plaintiffs’] ability to vindicate their federal statutory rights.” Id. at 212. Whether that holding prevails is irrelevant, as here the “practical effect” of a class waiver has no role in the analysis.
Part I describes the nature and purpose of arbitration, class action litigation, and class arbitration, and traces the evolution of the two bodies of law that have culminated in the present conflict: on the one hand, the increasingly broad enforcement of arbitration agreements through judicial interpretation of the FAA and, on the other hand, the expanding scope of employee rights protected by Section 7 of the NLRA. Part II brings these two bodies of law together by reviewing how the NLRB and courts have attempted to resolve the apparent conflict. In *D.R. Horton, Inc.*, the NLRB held that a class waiver in an employment agreement violated the NLRA and that refusing to enforce the offending term did not conflict with the FAA. While one federal court followed *D.R. Horton* and declared a similar class waiver unenforceable, numerous other courts presented with the same question have held that the FAA compels the enforcement of class waivers in employment agreements.

Part III seeks to resolve this split by undertaking what has thus far been missing: an analysis of the distinction between substantive and procedural rights as they relate to class waivers in employment arbitration agreements in order to properly understand the relationship between the FAA and NLRA. By way of comparison to a similar divide in the context of choice of law and the *Erie* doctrine, this part explains why Section 7 rights, including the right to invoke classwide proceedings, are substantive rights outside the domain of the FAA. Finally, this part describes why this result assuages the concerns raised by courts over the reach of the FAA under *Concepcion* and related cases, and thus concludes that employment arbitration agreements which waive all forms of classwide proceedings are unenforceable.

I. STATUTES IN TENSION: THE FAA AND NLRA

This part serves two purposes. First, Parts I.A and I.B define and review three foundational concepts: arbitration, class action, and class arbitration. Next, Parts I.C and I.D use these concepts to trace the evolving interpretations of the FAA and NLRA, which has resulted in the present dispute over the enforceability of class waivers in employment arbitration agreements.

Arbitration is an extrajudicial form of dispute resolution in which a neutral third party selected by the parties hears arguments, reviews evidence, and issues a final and binding decision.\footnote{See Ian R. MacNeil, American Arbitration Law 7 (1992); R. Gaull Silberman et al., Alternative Dispute Resolution of Employment Discrimination Claims, 54 L.A. L. Rev. 1533, 1537 (1994); see also S.I. Strong, Does Class Arbitration “Change the Nature” of Arbitration? Stolt-Nielsen, AT&T, and a Return to First Principles, 17 Harv. Negot. L. Rev. 201, 243–45 (2012).} As with many other forms of alternative dispute resolution, arbitration replaces the “default” use of litigation to resolve disputes and allows the parties to tailor the procedures used to resolve their dispute in a manner thought to be most beneficial to their needs.\footnote{See Silberman et al., supra note 17, at 1539.} The parties can agree to maintain some of the procedural rules governing litigation in a judicial forum, while choosing to abandon or alter other rules.\footnote{Id.} For example, parties outside of a judicial forum may opt to waive some or all of the rules of discovery or the rules of evidence.\footnote{See Norman T. Braslow, Contractual Stipulation for Judicial Review and Discovery in United States-Japan Arbitration Contracts, 27 Seattle U. L. Rev. 659, 667 (2004) (“[A]rbitration can be considerably less expensive because there is far less discovery than is generally permitted in litigation”); David H. Taylor & Sara M. Cliffe, Civil Procedure by Contract: A Convoluted Confluence of Private Contract and Public Procedure in Need of Congressional Control, 35 U. Rich. L. Rev. 1085, 1086 (2002) (discussing agreements that modify “what evidence may or may not be presented as proof”).}

Parties often employ arbitration to resolve disputes because it affords many of the advantages of litigation at a lower cost to the parties.\footnote{See Silberman et al., supra note 17, at 1539.} An arbitration proceeding occurs before a fair and impartial professional, mutually selected by the parties, who has expertise in the relevant area of law.\footnote{Id.} The parties can tailor the proceedings to contain as many or as few procedural requirements as they desire, thus creating (at least in theory) a more efficient, expeditious, and inexpensive form of justice.\footnote{Id.} However, use of arbitration, particularly in the employment context, raises many practical concerns due to the significant power imbalance that often exists between employer and employee, thus perhaps belying the perceived benefits of arbitration.\footnote{See Alexander J.S. Colvin, An Empirical Study of Employment Arbitration: Case Outcomes and Processes, 8 J. Empirical Legal Stud. 1, 1 (2011) (finding that, in arbitration, employees have a lower win rate and, when victorious, receive lower awards compared to litigation); Alexander J.S. Colvin & Kelly Pike, The Impact of Case and Arbitrator Characteristics on Employment Arbitration Outcomes 25 (June 2012) (unpublished manuscript), available at http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=conference (concluding that arbitration claims arising from an employer-promulgated procedure “result in relatively fewer employee wins, lower damages, and fewer compromise awards”).}
This Note focuses on predispute arbitration agreements—agreements in which the parties stipulate, generally in a written contract, to resolve some or all of their future disputes through arbitration. The resulting agreement is often called “mandatory” arbitration because, having consented to submit future disputes to arbitration, a party can be compelled into arbitration when such disputes later arise. Predispute arbitration agreements are appropriately referred to as “procedural contracts” because they allow parties to bargain over procedural rights even before a dispute arises. While in recent decades the Supreme Court has permitted greater freedom in the structuring of predispute arbitration agreements, this Note focuses on the critical limits to enforceable arbitration agreements that still remain.

B. Class Action Litigation and Class Arbitration

The class action is a procedural mechanism that enables one or more parties to bring a legal claim on behalf of other similarly situated individuals. Largely unique to the American legal system, the class action has been in use since 1966, when Congress promulgated Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP). A Rule 23 class action has the potential for far greater adjudicative efficiency by permitting, for example, a million victims, each of whom have been defrauded of $100 apiece by a common defendant, to bring one $100 million lawsuit rather than one million $100 lawsuits. Because class actions can allow for the aggregation of many similar small value claims, they are considered by many to serve an important public role of allowing “those who are less powerful to band together . . . to seek redress of grievances that would go unremedied if each litigant had to fight alone.” Given the high cost of bringing a lawsuit, such small value claims would likely never be brought

26. See id.
31. See Weston, supra note 29, at 770. Under Rule 23, a claim can be brought on behalf of others only if the claim satisfies requirements of numerosity of members, commonality of questions of law or fact, typicality of claims or defense, and adequacy of representation. See ROWE ET AL., supra note 30, at 646–50; see also FED. R. CIV. P. 23(a). The class claim must also be necessary either to avoid unfairness or serious hardship for the class representative, or would be more efficient than individual litigation. See ROWE ET AL., supra note 30, at 650; see also FED. R. CIV. P. 23(b).
32. ROWE ET AL., supra note 30, at 640.
33. See Weston, supra note 29, at 770–71 (internal quotation marks omitted).
on an individual basis and can only practically be brought by way of a class action.34

However, class actions raise concerns. While a class action case can serve as a powerful deterrent to misbehavior, weak claims brought as a class action can have the perverse effect of inducing settlement simply due to the large amount of money at stake.35 Thus, the class action has sometimes been characterized as “legalized blackmail.”36 Furthermore, while a class action can increase efficiency by aggregating many claims, it can also result in expensive discovery and difficulties in case management and trial proceedings.37 Concerns also arise in ensuring that class counsel, who often stands to receive a financial award far greater than any individual class member, acts in the best interest of all of the class members.38

Class arbitration imports elements of class actions into the arbitral context.39 While class arbitration has existed since the early 1980s, it was not in significant use until receiving implicit approval from the Supreme Court in Green Tree Financial Corp. v. Bazzle,40 decided in 2003.41 A plurality held that, where a predispute arbitration agreement was silent on whether classwide procedures could be used, the arbitrator could decide whether the parties intended to allow classwide procedures in arbitration or court.42 Spotting an open door to class arbitration, professional arbitration providers such as the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and JAMS43 soon after began setting up specialized rules for administering class arbitrations.44

The rules promulgated for class arbitration closely resembled judicial class actions. For example, under the Supplementary Rules of the AAA, if an arbitrator concludes that a predispute arbitration agreement permits class

---

34. See, e.g., Carnegie v. Household Int’l, Inc., 376 F.3d 656, 661 (7th Cir. 2004) (“The realistic alternative to a class action is not 17 million individual suits, but zero individual suits, as only a lunatic or a fanatic sues for $30.”).
35. ROWE ET AL., supra note 30, at 640.
36. Weston, supra note 29, at 770.
37. See Rowe et al., supra note 30, at 640.
38. See id.
39. See Strong, supra note 17, at 205–06.
41. See Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1139; Strong, supra note 17, at 206; Weston, supra note 29, at 768.
43. The organization was formally called Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services, Inc., but has since changed its name to JAMS, The Resolution Experts. About the JAMS Name, JAMS, http://www.jamsadr.com/about-the-jams-name/ (last visited Mar. 19, 2013).
action, he must decide whether class arbitration is appropriate for the case by using standards resembling those enumerated in Rule 23.45 If so, the arbitrator adjudicates the case on the merits.46

This Note focuses on the use of class waivers in predispute arbitration agreements. Such agreements require that disputes be resolved in arbitration and bar the use of class arbitration, thus effectively precluding all forms of class proceedings in the resolution of all future disputes.47 This Note argues that class waivers are unenforceable in employment predispute arbitration agreements.

C. The FAA and the Expanding Scope of Enforceable Arbitration Agreements

The Federal Arbitration Act undergirds the discussion and analysis to come. This section first describes the Act’s inception and structure. It then reviews three legal developments that are essential to understanding the present conflict: the application of the FAA to employment contracts, the arbitrability of statutory claims under the FAA, and the interaction between the FAA and class waivers.

1. The Federal Arbitration Act

Through the beginning of the twentieth century, courts viewed predispute arbitration agreements with a high degree of suspicion, often declaring them unenforceable, because they sought to “oust” the court of jurisdiction for adjudication of contractual disputes.48 In response, Congress passed the Federal Arbitration Act of 192549 to combat “widespread judicial hostility to arbitration agreements”50 and establish a “liberal federal policy favoring arbitration agreements.”51 The Supreme Court has written that the FAA’s purpose is to put the enforceability of arbitration agreements on equal footing with all other contracts.52 Section 2 of the FAA—the “primary substantive provision of the Act”53—states in full:

---

45. Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1140; see also AAA SUPPLEMENTARY RULES, supra note 44, R. 4.
46. See AAA SUPPLEMENTARY RULES, supra note 44, R. 7.
47. See Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1106–07; Weston, supra note 29, at 767 n.1.
52. See Hall St. Assocs. v. Mattel, Inc., 552 U.S. 576, 581 (2008); see also Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp., 500 U.S. 20, 24 (1991) (explaining that the FAA’s “purpose was to reverse the longstanding judicial hostility to arbitration agreements . . . and to place arbitration agreements upon the same footing as other contracts”); Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1112.
A written provision in any maritime transaction or a contract evidencing a
transaction involving commerce to settle by arbitration a controversy
thereafter arising out of such contract or transaction, or the refusal to
perform the whole or any part thereof, or an agreement in writing to
submit to arbitration an existing controversy arising out of such a
contract, transaction, or refusal, shall be valid, irrevocable, and
enforceable, save upon such grounds as exist at law or in equity for the
revocation of any contract.54

This section establishes that agreements to arbitrate dealing with
commerce and maritime matters are fully enforceable, whether regarding
present or future disputes.55 If parties agree to resolve future disputes using
the procedural rules of arbitration rather than the default procedural rules of
litigation, a court later reviewing the contract must respect and enforce this
agreement as written.56 The FAA establishes, with discrete and limited
exceptions, a body of substantive federal law declaring contractual
agreements to arbitrate, including predispute agreements, “valid,
irrevocable, and enforceable.”57 As detailed below, the scope of this
mandate has been significantly broadened in recent decades.

