

# Adverse Possession

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Few doctrines taught in the first year of law school make a worse first impression than adverse possession. Adverse possession enables a non-owner to gain title to land (or personal property, but we will focus here on land) after the expiration of the statute of limitations for the owner to recover possession. That sounds bad, and the thought of “squatters” becoming owners gets its share of bad press. But historically the doctrine has performed, and continues to serve, important functions.

The required elements for adverse possession vary by state. But they usually include: (1) actual possession; (2) exclusive; (3) continuous; (4) hostile or adverse; (5) open and notorious; and (6) for a statutory period. In some places, they also include (7) under a claim of right; and (8) paying taxes. Special rules also apply for (9) color of title. Not only do these requirements vary by state, the use of these words is also inconsistent. Some courts, for example, treat “hostile” as synonymous with “under a claim of right” while other courts treat these as distinct inquiries.

When courts apply these rules, they seem to oscillate between two perspectives: the owner and the adverse possessor. When they take the owner’s perspective, they often focus on fair notice. Was the adverse possessor acting in a way that a reasonable real owner would have detected? When they take the adverse possessor’s perspective, they often look to settled expectations. Here the question is not whether the real owner should have noticed, but instead on how long the adverse possessor had come to rely on continued possession.

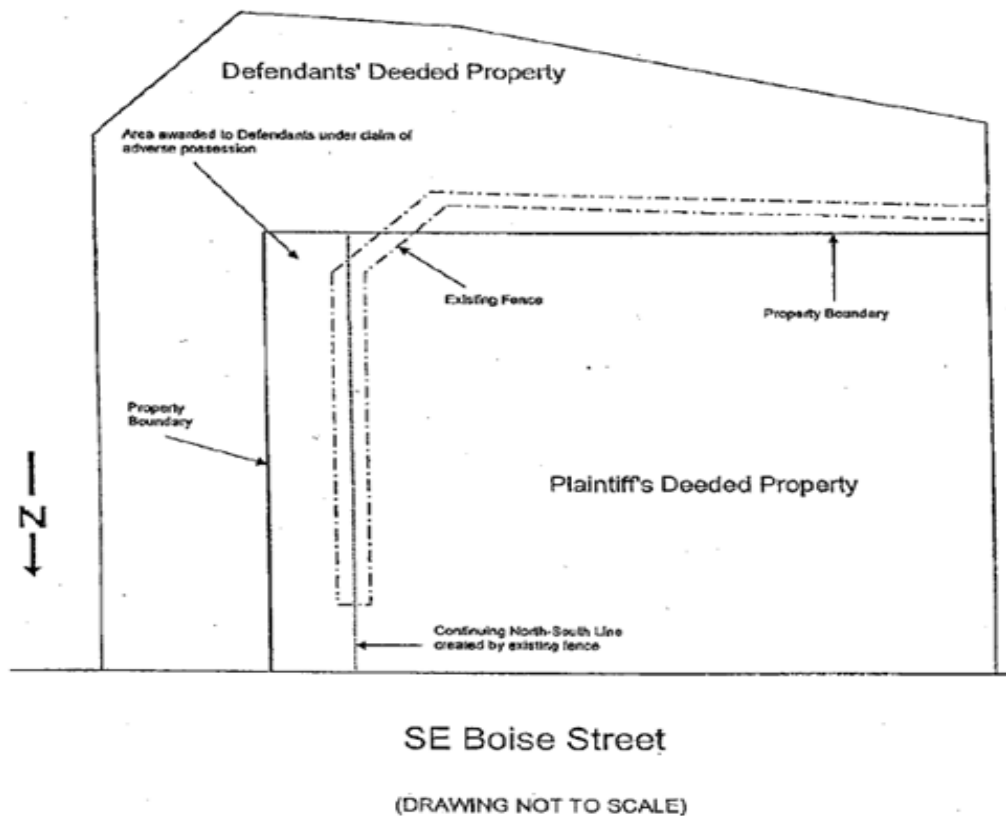
The rules of adverse possessor depend importantly on statutes of limitations. When I trespass on your land, I am committing a tort. Just as with any tort, a related statute of limitations specifies how quickly you must act if you want to pursue a legal remedy. In effect, the doctrine of adverse possessor grows out of the idea that if I trespass for enough time that the real owner can no longer sue to evict me – because her cause of action has expired – then for all practical purposes, she no longer owns the property.

## Tieu v. Morgan

265 P.3d 98 (Ore. App. 2011)

HADLOCK, J.