2. The FAA and Employment Agreements

In 1991, in Circuit City Stores v. Adams, Inc.,58 the Supreme Court
addressed whether and to what extent the FAA applied to disputes arising
under employment contracts. Section 1 of the FAA excludes from its
coverage “contracts of employment of seamen, railroad employees, or any
other class of workers engaged in foreign or interstate commerce.”59 The
question for the Court was how broadly to read the exempted “class of
workers engaged in foreign or interstate commerce”—whether it should be
construed narrowly to exempt only arbitration agreements of workers
engaged in transportation or broadly to exempt effectively all employment
arbitration agreements.60

Employing a thorough textual analysis, the Court held that “the text of
the FAA forecloses the construction of § 1 . . . which would exclude all
employment contracts from the FAA.”61 The Court reasoned that the
residual “class of workers” term must be controlled and defined by
reference to the enumerated categories of workers that precede it—
“seamen” and “railroad employees”—and so the exemption can apply only

55. See MACNEIL, supra note 17, at 102.
56. See Weston, supra note 29, at 772 (“A fundamental principle underlying the FAA is
to respect freedom of contract.”).
the FAA “creates a body of federal substantive law”’ (quoting Moses H. Cone, 460 U.S. at
25 n.32)).
60. Circuit City, 532 U.S. at 109.
61. Id. at 119.
narrowly to “contracts of employment of transportation workers.”62 Thus, the FAA and its “healthy regard”63 for the enforceability of predispute arbitration agreements governs the broad swath of employment contracts.64

3. The FAA and Arbitrability of Statutory Claims

Since Congress passed the FAA in 1925, the Supreme Court has reached varied conclusions on whether the statute can compel arbitration of disputes that are statutory in nature. In the decades immediately following enactment, the scope of the FAA in this area was significantly limited. Courts held that many disputes arising under federal statutes, such as securities laws, antitrust laws, and civil rights laws, were nonarbitrable because arbitration was inconsistent with Congress’s intent in creating a cause of action under those statutes.65 This broad “nonarbitrability doctrine” persisted for roughly fifty years after the enactment of the FAA.66

This began to change in the 1980s.67 For example, in the 1985 case Mitsubishi Motors Corp. v. Soler Chrysler-Plymouth, Inc.,68 the Supreme Court considered the enforceability of a predispute arbitration agreement between Mitsubishi, a Japanese automobile manufacturer, and Soler Chrysler-Plymouth, a Puerto Rican distributor.69 Their agreement stipulated that all future disputes, controversies, or differences between the parties under their distribution contract would be resolved through arbitration in Japan, in accordance with the rules of the Japan Commercial Arbitration Association.70 When a dispute over shipments arose, Mitsubishi filed suit in federal court in Puerto Rico and moved to compel arbitration under the FAA and the terms of the parties’ arbitration agreement.71 Soler then counterclaimed, alleging, among other things, antitrust violations under the Sherman Antitrust Act.72 The question was

62. Id.
64. Justice Stevens, in dissent, accused the majority of “[p]laying ostrich” by ignoring the “substantial history” indicating that the exemption language was added to the FAA precisely to alleviate concerns by labor unions that the statute might later be interpreted to apply to employment contracts. Circuit City, 532 U.S. at 126–28 (Stevens, J., dissenting). The proposed Arbitration Fairness Act seeks to amend the FAA and effectively overrule Circuit City. Its most recent incarnation states in relevant part: “no predispute arbitration agreement shall be valid or enforceable if it requires arbitration of an employment dispute.” S. 987, 112th Cong. § 402 (2011).
66. See Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1113 (describing how the bifurcation of arbitral disputes and nonarbitrable disputes persisted from 1925 until the 1970s and 1980s); Rutledge, supra note 48, at 553.
67. See Drahozal & Rutledge, supra note 27, at 1113.
69. Id. at 616–17.
70. Id. at 617.
71. Id. at 617–19; see also 9 U.S.C. § 4 (2006).
whether a statutory claim brought by Soler under the Sherman Act could be compelled into arbitration via the FAA.\footnote{Id. at 624–25.}

Relying on the “liberal federal policy favoring arbitration agreements,” the Court held that, as a general rule, arbitration agreements must be enforced for all claims, including those based on statutory rights.\footnote{Id.} As a guiding principle, the Court reasoned, Congress’s preeminent concern in passing the FAA was “to enforce private agreements into which parties had entered,”\footnote{Id. at 626 (quoting Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc. v. Byrd, 470 U.S. 213, 221 (1985)).} and so agreements to arbitrate must be “rigorously enforce[d]”\footnote{Id. (quoting Moses H. Cone Mem’l Hosp. v. Mercury Constr. Corp., 460 U.S. 1, 24–25 (1983)).} with “any doubts concerning the scope of arbitrable issues . . . resolved in favor of arbitration.”\footnote{Id. at 628.} The Court held that short of Congressional intent deriving from text or legislative history to the contrary, statutory claims can properly be resolved in arbitration because, “[h]aving made the bargain to arbitrate, the party should be held to it.”\footnote{Id. at 640.}

The Court stressed that compelling the resolution of the claim to arbitration in no way conflicted with Soler’s ability to bring antitrust claims under the Sherman Act:

By agreeing to arbitrate a statutory claim, a party does not forgo the substantive rights afforded by the statute; it only submits to their resolution in an arbitral, rather than a judicial, forum. It trades the procedures and opportunity for review of the courtroom for the simplicity, informality, and expedition of arbitration.\footnote{Id. at 637.}

Because Soler “effectively may vindicate its statutory cause of action in the arbitral forum,”\footnote{Id. at 637 n.19.} the Court held the arbitration agreement fully enforceable.\footnote{Id. at 640.} Critically, however, congruent with its reasoning the Court carved out an essential limitation: where an arbitration agreement serves as a “prospective waiver of a party’s right to pursue statutory remedies . . . [the Court] would have little hesitation in condemning the agreement as against public policy.”\footnote{Id. at 481.}

In 1989, the Court applied similar reasoning in \textit{Rodriguez de Quijas v. Shearson/American Express, Inc.}\footnote{346 U.S. 427 (1953).} in holding that claims brought under the Securities Act of 1933 were arbitrable; again, the change in forum did not forfeit any substantive rights of the parties.\footnote{346 U.S. 427 (1953).} The Court explicitly overruled its holding in \textit{Wilko v. Swan},\footnote{490 U.S. 477 (1989).} an earlier case from the “non-
arbitrability” era. However, the Court was careful to note that the predispute arbitration agreement in question only interfered with “procedural components” of the Securities Act, including broad venue provisions in federal courts, nationwide service of process in federal courts, removal of amount-in-controversy requirements, and concurrent state and federal jurisdiction. Other provisions of the Securities Act not in dispute are substantive, such as placing the burden on the seller to prove lack of scienter when a buyer alleges fraud. Waiver is permissible for procedural components of the statute, as the Court rejected the “outmoded presumption” that arbitration weakens “the protections afforded in the substantive law to would-be complainants.”

Similarly, in 1991, the Supreme Court considered in Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp. whether a statutory claim brought in federal court under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) could be compelled into arbitration per the terms of a predispute arbitration agreement between Interstate and one of its employees. Declaring the arbitration agreement enforceable and compelling arbitration, the Court reiterated many of its arguments from Mitsubishi. The Court stated that the employee, because he had agreed to arbitrate, had the burden of showing congressional intent to preclude waiver of a judicial forum for ADEA claims. This congressional intent, if it exists, “will be discoverable in the text of the ADEA, its legislative history, or an ‘inherent conflict’ between arbitration and the ADEA’s underlying purposes.” The Court stressed that “‘questions of arbitrability must be addressed with a healthy regard for the federal policy favoring arbitration.’”

Applying this test, the Court failed to find the necessary congressional intent or conflict of underlying purpose in the text or legislative history of the ADEA. Arbitration falls within the “ADEA’s flexible approach to resolution of claims” and allows parties to broadly select the forum for resolving their dispute. The Court also rejected arguments that specific aspects of arbitration were incompatible with resolution of a suit brought by an employee under the ADEA, such as concerns of bias by the arbitration

86. Rodriguez de Quijas, 490 U.S. at 485.
87. Id. at 481–82.
88. Id. at 481.
89. Id.
92. Gilmer, 500 U.S. at 23.
93. Id. at 26 (citing Shearson/Am. Express, Inc. v. McMahon, 482 U.S. 220, 227 (1987)).
94. Id. (quoting Shearson/Am. Express, Inc. v. McMahon, 482 U.S. 220, 227 (1987)).
95. Id. (quoting Moses H. Cone Mem’l Hosp. v. Mercury Constr. Corp., 460 U.S. 1, 24 (1983)).
96. Id. at 35.
97. Id. at 29.
98. See id. (citing Rodriguez de Quijas v. Shearson/Am. Express, 490 U.S. 477, 483 (1989)).
panel, lack of extensive discovery, absence of written opinions, inequality of bargaining power between employee and employer, and—of particular importance for this Note—absence of class action relief through arbitration procedures. On this last point, the Court noted that the arbitrator was not restricted in the types of relief he was permitted to award, and applicable New York Stock Exchange rules provided for collective proceedings. At least on these facts, arbitration did not impinge upon class relief or any other underlying purpose of the ADEA that would render the parties’ predispute arbitration agreement unenforceable. As in Mitsubishi, the Court emphasized that arbitration did not prevent the plaintiff from vindicating his underlying age discrimination claim, and so, “[b]y agreeing to arbitrate a statutory claim, [the plaintiff] does not forgo the substantive rights afforded by the statute.”

Finally, in 2012, the Court in CompuCredit Corp. v. Greenwood considered the specificity of legislative instruction required to overcome the presumption of enforceability of an arbitration agreement. The case dealt with a credit card application that stipulated arbitration for resolution of all future disputes. Customers brought a claim under the Credit Repair Organizations Act (CROA) for misleading representations made by the defendant, a credit card company. The customers argued that, because the CROA contains a provision stating that “[y]ou have a right to sue a credit repair organization that violates the Credit Repair Organization Act,” they could not be compelled into arbitration despite the terms of their predispute arbitration agreement and should have been permitted to bring their CROA claim in court.

Citing Mitsubishi, the Court reasoned that arbitration agreements must be enforced according to their terms, even when the claims at issue are federal statutory claims, unless the federal statute overrides the FAA by a “contrary congressional command.” The Court held that statutory language merely suggesting a cause of action (here a “right to sue”) is not a sufficient “contrary congressional command” to override the FAA. As in Mitsubishi, Rodríguez de Quijas, and Gilmer, compelling arbitration does not conflict with any substantive statutory rights afforded by the CROA because “contractually required arbitration of claims satisfies the statutory

---

99. Id. at 30–33.
100. Id. at 32.
101. Id. at 26 (quoting Mitsubishi Motors Corp. v. Soler Chrysler-Plymouth, 473 U.S. 614, 628 (1985)).
103. Id. at 668.
105. CompuCredit, 132 S. Ct. at 665.
106. Id. at 669 (quoting 15 U.S.C. § 1679c(a)).
107. Id.
108. Id. (quoting Shearson/Am. Express, Inc. v. McMahon, 482 U.S. 220, 226 (1987)).
109. Id. at 670 (quoting Shearson/Am. Express, Inc. v. McMahon, 482 U.S. 220, 226 (1987)).
prescription of civil liability in court.” If Congress wishes to overrule the FAA by prohibiting use of arbitration for certain statutory claims, it must do so “in a manner less obtuse” than the language of the CROA. The “right to sue” language provides only a “guarantee of the legal power to impose liability.” Because this right could be effectuated through arbitration, the Court enforced the terms of the arbitration agreement.

4. The FAA and Class Waivers

The Supreme Court has also shifted in its interpretation of the relationship between the FAA and the use of class arbitration. The Court’s plurality opinion in Bazzle, described above, was viewed as a signal that arbitrators could use class arbitration when appropriate and, consequently, use of class arbitration increased significantly. More recently, however, the Court has decided two cases that significantly increase the ability of a party to avoid use of class proceedings—in both court and arbitration—through use of class waivers in predispute arbitration agreements.

In the 2010 case Stolt-Nielsen S.A. v. AnimalFeeds International Corp., the Court decided whether imposing class arbitration on parties whose arbitration agreement is silent on that issue is consistent with the FAA. The arbitration agreement in dispute, between shipping companies and a corporate customer, required arbitration of all future disputes but was silent as to whether this permitted use of class arbitration.

The Court began its analysis with “the basic precept that arbitration ‘is a matter of consent, not coercion.’” Accordingly, the Court must “give effect to the contractual rights and expectation of the parties” and ensure that “the parties’ intentions control.”

The Court noted initially that its plurality opinion in Bazzle did not bear on the present analysis. The Court rejected the parties’ view that the Bazzle plurality stood for the proposition that “an arbitrator, not a court, [should] decide whether a contract permits class arbitration.” Rather, the Bazzle plurality determined only that the arbitrator could determine whether an arbitration agreement was indeed silent on the issue of class arbitration. Thus, the question of whether class arbitration is permitted given contractual silence remained unanswered.

id. at 1772. 118  id. at 1764–66. The Court noted initially that its plurality opinion in Bazzle did not bear on the present analysis. The Court rejected the parties’ view that the Bazzle plurality stood for the proposition that “an arbitrator, not a court, [should] decide whether a contract permits class arbitration.” id. at 1772. Rather, the Bazzle plurality determined only that the arbitrator could determine whether an arbitration agreement was indeed silent on the issue of class arbitration. id. at 1771. Thus, the question of whether class arbitration is permitted given contractual silence remained unanswered. id. at 1772.

119  id. at 1773 (quoting Volt Info. Scis. v. Bd. of Trs. of the Leland Stanford Junior Univ., 489 U.S. 468, 479 (1989)).

120  id. at 1774 (citations and internal quotation marks omitted).

121  id.
party may not be compelled under the FAA to submit to class arbitration unless there is a contractual basis for concluding that the party agreed to do so.

In the Court’s reasoning, explicit agreement to enter into class arbitration is necessary because “class-action arbitration changes the nature of arbitration to such a degree that it cannot be presumed the parties consented to it by simply agreeing to submit their disputes to an arbitrator.” The Court offered two justifications for this conclusion. First, class arbitration diminishes the usual benefits of arbitration—“lower costs, greater efficiency and speed, and the ability to choose expert adjudicators to resolve specialized disputes.” Second, the shift to class arbitration introduces fundamental changes because, as compared to bilateral arbitration, class arbitration calls for the resolution of many disputes between hundreds or thousands of parties, often sacrifices privacy and confidentiality, binds many absent parties, and greatly increases the commercial stakes. Class arbitration fundamentally differs from bilateral arbitration and, under the FAA, cannot be imposed on an unwilling party absent explicit contractual consent.

In 2011, the Supreme Court addressed for the first time the enforceability of contractual class waivers in Concepcion. A cell phone contract between AT&T and a customer required that all future disputes be brought in arbitration and in the parties’ “individual capacity, and not as a plaintiff or class member in any purported class or representative proceeding.” However, under California law, a clause waiving classwide procedures in consumer adhesion contracts was unconscionable and thus unenforceable. The Concepcions argued that this rationale for not enforcing the arbitration agreement fell under the “saving clause” of Section 2 of the FAA, which requires that arbitration agreements be declared unenforceable “upon such grounds as exist at law or in equity for the revocation of any contract.” If the California law was not included within the saving clause, then the FAA would preempt the state law and the

---

122. Id. at 1775.
123. Id.
124. Id.
125. See id. at 1776.
126. See id. For an article taking to task the Court’s conclusion that class arbitration fundamentally changes the nature of arbitration, see Strong, supra note 17 (arguing that class arbitration closely resembles other forms of multiparty arbitration).
127. AT&T Mobility LLC v. Concepcion, 131 S. Ct. 1740, 1744 (2011) (quoting Petition for Writ of Certiorari at 61a, Concepcion, 131 S. Ct. 1740 (No. 09-893)).
128. Id. at 1746; see also Discover Bank v. Superior Court of L.A., 30 Cal. Rptr. 3d 76, 87 (2005) (holding that where a class waiver “is found in a consumer contract of adhesion in a setting in which disputes between the contracting parties predictably involve small amounts of damages, and when it is alleged that the party with the superior bargaining power has carried out a scheme to deliberately cheat large numbers of consumers out of individually small sums of money,” the waiver is unconscionable and thus unenforceable).
129. Concepcion, 131 S. Ct. at 1746 (quoting 9 U.S.C. § 2 (2006)).
parties’ arbitration agreement waiving use of classwide procedures would be enforceable.\textsuperscript{130}

Relying heavily on \textit{Stolt-Nielsen}, the Court held that the California law stood “as an obstacle to the accomplishment and execution of the full purposes and objectives of Congress” in enacting the FAA, and so was preempted by the FAA.\textsuperscript{131} By entering into an arbitration agreement, parties seek to contractually modify the procedural rules that will be used to resolve their dispute.\textsuperscript{132} The Court viewed use of class arbitration rather than bilateral arbitration as a modification of procedural rules akin to altering the rules of discovery or evidence.\textsuperscript{133} The California law, by forbidding class arbitration waivers in consumer adhesion contracts and thus requiring the availability of classwide procedures, interfered with the freedom of the parties to select their procedural rules, and so “create[d] a scheme inconsistent with the FAA.”\textsuperscript{134}

As in \textit{Stolt-Nielsen}, the Court emphasized the significant differences between class arbitration and bilateral arbitration. Class arbitration “sacrifices the principal advantage of arbitration—its informality—and makes the process slower, more costly, and more likely to generate procedural morass than final judgment.”\textsuperscript{135} Even if a state has legitimate grounds for requiring class proceedings—such as the ability to “prosecute small-dollar claims that might otherwise slip through the legal system”\textsuperscript{136}—a state law, such as the California law, is impermissible.\textsuperscript{137} By requiring procedures beyond the scope of the parties’ consent, the law stands as an obstacle to the FAA’s principle purpose of ensuring that private arbitration agreements are enforced according to their terms.\textsuperscript{138} Reading a class arbitration requirement into the FAA’s savings clause for consumer agreements would be “absolutely inconsistent with the provisions of the [FAA].”\textsuperscript{139} Accordingly, the Court overruled the state unconscionability law, with language suggesting a broad endorsement of the enforceability of class waivers in predispute arbitration agreements.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{130} See id. at 1747.
\textsuperscript{131} Id. at 1753 (quoting Hines v. Davidowitz, 312 U.S. 52, 67 (1941).
\textsuperscript{132} Id. at 1748–49 (citations omitted) (“[W]e have held that parties may agree . . . to arbitrate according to specific rules.”).
\textsuperscript{133} Id. at 1747.
\textsuperscript{134} Id. at 1748.
\textsuperscript{135} Id. at 1751.
\textsuperscript{136} Id. at 1753.
\textsuperscript{137} See id. at 1748.
\textsuperscript{138} See id. The Court reiterated the point made in \textit{Stolt-Nielsen} that class arbitration cannot be used absent explicit consent from both parties. Id. at 1750–51 (“The conclusion follows that class arbitration, to the extent it is manufactured by [California law] rather than consensual, is inconsistent with the FAA.”).
\textsuperscript{139} Id. at 1748 (quoting AT&T v. Cent. Office Tel., Inc., 524 U.S. 214, 227–28 (1998)).
\textsuperscript{140} See id. at 1753; see also Weston, supra note 29, at 781 (“\textit{Concepcion} appeared to require that courts enforce class action waivers, even under circumstances where the bans on collective relief would otherwise impose unconscionable results.”).
Putting these developments in FAA jurisprudence together, a few general conclusions can be made. First, the FAA applies to nearly all arbitration agreements in employment contracts, with only narrow exceptions for transportation workers.141 Second, where parties have entered into a predispute arbitration agreement, the FAA compels arbitration of many types of statutory claims, provided that arbitration will not infringe upon any substantive rights of the parties.142 Third, such claims must be arbitrated according to the clear intent of the parties as expressed in their arbitration agreement.143 Where the parties have not agreed to the use of class arbitration, the arbitrator cannot later implement it absent the parties’ consent.144 Class waivers in arbitration agreements are generally enforceable, as state law cannot require the availability of class arbitration.145 Statutory rights of employees, to be discussed below, should be analyzed with this framework in mind.

D. The NLRA and the Development of Protected Employee Activities

The NLRA is a cornerstone piece of federal legislation establishing basic rights of employees. In order to determine how these rights interact with the FAA, it is necessary to understand the substantive nature of the NLRA and the type of employee activities it protects. To that end, this section first provides background on important elements of the NLRA. Next, it describes the types of employee activities protected by the NLRA as interpreted by the Supreme Court and NLRB, and then it reviews a recent NLRB decision ruling that an employee’s invocation of classwide proceedings is one such activity. Finally, this section discusses the waivability of NLRA protections and the appropriate remedy if the Board or a court finds a violation.

1. Purpose and Structure of the NLRA

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935146 sought to strengthen the ability of workers to organize in order to better their employment

141. See supra Part I.C.2.
142. See supra Part I.C.3.
143. See supra Part I.C.4.
144. See supra notes 115–26 and accompanying text.
145. See supra notes 127–40 and accompanying text.
conditions. Section 1 of the NLRA makes clear that the primary focus of
the statute is the right of employees to act collectively:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States . . . [to protect]
the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization,
and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose
of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other
mutual aid or protection.

The NLRA gives employees a right to organize and, unlike the National
Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) passed two years prior, the NLRA
makes this right legally enforceable. The linchpin of the NLRA is
Section 7, which provides: “Employees shall have the right to self-
organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain
collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in
other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other
mutual aid or protection.”

Section 7 establishes three rights—the right to organize, the right to
bargain collectively, and the right to engage in other concerted activities—
that were considered necessary “to establish a balance of bargaining power
between employer and employee and thereby avoid the pitfalls and inadequacies that had characterized earlier labor legislation [such as the
NIRA].” The core purpose of Section 7, as the Supreme Court has
written, is to “affirmatively guarantee[] employees the most basic rights of
industrial self-determination.” To effectuate this guarantee, Section 8 of
the NLRA provides: “It shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer . . . to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of the
rights guaranteed in section [7].” Legally enforceable protection of
employees’ right to engage in concerted activities is, in the words of the
Supreme Court, the “fundamental right” protected by the NLRA.

To enforce the rights created by Sections 7 and 8, the NLRA established
a new federal agency called the National Labor Relations Board. Sections 3 through 6 of the NLRA created the Board and set out basic
details of its composition and operations. Section 9 gives the Board
exclusive jurisdiction over questions of employee representation, and
Section 10 gives the Board exclusive jurisdiction over enforcement of

---

147. Higgins, supra note 146, at 28.
148. Id. at 82.
151. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 28.
157. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 29.
159. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 29; see also 29 U.S.C. § 159.
Section 8 unfair labor practices. Section 10 also sets forth, in broad terms, NLRB procedures, including provisions for judicial review and enforcement of Board orders.

2. Scope of Section 7 Rights

Section 7 of the NLRA grants employees the right “to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of . . . mutual aid or protection.” This clause establishes employee protection not just in joining or assisting labor organizations but also in engaging in a broad category of activities that are carried out for their “mutual aid or protection.” To receive Section 7 protection, an employee activity must meet two requirements. First, the activity must be “concerted”; it must be “undertaken together by two or more employees or undertaken by one on behalf of others.” Second, an employee activity must be for “mutual aid or protection.”

Reviewing the types of activities encompassed by these terms will aid in understanding why the Board properly held recently that they include employee use of classwide proceedings.

   a. “Concerted Activity”

   Courts and the NLRB have endorsed a broad reading of the “concerted” requirement of Section 7 activities. Narrowly, employees act concertedly when they engage in direct group action and “have joined together in order to achieve common goals.” In addition, an individual employee can engage in concerted activity in two other circumstances: “(1) that in which the lone employee intends to induce group activity, and (2) that in which the employee acts as a representative of at least one other employee.” The Supreme Court has justified this broad reading of Section 7 by reasoning that “[t]here is no indication that Congress intended to limit this protection to situations in which an employee’s activity and that of his fellow employees combine with one another in any particular way.”

   Applying this standard, an individual employee engages in “concerted activity” when he or she protests working hours and travel requirements in the presence of other employees engages in conversations for the

160. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 29; see also 29 U.S.C. § 160.
161. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 29.
163. Higgins, supra note 146, at 83.
164. Id. at 83–84.
165. For a general summary of these two requirements, see Ann C. Hodges, Can Compulsory Arbitration Be Reconciled with Section 7 Rights?, 38 Wake Forest L. Rev. 173, 187–200 (2003); see also Higgins, supra note 146, at 209–33.
166. NLRB v. City Disposal Sys., 465 U.S. 822, 830 (1984); see also Higgins, supra note 146, at 210–11.
168. Id. at 835.
purpose of initiating group activity,170 composes a petition protesting a pay system,171 writes a letter to a newspaper seeking community support for a strike,172 or posts notices regarding workplace illness seeking discussion with other employees.173 However, activity by an individual is not concerted if undertaken solely “by and on behalf of the employee himself.”174 Thus, an employee’s refusal to operate equipment that he believes is unsafe is not concerted activity where no other employees had similarly complained.175

b. “Mutual Aid or Protection”

A comparably generous reading has been given to the “mutual aid or protection” requirement.176 Eastex, Inc. v. NLRB177 is the foundational Supreme Court case establishing the breadth of activities encompassed by this clause. In this case, Eastex, a paper products manufacturer, had barred union representatives from distributing to Eastex employees a newsletter seeking union membership and support for proposed employment-related legislation.178 The union filed a claim with the NLRB, alleging an illegal restraint on employees’ right to engage in “concerted activities for the purpose of . . . mutual aid or protection.”179 The case ultimately proceeded to the Supreme Court specifically to address the scope of the “mutual aid or protection” clause.180

The Court ruled that employees act for the purpose of “mutual aid or protection” whenever they seek to improve their terms and conditions of employment, even if these activities occur outside the immediate employee-employer relationship.181 Employees’ activities are protected where, as here, they seek to appeal to legislators to protect their interests as employees, and also whenever employees “seek to improve working conditions through resort to administrative and judicial forums.”182 The Court held that a narrower reading of the Section 7 protections would “‘frustrate the policy of the [NLRA] to protect the right of workers to act together to better their working conditions.’”183 While the Court

176. See Higgins, supra note 146, at 220–27.
178. Id. at 559–61.
179. Id. at 558 (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 157 (2006)).
180. Id. at 562 (“Because of apparent differences among the Courts of Appeals as to the scope of rights protected by the ‘mutual aid or protection’ clause of § 7 . . . we granted certiorari.”).
181. Id. at 565.
182. Id. at 566.
183. Id. at 567 (quoting NLRB v. Wash. Aluminum Co., 370 U.S. 9, 14 (1962)).
acknowledged that some activities may be too attenuated to be covered by the “mutual aid or protection” clause, the Court left it to the Board to analyze possible borderline cases in the first instance.  

Accordingly, Section 7 has been interpreted to protect various forms of appeals to legislators or agencies and filings of judicial actions. Employees engage in Section 7 protected activity when they write letters to legislators opposing changes in immigration law that may affect job security, file safety complaints with state agencies, file employment discrimination claims with a state civil rights commission, or call the Department of Labor regarding changes in lunch policy. Similarly, Section 7 covers an employee who files a petition in court seeking an injunction against employer harassment, a group of employees who file an invasion of privacy suit against an employer using listening devices, an employee who joins others in filing a libel suit, and employees who file a breach of contract lawsuit against their employer. In general, such appeals to agencies or courts are activities for “mutual aid and protection” so long as they are not done out of malice or bad faith, even if they are ultimately found to be without merit.

3. Class Action As a Protected Section 7 Right

Recently, in D.R. Horton, the Board applied these standards in considering whether, by filing a class action disputing the classification of him and others as supervisors, an employee engaged in activity protected by Section 7. The case dealt with a claim brought by Michael Cuda, a former employee of home building company D.R. Horton. D.R. Horton’s employment agreement, signed by Cuda as a condition of employment, stipulated that all disputes be resolved exclusively in arbitration and that the arbitrator “may hear only Employee’s individual claims . . . and does not have authority to fashion a proceeding as a class or collective action or to award relief to a group or class of employees in one arbitration proceeding.” Cuda filed a claim with the NLRB, alleging that Section 7 protected his right to invoke class proceedings, and so D.R. Horton violated

184. Id. at 567–68.
193. Id. at 365.
196. Id. at *1.
197. Id. (internal quotation marks omitted).
Section 8 by maintaining an employment contract that required the arbitrator to resolve all disputes on an individual basis.198

Quoting Eastex, the Board first reasoned that Section 7 protects employees seeking to improve their working conditions through resort to administrative, judicial, and arbitral forums, as all are activities undertaken for “mutual aid or protection.”199 The Board had previously held that a suit filed by multiple employees is a form of concerted activity, and so it concluded that the same classification should apply to claims brought on a classwide basis.200 This is true even if the suit is initiated unilaterally, on behalf of other employees.201 Allowing an employee to assert a claim collectively, the Board wrote, serves the purpose of “mutual aid or protection,” and is in line with the underlying purpose of the NLRA as “[e]mployees are both more likely to assert their legal rights and also more likely to do so effectively if they can do so collectively.”202 Thus, the Board held that “an individual who files a class or collective action regarding wages, hours or working conditions, whether in court or before an arbitrator, seeks to initiate or induce group action and is engaged in conduct protected by Section 7.”203 The latter portion of this opinion—whether the Section 7 violation rendered D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement unenforceable—is discussed below.204

4. Waivability and Enforcement of Section 7 Rights

Once an employee activity is deemed protected under Section 7, a related question is whether the right to engage in the activity can be waived by a contractual agreement between employee and employer. The Supreme Court addressed whether employees can waive their protected rights in National Licorice Co. v. NLRB.205

In this case, the employment contract between National Licorice Company and its employees required that all employees relinquish “the right to strike, the right to demand a closed shop or signed agreement with

198. Id. at *2.
200. See id. (citing Salt River Valley Water Users Ass’n, 99 N.L.R.B. 849, 853–54 (1952); Spandseo Oil & Royalty Co., 42 N.L.R.B. 942, 948–49 (1942)).
201. See id. at *3.
202. Id. (internal quotation marks omitted).
203. Id. at *4; see also Hodges, supra note 165, at 229 (“[A] mandatory arbitration agreement should be found unlawful if it does not expressly permit the unquestionably concerted activities of class action . . . .”). This right does not guarantee class certification. Rather, “it guarantees only employees’ opportunity to pursue without employer coercion, restraint or interference such claims of a class or collective nature as may be available to them under Federal, State or local law.” D.R. Horton, 2012 WL 36274, at *12 n.24. An employee must be permitted, for example, to use Rule 23 to seek class certification. However, if a judge determines that the Rule 23 requirements are not met, he can then deny certification without infringing the Section 7 right. Id. 204. See infra Part II.A.
205. 309 U.S. 350 (1940).
any union.”

This requirement clearly violated “the employees’ rights to organize and bargain collectively guaranteed by §§ 7 and 8 of the [NLRA].” The question, however, was whether a violation of the NLRA was grounds to declare the contract unenforceable.

The Court ruled that the Board was empowered to declare the employment contracts unenforceable under its Section 10 remedial power because “the contracts were the fruits of unfair labor practices, stipulated for the renunciation by the employees of rights guaranteed by the [NLRA], and were a continuing means of thwarting the policy of the [NLRA].”

The rights protected by Sections 7 and 8 are “public right[s] vested in [the NLRB] as a public body, charged in the public interest with the duty of preventing unfair labor practices.” Accordingly, “employers cannot set at naught the National Labor Relations Act by inducing their workmen to agree not to demand performance of the duties which it imposes.”

The Supreme Court in *J.I. Case Co. v. NLRB* addressed a related issue. In this case, the employer argued that it did not have to negotiate portions of a collective agreement because employees were already covered by lawful individual employment contracts. Again, the Court held that individual employment contracts could not be used as grounds to waive rights protected by the NLRA. Here, because the collective bargaining process was mandated by the NLRA, access to it could not be waived in individual employment contracts, even if an individual employee received some benefits by bargaining individually. As in *National Licorice*, the Court emphasized the critical nature of the NLRA as a public law protecting public rights. Thus, “[w]herever private contracts conflict with [the NLRA’s] functions, they obviously must yield or the [NLRA] would be reduced to a futility.”

Subsequently, the Board has ordered employers to cease and desist from maintaining employment agreements that explicitly restrict Section 7 activity or have the effect of chilling Section 7 activity. Furthermore, the

---

206. *Id.* at 355.
207. *Id.* at 360.
208. See *id.* at 351.
209. *Id.* at 361.
210. *Id.* at 364.
211. *Id.*
212. 321 U.S. 332 (1944).
213. See *id.* at 334.
214. *Id.* at 339.
215. See *id.* at 336.
216. *Id.* at 337 (citing *Nat’l Licorice Co.*, 309 U.S. at 364).
217. *Id.*
218. See *Martin Luther Mem’l Home*, 343 N.L.R.B. 646, 646–47 (2004) (citations omitted) (“[O]ur inquiry into whether the maintenance of a challenged rule is unlawful begins with the issue of whether the rule explicitly restricts activities protected by Section 7. If it does, we will find the rule unlawful. If the rule does not explicitly restrict activity protected by Section 7, the violation is dependent upon a showing of one of the following: (1) employees would reasonably construe the language to prohibit Section 7 activity; (2) the rule was promulgated in response to union activity; or (3) the rule has been applied to restrict
Supreme Court has held that courts cannot enforce contracts that violate the NLRA because they are illegal agreements. While the NLRB has primary jurisdiction to determine if an agreement violates Sections 7 and 8, federal courts must at all times refuse to enforce contracts if they are found to violate federal law.

II. RECONCILING THE FAA AND NLRA: THE ENFORCEABILITY OF CLASS WAIVERS IN EMPLOYMENT ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS

The issue to be analyzed in the balance of this Note is whether, given the Board’s ruling in _D.R. Horton_ that invoking classwide procedures is a form of concerted activity protected under Section 7 of the NLRA, employers can require, as a condition of employment, an agreement to arbitrate all future disputes on an individual basis. The stakes are high. A recent paper found that the prevalence of predispute arbitration agreements in employment contracts has increased markedly in recent decades, paralleling increased judicial acceptance. Studies conducted in the early to mid-1990s found that between 2.1 percent and 9.9 percent of employers had adopted arbitration agreements; by the late 1990s and 2000s the reported range increased to between 14.1 percent and 22.7 percent. Arbitration agreements have been estimated to cover at least thirty million employees, and commentators believe this number will continue to rise. Furthermore, in light of _Stolt-Nielsen_ and _Concepcion_, there is concern that employers can have a sort of “get out of jail free” card by including class waivers as part of arbitration agreements, or even simply by leaving the arbitration agreement silent as to the use of class proceedings.

_The exercise of Section 7 rights.”); Lafayette Park Hotel, 326 N.L.R.B. 824, 825 (1998) (“Where the rules are likely to have a chilling effect on Section 7 rights, the Board may conclude that their maintenance is an unfair labor practice, even absent evidence of enforcement.”)._  
219. _See_ Kaiser Steel Corp. v. Mullins, 455 U.S. 72, 86 (1982) (“While only the Board may provide affirmative remedies for unfair labor practices, a court may not enforce a contract provision which violates § 8(e) [of the NLRA].”).  
220. _See id. at 83–84 (“The power of the federal courts to enforce the terms of private agreements is at all times exercised subject to the restrictions and limitations of the public policy of the United States as manifested in . . . federal statutes. . . . Where the enforcement of private agreements would be violative of that policy, it is the obligation of courts to refrain from such exertions of judicial power.”) (quoting Hurd v. Hodge, 334 U.S. 24, 34–35 (1948))).  
221. _See supra_ Part I.D.3.  
222. _See_ Alexander J.S. Colvin, _Empirical Research on Employment Arbitration: Clarity Amidst the Sound and Fury_, 11 EMP. RTS. & EMP. POL’Y J. 405, 411 (2007); _see also_ Rutledge, _supra_ note 48, at 555 (“Surveys similarly show that . . . a growing number of employers and companies are using arbitration clauses.”); Weston, _supra_ note 29, at 772 (“Arbitration provisions became standard in employment contracts after . . . Gilmer.”).  
223. _See_ Colvin, _supra_ note 222, at 408–10.  
224. Ruan, _supra_ note 7, at 22.  
While the potential conflict between Section 7 NLRA rights and the FAA has been considered in academic literature, the NLRB first squarely addressed the issue only recently in the latter portion of its *D.R. Horton* opinion. In addition to holding that classwide proceedings are a form of concerted activity protected by Section 7, the Board also held that D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement interfered with the employee’s Section 7 right and ordered D.R. Horton to modify its arbitration agreement. The Board ruled that refusing to enforce the arbitration agreement’s class waiver did not create a conflict with the FAA and, even if it did, that the FAA must yield to the NLRA.

Subsequent to the Board’s ruling in *D.R. Horton*, courts throughout the country have ruled on the same issue of employment arbitration agreements containing class waivers. While one federal court agreed with the Board’s analysis and declared an arbitration class waiver unenforceable, many other courts have declined to follow the Board’s reasoning and have enforced class waivers. This part lays out the arguments made by both sides of the debate to establish a clearer picture of the conflict as it currently stands. Part II.A presents in greater detail the Board’s rationale in *D.R. Horton* and the federal court that followed its holding. Part II.B explores the opinions rejecting *D.R. Horton* and holding class waivers enforceable.

**A. The NLRB and a Federal Court Refuse To Enforce Class Waivers**

After concluding that pursuit of classwide employment-related claims is a protected Section 7 activity, the Board in *D.R. Horton* made two further rulings. First, D.R. Horton’s employment agreement violated Section 8 of NLRA by “‘interfer[ing] with, restrain[ing], or coerc[ing]...
employees in the exercise of a right guaranteed’” by Section 7.235 Citing National Licorice236 and J.I. Case,237 the Board held it unlawful for D.R. Horton to include a term in its employment agreement that restricted a Section 7 right by requiring employees to pursue claims against their employer only individually.238

Second, the Board addressed the more critical question: is this ruling consistent with the FAA, particularly in light of the Supreme Court’s ruling in Concepcion? The Board held that it was and provided four justifications. First, the Board reasoned that declaring D.R. Horton’s employment agreement unlawful does not conflict with the FAA and its underlying concern about judicial or administrative bodies failing to put private arbitration agreements “upon the same footing as other contracts.”239 Under J.I. Case, any private contract that conflicts with the NLRA is unlawful, so invalidation of D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement treats it no worse than any other private contract that infringes upon a protected activity.240 Unlike in Concepcion, invalidation of the class waiver does not rest on “‘defenses that apply only to arbitration or that derive their meaning from the fact that an agreement to arbitrate is at issue.’”241

Second, the Board concluded that its ruling does not conflict with the FAA, because D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement waives employees’ substantive Section 7 right.242 The FAA does not compel enforcement of an arbitration agreement that requires a party to “‘forgo the substantive rights afforded by the statute.’”243 Indeed, the Board determined, “the intent of the FAA was to leave substantive rights undisturbed.”244 The Board wrote that the Section 7 right to bring a class or collective action is substantive, not procedural, because “[t]he right to engage in collective action—including collective legal action—is the core substantive right protected by the NLRA and is the foundation on which the Act and Federal labor policy rest.”245 While the Board acknowledged that class action rules such as Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23 are procedural, “the Section 7 right to act concertedly by invoking Rule 23, Section 216(b) [of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)],246 or other legal procedures is not.”247

236. *See supra* notes 205–11 and accompanying text.
237. *See supra* notes 212–17 and accompanying text.
241. *Id.* at *11 (quoting AT&T Mobility LLC v. Concepcion, 131 S. Ct. 1740, 1746 (2011)).
242. *Id.* at *12.
243. *Id.* (quoting Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp., 500 U.S. 20, 26 (1991)).
244. *Id.* at *13.
245. *Id.* at *12.
246. *Section 216(b)* of the FLSA creates a procedural mechanism similar to that of a Rule 23 class action for enforcement of violations: “An action to recover . . . may be maintained against any employer . . . by any one or more employees for and in behalf of himself or themselves and other employees similarly situated.” 29 U.S.C. § 216(b) (2006).
Third, the Board reasoned that prohibiting class waivers as violative of the NLRA is consistent with the FAA because it falls under the FAA’s Section 2 saving clause; arbitration agreements are properly invalidated if based on “‘grounds as exist at law or in equity for the revocation of any contract.’”248 Here, enforcing an arbitration agreement that violates federal employment law is against public policy—precisely the type of grounds contemplated by the FAA for declaring an arbitration agreement unenforceable under the saving clause.249

Fourth, even if declaring the agreement unenforceable does conflict with the FAA, the Board determined that the FAA must yield to the NLRA.250 The Board cited the Norris-LaGuardia Act,251 which provides that a private agreement is unenforceable if it seeks to prohibit a “‘lawful means [of] aiding any person participating or interested in’ a lawsuit arising out of a labor dispute.”252 The Norris-LaGuardia Act repealed “‘[a]ll acts and parts of acts in conflict.’”253 Because it was passed seven years after the FAA, the Board reasoned that the Norris-LaGuardia Act repealed the FAA to the extent that it required the enforcement of arbitration agreements with class waivers.254

For all of these reasons, the Board ordered D.R. Horton to cease and desist from maintaining its employment agreement because it required employees, as a condition of their employment,255 to waive the right to maintain class or collective actions in all forums.256

248. Id. at *11 (quoting 9 U.S.C. § 2 (2006)).
249. See id. at *14.
250. Id. at *16.
252. D.R. Horton, 2012 WL 36274, at *16 (alteration in original) (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 104(d)).
254. Id.
255. Id. at *17–18. An NLRB Administrative Law Judge has subsequently applied D.R. Horton in holding that an employer violates Section 8 even where a class waiver can be opt out of, and so it is not a mandatory condition of employment. See 24 Hour Fitness USA, Inc., no. 20-CA-035419, 2012 WL 5495007 (NLRB Nov. 6, 2012) (“The requirement that employees must affirmatively act to preserve rights already protected by Section 7 rights through the opt-out process is . . . an unlawful burden on the right of employees to engage in collective litigation that may arise in the future.”).
256. The Board made clear that D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement was illegal because it violated the NLRA, not because it violated the FLSA upon which Cuda’s claim of misclassification was based. D.R. Horton, 2012 WL 36274, at *12 (“[T]he right allegedly violated by [D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement] is not the right to be paid the minimum wage or overtime under the FLSA, but the right to engage in collective action under the NLRA.”). Nonetheless, some courts rejecting D.R. Horton have incorrectly focused on the rights protected by the FLSA rather than the NLRA. See Owen v. Bristol Care, Inc., 702 F.3d 1050, 1055 (8th Cir. 2013) (internal quotation marks omitted) (“[G]iven the absence of any contrary congressional command from the FLSA that a right to engage in class actions overrides the mandate of the FAA in favor of arbitration, we reject Owen’s invitation to follow the NLRB’s rationale in D.R. Horton.”); Cohen v. UBS Fin. Servs., Inc., No. 12 Civ. 2147 (BSJ)(JLC), 2012 WL 6041634, at *4 (S.D.N.Y. Dec. 4, 2012) (citations omitted) (“To the extent that Plaintiffs rely on . . . D.R. Horton . . . for the proposition that ‘a waiver of the
Several months later, in *Herrington v. Waterstone Mortgage Corp.*, 257 a federal court in Wisconsin applied *D.R. Horton* in refusing to enforce a class waiver in an employment arbitration agreement. Plaintiff Pamela Herrington brought a claim against her employer for failing to provide overtime pay as required under the FLSA. 258 The defendant moved to dismiss or stay the case under the terms of the parties’ arbitration agreement, which required all employment disputes be resolved in arbitration, and “[s]uch arbitration may not be joined with or join or include any claims by any persons not party to this Agreement.” 259 Herrington argued that, consistent with *D.R. Horton*, the arbitration agreement was unenforceable because it required her to give up her right under the NLRA to pursue a classwide claim. 260

The court first noted that, under Supreme Court precedent, rulings by the Board are entitled to “the greatest deference” and should be followed if “reasonably defensible.” 261 The court then followed the Board’s interpretation of the NLRA that collective actions are protected Section 7 activities. 262 The court agreed with the Board that the NLRA provides a substantive right that cannot be waived as a condition of employment. 263 Thus, refusing to enforce the class waiver does not conflict with *Gilmer*, which does not mandate enforcement of an agreement that requires waiver of substantive rights, 264 or *Concepcion*, which is distinguishable because it did not deal with a substantive right protected by a federal statute. 265 The court found the Board’s interpretation of the NLRA in *D.R. Horton* “reasonably defensible” and invalidated the class waiver in the arbitration agreement. 266

---

258. Id. at *1.
259. Id.
260. Id. at *2.
261. Id. at *5 (quoting ABF Freight Sys., Inc. v. NLRB, 510 U.S. 317, 324 (1994); Sure-Tan, Inc. v. NLRB, 467 U.S. 883, 891 (1984)).
262. Herrington, 2012 WL 1242318, at *5 (“Particularly because defendant develops no argument that the Board has interpreted the NLRA incorrectly, I see no reason to question the Board’s judgment in this instance.”).
263. Id. at *4.
264. See id.
265. See id. at *6.
266. Id. (quoting Sure-Tan, Inc. v. NLRB, 467 U.S. 883, 891 (1984)). The court severed the class waiver and stayed the case pending arbitration, primarily because neither party had argued that class arbitration was improper for the resolution of the dispute. See id. at *7. Very recently, a second federal court refused to enforce a class waiver based on a similar substantive right rationale. Brown v. Citicorp Serv., Inc., No. 1:12-cv-00062-BLW, 2013 WL 645942, at *3 (D. Idaho Feb. 21, 2013) (revoking an employment arbitration agreement by reasoning that the employer’s “arbitration agreement does more than merely waive [the plaintiff’s] right to a procedural remedy; it bars her from asserting a substantive right that is critical to national labor policy”).
B. Federal and State Courts Enforce Class Waivers

Federal district courts in California and Arkansas and state courts of appeal in California and Arkansas have recently enforced class waivers in employment arbitration agreements. This section first provides a brief account of the facts in each of these cases and then explores the overlapping reasoning of these courts for enforcing class waivers and refusing to follow D.R. Horton.

In Jasso v. Money Mart Express, Inc., Janelle Jasso brought a class action in state court against her employer for violations of California labor law relating to overtime pay, meal and rest breaks, reimbursement for employment-related expenses, and penalties for late wage payments. Jasso had previously signed a predispute arbitration agreement that contained a class waiver. Money Mart Express removed the case to federal court and then moved to compel arbitration according to the terms of their arbitration agreement. Rejecting D.R. Horton, the court held the arbitration agreement and class waiver enforceable and stayed the case pending arbitration.

In Morvant v. P.F. Chang’s China Bistro, Inc., Zachary Morvant and Jean Andrews, former employees of a P.F. Chang’s restaurant, brought a class action in state court against P.F. Chang’s for violating California labor law by failing to provide meal and rest breaks, refusing to pay for missed meal and rest breaks, failing to pay for overtime, and failing to provide accurate wage statements. P.F. Chang’s removed the case to federal court and then moved to compel arbitration according to the terms of their arbitration agreement. Requiring D.R. Horton, the court held the arbitration agreement and class waiver enforceable and stayed the case pending arbitration.

272. Id. at 1040.
273. Id. at 1041.
274. Id. at 1040.
275. Id. at 1052.
277. Id. at 834.
court and moved to compel arbitration per the terms of its arbitration agreement, which contained a class waiver. The court denied P.F. Chang’s motion to compel arbitration as to Morvant because he had never signed the arbitration agreement. However, the court granted the motion to compel arbitration as to Andrews, rejecting Andrews’s argument that D.R. Horton rendered the arbitration agreement unenforceable.

In Delock v. Securitas Security Services USA, Inc., David Delock and several others brought a class action in federal court against their employer Securitas Security Services. Delock was a site supervisor and his co-plaintiffs were security guards. They alleged that Securitas violated the FLSA and the Arkansas Minimum Wage Act by forcing them to work off the clock. Securitas moved to stay the case pending arbitration, arguing that the employees had agreed to an enforceable arbitration agreement with a class waiver. In an initial order, the court held that the employees had accepted the arbitration agreement and granted Securitas’s motion to compel arbitration. However, the court wrote that it needed more time to determine if the class waiver was enforceable in light of D.R. Horton. In a later order, the court considered and rejected D.R. Horton and enforced the class waiver.

In Iskanian v. CLS Transportation Los Angeles LLC, plaintiff Arshavir Iskanian, a driver employed by CLS Transportation, brought a class action in state court against CLS, alleging violation of California law for failure to pay overtime, provide meal and rest breaks, reimburse business expenses, provide accurate and complete wage statements, and pay final wages in a timely manner. He had previously signed CLS’s arbitration agreement containing a class waiver. The trial court found in favor of CLS and

278. Id. at 835.
279. Id. at 836–37.
280. The parties agreed that Andrews had accepted P.F. Chang’s arbitration agreement. Id. at 837.
281. Id. at 845 (“[T]he inclusion of a class action waiver provides no basis to hold the Arbitration Agreement unenforceable . . . .”).
283. Id. at *1.
284. Id.
285. Id.
286. Id.
287. Id. at *3.
288. Id. at *4.
291. Id. at 375–76.
292. Id.
granted the motion to compel arbitration. The court of appeal affirmed the ruling.

Finally, in *Nelsen v. Legacy Partners Residential, Inc.*, Lorena Nelsen, a former property manager for Legacy Partners Residential, brought a class action against Legacy, alleging violations of the California Labor Code. Nelsen had previously accepted an arbitration agreement with a class waiver, and Legacy moved to compel arbitration. The trial court granted Legacy’s motion and ordered individual arbitration, and the court of appeal affirmed.

All of these courts enforced employment arbitration agreements with class waivers, and each explicitly rejected *D.R. Horton*. Similar and overlapping reasoning was used throughout. These courts largely accepted the Board’s interpretation of the NLRA that use of class proceedings is protected under Section 7, and therefore their inclusion in arbitration agreements violates the NLRA. The primary point of contention, rather, was whether enforcing the NLRA here conflicts with the FAA and, if so, how to resolve the conflict. To answer this question, several courts noted that a decision by the Board interpreting a statute other than the NLRA (here the FAA) is not entitled to judicial deference or the “reasonably defensible” standard applied in *Herrington*. Particularly because the NLRB has “no special competence or experience in interpreting the Federal Arbitration Act,” the analysis is more searching and critical than that undertaken in the case of the NLRB’s interpretation of the NLRA.

Under this standard of review, these courts all held that refusing to enforce a class waiver that violates Section 7 creates a conflict with the FAA. The primary justification was that the presumed remedy—compelling class arbitration absent the parties’ consent—conflicts with the underlying purpose of the FAA to enforce arbitration agreements as written. The focus is on “the broad language in *Concepcion* which

---

293. Id. at 376.
294. Id. at 388.
295. 144 Cal. Rptr. 3d 198 (Ct. App. 2012).
296. Id. at 202–03.
297. Id.
298. Id. at 215–16.
299. Id. at 216.
301. See supra note 261 and accompanying text.
302. See DeLock, 2012 WL 3150391, at *3; Nelsen, 144 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 213; Iskanian, 142 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 381–82.
304. See id. at *2; Jasso, 879 F. Supp. 2d at 1048; Morvant v. P.F. Chang’s China Bistro, Inc., 870 F. Supp. 2d 831, 842 (N.D. Cal. 2012); Iskanian, 142 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 380.
articulates a strong policy choice in favor of enforcing arbitration agreements and thereupon holds that class waiver provisions should not be stricken or render the agreements unenforceable.”\(^{305}\) Under both \textit{Stolt-Nielsen} and \textit{Concepcion}, class arbitration cannot be compelled absent clear intent.\(^{306}\)

Because they found a conflict between the NLRA and the FAA, these courts applied \textit{CompuCredit}’s “contrary congressional command” test to determine if the NLRA should overrule the FAA.\(^{307}\) Because the NLRA does not contain a command in its text or legislative history requiring the availability of classwide claims, class waivers in employment arbitration agreements must be enforced in accordance with the FAA.\(^{308}\) Even if there is a right under the NLRA to classwide proceedings, it gives way to the FAA when waived in an arbitration agreement.

Courts also rejected \textit{D.R. Horton}’s conclusion that the Norris-LaGuardia Act overrides the FAA’s mandate to enforce illegal arbitration agreements.\(^{309}\) As with the FAA, the Board’s interpretation of the Norris-LaGuardia Act is not entitled to judicial deference, because the Board is interpreting a statute other than the NLRA.\(^{310}\) The Norris-LaGuardia Act is inapplicable to the enforceability of class waivers, these courts reasoned, because it applies only to infringements on joining or withdrawing from labor organizations.\(^{311}\) Even if it was applicable, courts concluded that the Norris-LaGuardia Act, like the NLRA, contains no \textit{CompuCredit} “contrary congressional command” overriding the FAA.\(^{312}\) Finally, \textit{D.R. Horton}’s implied repeal claim—that the Norris-LaGuardia Act overrules the FAA because it was enacted later—also fails because “[t]hough Congress first enacted the FAA in 1925, it reenacted the statute in 1947—after passing the Norris-LaGuardia Act and reenacting the NLRA.”\(^{313}\) Accordingly, courts held that the Board erred in “concluding that the FAA had to give way

\(^{305}\) \textit{Jasso}, 879 F. Supp. 2d at 1048.
\(^{306}\) \textit{See Morvant}, 870 F. Supp. 2d at 842.
\(^{307}\) \textit{See Delock}, 2012 WL 3150391, at *5; \textit{Jasso}, 879 F. Supp. 2d at 1045–46; \textit{Morvant}, 870 F. Supp. 2d at 845; \textit{Nelsen}, 144 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 214; \textit{Iskanian}, 142 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 382; \textit{see also supra} notes 102–12 and accompanying text. \textit{CompuCredit} was decided after \textit{D.R. Horton} and so was not discussed in the Board’s opinion.
\(^{308}\) \textit{See Delock}, 2012 WL 3150391, at *5 (“The NLRA’s text contains no command that is contrary to enforcing the FAA’s mandate.”); \textit{Jasso}, 879 F. Supp. 2d at 1047; \textit{Morvant}, 870 F. Supp. 2d at 845 (“Because Congress did not expressly provide that it was overriding any provision in the FAA when it enacted the NLRA . . . the Court cannot read such a provision into [the NLRA].”); \textit{Nelsen}, 144 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 214 (“[T]here is no language in the NLRA . . . demonstrating that Congress intended the employee concerted action rights therein to override the mandate of the FAA.” (internal quotation marks omitted)); \textit{Iskanian}, 142 Cal. Rptr. 3d at 382 (“The \textit{D.R. Horton} decision identified no ‘congressional command’ in the NLRA prohibiting enforcement of an arbitration agreement pursuant to its terms.”).
\(^{310}\) \textit{See Morvant}, 870 F. Supp. 2d at 843.
\(^{311}\) \textit{Id.} at 843–44 (citing 29 U.S.C. § 103(a)–(b) (2006)).
\(^{312}\) \textit{See Jasso}, 879 F. Supp. 2d at 1049; \textit{Morvant}, 870 F. Supp. 2d at 843.
\(^{313}\) \textit{Delock}, 2012 WL 3150391, at *5.
because of when Congress had enacted [the NLRA and the Norris-LaGuardia Act]."314

III. THE SUBSTANTIVE RIGHT SOLUTION

As detailed in Part II, the NLRB and courts have split on whether to enforce class waivers in employment arbitration agreements. Courts that enforced class waivers focused primarily on the policy, articulated in Concepcion, of enforcing arbitration agreements according to their terms in the absence of a contrary congressional command in the NLRA, as required by CompuCredit, to overcome this policy.315 This part argues that this application of Concepcion and CompuCredit fails to consider a critical distinguishing feature of Section 7 rights. While the plaintiffs in Concepcion sought class proceedings as a procedural right, class proceedings are protected by the NLRA as a substantive right. The Supreme Court’s interpretation of the FAA has never mandated the enforcement of arbitration agreements that interfere with substantive rights. While the Board discussed this point in D.R. Horton, its justification was lacking.316 Those courts critical of D.R. Horton failed to address this argument.

This part fills the void left by the NLRB and courts by providing a more thorough analysis of the distinction between substantive and procedural rights. The Supreme Court has rich precedent distinguishing between substantive and procedural rules for purposes of choice of law in federal courts. Because similar concerns are implicated in rights that arise in choice of law as in rights that relate to the enforceability of arbitration agreements, understanding how the line between substance and procedure is drawn in the former can aid in determining how to properly draw the line in the latter.

Part III.A reviews the distinction between substantive and procedural rules for determining choice of law in federal courts. Part III.B explores how courts use similar considerations in determining whether or not to enforce aspects of arbitration agreements. Part III.C applies this framework to the right under the NLRA to invoke classwide proceedings and concludes that this right is a substantive right. Because the right is substantive, it cannot be waived in an employment arbitration agreement, a conclusion in full accord with the Court’s FAA jurisprudence.

314. Id.
315. See supra Part II.B.
316. See D.R. Horton, Inc., 357 N.L.R.B. No. 184, 2012 WL 36274, at *5, *12 (Jan. 3, 2012) (reasoning that the D.R. Horton’s arbitration agreement “clearly and expressly bars employees from exercising substantive rights that have long been held protected by Section 7 of the NLRA” and rejecting the claim that “the Section 7 right to bring a class or collective action is merely ‘procedural’”).
A. The Substance/Procedure Dichotomy for Choice of Law

When a federal court serves as the forum for the adjudication of state law claims by exercising its diversity jurisdiction, the court must determine whether to apply state or federal law. The *Erie* doctrine answers this question. In *Erie Railroad Co. v. Tompkins*, the question for the Supreme Court was whether, in determining the duty of care owed by a railroad company to a pedestrian walking alongside the track, a federal court adjudicating the claim was required to apply Pennsylvania tort law. The Court held that, where no constitutional provision or federal statute applied, the federal court must apply relevant Pennsylvania tort law rather than general federal common law. When sitting in diversity jurisdiction the federal courts must apply the substantive law of the relevant state, as mandated both by the Rules of Decision Act and by the Constitution itself.

The Supreme Court soon acknowledged the difficulty in determining whether a state law is “substantive,” and thus must be applied in federal court. In *Guaranty Trust Co. v. York*, the question was whether a state statute of limitations that had run barred a federal court from adjudicating the underlying claim. In other words, is a statute of limitations a “substantive” or “procedural” rule? The Court’s answer was not based on whether the state law is “deemed a matter of ‘procedure’ in some sense.” Rather, a law is procedural if it “concerns merely the manner and the means by which a right to recover . . . is enforced,” and substantive if it would “significantly affect the result of a litigation for a federal court to disregard [the state law].” Because the state statute of limitations is

---

317. See U.S. Const. art. III, § 2 (“The judicial Power shall extend to all Cases . . . between Citizens of different States.”).
319. 304 U.S. 64 (1938).
320. Id. at 69–70. The claim was brought in federal court for the Southern District of New York. However, because the accident in dispute occurred in Pennsylvania, its tort law would govern if any state law governed at all.
321. Id. at 80.
322. Id. at 78 (“Congress has no power to declare substantive rules of common law applicable in a State whether they be local in their nature or ‘general,’ be they commercial law or a part of the law of torts. And no clause in the Constitution purports to confer such a power upon the federal courts.”).
323. 28 U.S.C. § 1652 (2006) (“The laws of the several states, except where the Constitution or treaties of the United States or Acts of Congress otherwise require or provide, shall be regarded as rules of decision in civil actions in the courts of the United States, in cases where they apply.”).
324. *Erie*, 304 U.S. at 80 (holding that in failing to apply state law, lower courts have “invaded rights which in our opinion are reserved by the Constitution to the several States”).
326. Id. at 109.
327. Id.
328. Id.
329. Id.
“outcome determinative” in the sense that it would completely bar recovery if the suit had been brought in state court, it is deemed a substantive state rule that must be applied by the federal court.\textsuperscript{330} Thus, the plaintiff’s claim was barred in federal court by the application of the state statute of limitations.\textsuperscript{331}

The distinction between “substantive” and “procedural” rules is also implicated when a federal court must determine whether to apply a state law that appears to clash with a Federal Rule of Civil Procedure. Under the Rules Enabling Act\textsuperscript{332} (REA), the Supreme Court is empowered to prescribe “general rules of practice and procedure and rules of evidence for cases in the United States district courts . . . and courts of appeals,” on the condition that “[s]uch rules shall not abridge, enlarge or modify any substantive right.”\textsuperscript{333} As the Court stated in \textit{Hanna v. Plumer},\textsuperscript{334} the broad command of the \textit{Erie} doctrine is identical to that of the REA: “[F]ederal courts are to apply state substantive law and federal procedural law.”\textsuperscript{335} A rule is valid under the REA only if it is “procedural” and, if so, it trumps any conflicting state procedural rules in federal court.

To determine whether a rule is procedural, the \textit{Hanna} Court provided a refined account of the somewhat simplistic \textit{Guaranty Trust “outcome determinative” test: “The test must be whether a rule really regulates procedure, the judicial process for enforcing rights and duties recognized by substantive law and for justly administering remedy and redress for disregard or infraction of them.”\textsuperscript{336} Applying this test, the Court held that Rule 4 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which prescribes the proper manner of service of summons, is procedural because it relates only to the “practice and procedure of the district courts.”\textsuperscript{337} The rule was not substantive even though the Court acknowledged that the ways in which it differs from state rules may in some cases be outcome determinative.\textsuperscript{338}

Recently in \textit{Shady Grove Orthopedic Associates, P.A. v. Allstate Insurance Co.},\textsuperscript{339} the Supreme Court affirmed in a plurality opinion that the dividing line between “substance” and “procedure” when analyzing a Federal Rule (and thus the validity of the rule itself) is whether the rule “really regulate[s] procedure.”\textsuperscript{340} For the plurality, “[t]he test is not whether the rule affects a litigant’s substantive rights; most procedural rules

\begin{itemize}
\item 330. \textit{Id.} at 110.
\item 331. \textit{Id.} at 112.
\item 333. \textit{Id.}
\item 335. \textit{Id.} at 465.
\item 336. \textit{Id.} at 464 (quoting Sibbach v. Wilson & Co., 312 U.S. 1, 14 (1941) (internal quotation marks omitted)).
\item 337. \textit{Id.} (internal quotation marks omitted).
\item 338. \textit{Id.} at 468.
\item 339. 130 S. Ct. 1431 (2010).
\item 340. \textit{Id.} at 1442 (quoting Sibbach v. Wilson & Co., 312 U.S. 1, 14 (1941) (internal quotation marks omitted)).
\end{itemize}
do.” Substantive rules “alter the rights themselves, the available remedies, or the rules of decision by which the court adjudicate[s] either.” Understanding substantive rules as those that alter “the rights themselves” is vital to the analysis to come below.

Shady Grove also provides a second important point. The particular question before the Court was whether Rule 23 of the FRCP which, as discussed above, provides the conditions upon which a class action may be maintained, is procedural and thus valid under the REA. Applying its newly articulated test, the Court held that Rule 23 is valid because, like other forms of joinder, a class action “merely enables a federal court to adjudicate claims of multiple parties at once, instead of in separate suits.” A class action is procedural because it “leaves the parties’ legal rights and duties intact and the rules of decision unchanged,” even if it has significant “incidental effect[s]” on the likelihood or nature of claims that it enables. Thus, for purposes of Erie choice of law analysis, use of class actions is a procedural, not substantive, right.

B. The Substance/Procedure Dichotomy and Arbitration Agreements

A similar analysis in distinguishing substance and procedure implicitly guides courts’ determination as to whether to enforce terms in arbitration agreements. Both an agreement to submit a claim to arbitration and a decision to remove a state claim to federal court are choices of forum for resolution of disputes. Predispute arbitration agreements serve as a “specialized kind of forum-selection clause” that set both “the situs of the suit but also the procedure to be used in resolving the dispute.” Similarly, removal to federal court changes the site of the suit and results in the implementation of federal procedural rules. Unsurprisingly then, the Supreme Court’s increasing acceptance of procedural modifications through both forum selection clauses and arbitration agreements have developed in tandem in recent decades. As is true for the FRCP, arbitration

---

341. Id.
342. Id. (quoting Miss. Publ’g Corp. v. Murphree, 326 U.S. 438, 446 (1946)).
343. Id. at 1443.
344. Id. at 1442; see also supra notes 29–38 and accompanying text.
345. Id.
346. Id. at 1443.
347. See supra Part I.A.
agreements are valid and enforceable because they modify only the procedural rights of the parties, the “‘manner and the means by which the litigants’ rights are enforced.’”

Where an arbitration agreement modifies only the procedure of adjudicating a dispute, courts with increasing stringency enforce the agreement pursuant to the FAA. Typical examples of procedural rights that can be modified through an arbitration agreement are the scope of discovery and rules of evidence, as these leave the rights themselves that are being adjudicated unaffected. The same is generally true for predispute agreements to arbitrate a statutory claim. By agreeing to arbitration, “a party does not forgo the substantive rights afforded by the statute; it only submits to their resolution in an arbitral, rather than a judicial, forum.” If an arbitration agreement only changes the forum in which a dispute is resolved, then the FAA mandates that a reviewing court enforce the agreement as written. Accordingly, the Supreme Court has held that a predispute agreement to arbitrate does not interfere with a party’s ability to bring substantive claims under antitrust, securities, age discrimination, or misrepresentations in advertising statutes; the substantive claim is adjudicated through the agreed upon arbitration procedures rather than standard judicial procedures.

However, where terms of an arbitration agreement do interfere with substantive rights of the parties, courts have declared the terms unenforceable and have either severed the offending clauses or invalidated the entire arbitration agreement. For example, because Title VII provides for statutory punitive damages, parties cannot agree to ban such damages for Title VII claims brought in arbitration. The same is true for punitive

351. Shady Grove, 130 S. Ct. at 1442 (quoting Miss. Publ’g Corp. v. Murphree, 325 U.S. 438, 446 (1946)); see supra notes 339–43 and accompanying text. That the FAA was not intended to require the enforcement of arbitration agreements that interfere with substantive legal rights is evidenced in the writings of Julius Henry Cohen, a primary drafter of the FAA. See Hall St. Assocs. L.L.C. v. Mattel, 552 U.S. 576, 589 n.7 (2008). Cohen wrote a companion article explaining that, under the FAA, “[w]hen the agreement to arbitrate is made, it is not left outside the law. Proceedings under the new arbitration law are as much a part of our legal system as any other special proceeding or form of remedy.” Julius Henry Cohen & Kenneth Dayton, The New Federal Arbitration Law, 12 V.A. L. REV. 265, 279 (1926). Agreements to arbitrate provide parties with a different forum but cannot leave them “outside the law.” Id.

352. See supra Part I.C.3.

353. See supra note 20 and accompanying text; see also Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp., 500 U.S. 20, 31 (1991) (holding that an arbitration agreement is enforceable even if discovery “procedures might not be as extensive as in the federal courts”).

354. See supra note 20 and accompanying text.


356. See supra notes 90–101 and accompanying text.

357. See supra notes 90–82 and accompanying text.

358. See supra notes 83–89 and accompanying text.

359. See supra notes 90–101 and accompanying text.

360. See supra notes 102–12 and accompanying text.

damages permissible under the D.C. Human Rights Act\textsuperscript{362} and treble damages in federal antitrust claims.\textsuperscript{363} In all of these, enforcing the arbitration agreement would displace a statutory remedy, a substantive component of the statute.\textsuperscript{364} Refusing to enforce such agreements is consistent with the Supreme Court dicta in \textit{Mitsubishi} and \textit{Gilmer} that clauses in arbitration agreements that interfere with statutory rights or remedies are invalid.\textsuperscript{365} Thus, while a party can be bound to resolve a Title VII employment dispute in arbitration rather than in court, previously agreed upon limits on damages must be lifted to allow the underlying statute to “function fully and adequately under the law.”\textsuperscript{366}

The Supreme Court undertook this process of disentangling substantive and procedural components of a statute in \textit{Rodriguez de Quijas}.\textsuperscript{367} The Court enforced waiver through arbitration of “procedural components” of the Securities Act, which included provisions regarding federal venue, service of process, and removal requirements.\textsuperscript{368} However, the Court implied that it would not have enforced a waiver of the burden-of-proof stipulation, as that is a substantive component of the statute.\textsuperscript{369} The differentiation seems to closely track \textit{Shady Grove}, as waiver of procedural components of the statute would alter “‘the manner and the means by which the litigants’ rights are enforced,’” while waiver of substantive components would alter “‘the rules of decision by which the court . . . adjudicate[s].’”\textsuperscript{370} Thus, the \textit{Shady Grove} framework is a logical way to analyze the enforceability of class waivers in employment arbitration agreements.

C. The Substantive Nature of Class Proceedings As Protected by the NLRA

The final step is to apply this framework to determine if employees’ right to invoke classwide proceedings is a procedural right that can be enforceably waived under the FAA or a substantive right that cannot be enforceably waived in predispute arbitration agreements. Underlying the analysis is the Supreme Court’s holding in \textit{Shady Grove} that use of Rule 23 to bring a class action is a procedural, not a substantive, right.\textsuperscript{371} Rule 23 and use of class actions more generally are procedural rights because they “leave[] the parties’ legal rights and duties intact and the rules of decision unchanged.”\textsuperscript{372} The Court in \textit{Concepcion} similarly viewed class arbitration

\footnotesize{
363. See Kristian v. Comcast Corp., 446 F.3d 25, 48 (1st Cir. 2006).
364. See supra note 343 and accompanying text.
365. See supra notes 82, 100–01 and accompanying text.
366. Hadnot, 344 F.3d at 478.
367. See supra notes 82–89 and accompanying text.
368. See supra note 87 and accompanying text.
369. See supra note 88 and accompanying text.
371. See supra notes 344–46 and accompanying text.
372. Shady Grove, 130 S. Ct. at 1443.
}
as a procedural right that cannot be forced on a party absent explicit agreement, akin to altering the rules of discovery or evidence. 

However, unlike Rule 23 and other class mechanisms meant simply to aggregate similar claims, the nature of the right here is different. Viewed through the *Shady Grove* framework, when employees seek to use classwide proceedings as a form of collected activity for their mutual aid or protection, the right is substantive, not procedural. This conclusion follows from the NLRA itself. The discrete purpose of the NLRA is to strengthen the ability of workers to organize through collective activities. Protection of employees’ ability to act collectively is the “fundamental right” of the NLRA and “guarantees employees the most basic rights of industrial self-determination.” Because Section 7 rights are so fundamental, an individual employee cannot waive them contractually, even if doing so would be to the individual employee’s benefit. The violation of Section 7 and the harm to the employee occurs at the moment he is presented with an employment agreement with an offending term, even if he has suffered no subsequent harm by the employer and even if the employer has made no attempt to enforce the illegal term.

For these reasons, as a Section 7 right, an employee’s invocation of classwide proceedings is not solely procedural as it was in *Shady Grove*; it is not merely the “the manner and the means by which the litigants’ rights are enforced.” Invocation of classwide proceedings is the right. A class waiver in an employment arbitration agreement interferes with a substantive right—Section 7 protections are, in the words of *Shady Grove*, “the rights themselves” for which a party seeks relief from the NLRB or the courts. As such, this right cannot be modified in a predispute arbitration agreement, and attempts to do so (in the form of a class waiver) must not be enforced.

This conclusion is entirely consistent with the FAA jurisprudence reviewed above. In *Mitsubishi*, *Rodriguez de Quijas*, and *Gilmer*, enforcement of arbitration agreements did not conflict with the parties’ ability to seek relief for infringement of their statutory substantive rights for antitrust, securities, and age discrimination violations. Here, however, enforcement of the arbitration agreements, which requires waiving the use of class proceedings, directly infringes the right being sought. As stated in both *Mitsubishi* and *Gilmer*, arbitration agreements are unenforceable if they interfere with substantive rights. In *Stolt-Nielsen* and *Concepcion*,

---

373. See supra notes 127–40 and accompanying text.
374. See supra notes 147–49 and accompanying text.
375. See supra notes 154, 156 and accompanying text.
376. See supra notes 212–17 and accompanying text.
377. See supra note 218 and accompanying text.
379. See supra note 343 and accompanying text.
380. See supra notes 68–101 and accompanying text.
381. See supra notes 127–204 and accompanying text.
382. See supra notes 82, 100–01 and accompanying text.
the plaintiffs’ desired use of classwide proceedings was a procedural right because the plaintiffs sought it as a means of expediting or vindicating other substantive rights. Accordingly, in both, the Court considered whether this change in procedure was appropriate given the agreement of the parties. Here, however, class proceedings are the substantive right protected by statute and, indeed, there is no other substantive right that the NLRA serves to protect. Just as under the *Erie* doctrine, removal to federal court should not upset the substantive rules of the states, use of arbitration rather than the courts should not upset the substantive rights of employees. In accordance with the NLRA, employers cannot use an agreement to arbitrate as a means of denying employees their substantive right to employ classwide proceedings for the resolution of a dispute.

Understanding the Section 7 right as substantive rather than procedural resolves the criticisms raised by the courts that objected to the Board’s *D.R. Horton* holding. Refusing to enforce class waivers in employment contracts does not run afoul of the holding of *Stolt-Nielsen* or *Concepcion* by creating a conflict with the FAA, because the FAA has never been held to mandate the enforcement of arbitration agreements that waive substantive rights. Rather, the cases consistently hold that parties can and should use predispute arbitration agreements as a means of modifying only their procedural rights, whether arising under federal statutes or not. Furthermore, there is no conflict between the NLRA and the FAA because refusing to enforce a class waiver does not require compelled class arbitration. Rather, employers need only “leave[] open a judicial forum for class and collective claims,” and so would not be compelled into a type of arbitration with which they did not agree. Where there is no conflict between the NLRA and the FAA, the *CompuCredit* “contrary congressional command” test to resolve statutory conflict is irrelevant. Infringing a substantive right takes the enforceability of an arbitration agreement outside of the FAA’s mandate and, as the Supreme Court has consistently held, such agreements are unenforceable.

---

383. *See supra* notes 116–40 and accompanying text.
384. *See supra* notes 116–40 and accompanying text.
385. *See supra* notes 300–14 and accompanying text.
386. *See supra* notes 82, 100–01 and accompanying text.
387. *Contra supra* notes 304–06 and accompanying text.
389. This remedy differs from that in *Herrington*, in which the class waiver was severed and the court permitted the use of class arbitration, likely due to ambiguity in the intent of the parties. *See supra* note 266. However, given the strong language in *Stolt-Nielsen* and *Concepcion* that nonconsensual class arbitration is inconsistent with the FAA, as a general rule access to invocation of judicial class action, rather than class arbitration, is the proper remedy. *See D.R. Horton*, 2012 WL 36274, at *16.
390. *See supra* note 108 and accompanying text.
CONCLUSION

Over the last few decades, the Supreme Court has interpreted the FAA to afford great discretion in allowing parties to use arbitration agreements to alter the procedural rules by which their disputes will be resolved. Recently, the Court held that this discretion generally includes the ability to waive classwide proceedings in the resolution of future disputes. However, discretion in structuring arbitration agreements has never been extended to permit waiver of substantive rights protected by statute. One such unwaivable substantive right is invocation of classwide proceedings under Section 7 of the NLRA. Accordingly, refusing to enforce predispute arbitration agreements that waive this right creates no conflict with the FAA. As the NLRB correctly held in D.R. Horton, employment arbitration agreements with class waivers must be declared unenforceable.