The parties dispute ownership of a strip of land that runs parallel to defendants' driveway. Plaintiff, who owns residential property adjoining that strip of land, filed suit seeking (1) a declaration that he owns the disputed strip and (2) an injunction prohibiting defendants from trespassing on that property. Defendants counterclaimed, asserting that they acquired the disputed strip through adverse possession, and subsequently moved for summary judgment on that counterclaim. The trial court granted defendants' motion and entered a judgment declaring that defendants had acquired the strip through adverse possession. Plaintiff appeals, and we affirm....



The two parcels subject to this appeal are adjoining residential tax lots in a Portland subdivision. Tax lot 3100 is rectangular, with its north side fronting Southeast Boise Street. Tax lot 3200 is a flag lot that is situated largely south of lot 3100; its driveway

(the “flagpole”) runs north from the main portion of the lot (the “flag”) to Southeast Boise Street, parallel to the eastern edge of lot 3100. The disputed three-foot-wide strip lies between lot 3200’s driveway and lot 3100. Defendants own lot 3200. Plaintiff owns lot 3100 and also is the record owner of the disputed strip.

A north-south stretch of fence on plaintiff’s property runs along the western boundary of the disputed strip, parallel to defendants’ driveway. The fence starts roughly halfway down the driveway from Southeast Boise Street, running south, then turns 45 degrees to the southwest, cutting off the southeast corner of lot 3100, then makes another 45-degree turn before continuing west, roughly following the east-west boundary between lots 3100 and 3200. The diagonal portion of the fence that cuts the corner of lot 3100 includes a gate wide enough to accommodate a boat trailer. As noted, the disputed three-foot-wide strip lies between defendants’ driveway and the north-south fence on lot 3100; its practical effect is to widen the “flagpole” portion of lot 3200.

The fencing that separates the two properties has existed for decades. As of 1984, the two lots were owned by Robert Stevens, who installed most of the fencing that year, including about half of the north-south stretch located west of lot 3200’s driveway. In 1994, Robert Stevens sold lot 3200 to his son, James Stevens, believing that the deed he conveyed to James included all property on the east side of a north-south line defined by that portion of the fence, *i.e.*, the disputed strip. Although he never specifically discussed the issue with his father, James also believed that his purchase of the flag lot included the disputed strip along his driveway. James explained that he had “no reason to know—to think [that the fence] would be in the wrong location.”

During the four years that James owned the flag lot, he granted Robert permission to occasionally use James’s driveway and the disputed strip, so that Robert could drive a large vehicle and boat trailer through the diagonal gate into Robert’s back yard. In 1996, James installed a sewer line in the center of the disputed strip, running all the way from Southeast Boise Street to the house on lot 3200. When James later put lot 3200 on the market, he advertised it as having a “fully fenced yard,” based on his belief that his ownership included the disputed strip.

James sold lot 3200 to defendants in 1998. The lot was not surveyed in conjunction with that sale; nor did the parties to the sale discuss the lot’s recorded boundaries,

review paperwork or maps, or perform any investigation specifically related to that subject.

Defendants have made use of the disputed strip since they purchased lot 3200. Defendant Francine Morgan runs a daycare business from her home, and parents regularly use the disputed strip when dropping off and picking up their children. In 1999, defendants extended the fence paralleling the strip north by roughly 40 feet, choosing not to extend the fence all the way to Southeast Boise Street after Robert suggested that they leave that area unfenced to accommodate maneuvering large vehicles in and out of their driveways. Defendants have laid gravel and bark dust on the disputed strip a number of times and have maintained the fence by replacing posts and fence boards. While Robert still owned lot 3100, he specifically asked defendants' permission each time he wanted to use the disputed strip to access or move his boat, and defendants granted that permission.

Plaintiff bought lot 3100 from Robert in early 2006. Before purchasing the property, plaintiff had it surveyed and learned that the north-south fence was not located on the deeded boundary between lots 3100 and 3200. A survey pin marking the recorded boundary was placed at that time. Plaintiff claims that he told defendant Francine Morgan soon after the survey was completed that he planned to move the fence to the deeded property line within two years. According to plaintiff, Francine neither disputed plaintiff's right to move the fence nor claimed ownership of land between the survey marker and the fence. Defendants deny that such a conversation occurred.

In 2008, plaintiff attempted to remove the north-south portion of the fence. After defendants protested, plaintiff initiated this action, seeking a declaration that he owned the disputed strip. As noted, defendants asserted in a counterclaim that they had acquired the strip through adverse possession. The trial court ultimately granted summary judgment to defendants, ruling that the undisputed facts established that defendants had acquired the disputed strip through adverse possession....

ORS 105.620 codifies the common-law elements of adverse possession, requiring a claimant to prove by clear and convincing evidence that the claimant or the claimant's predecessors in interest maintained actual, open, notorious, exclusive, hostile, and continuous possession of the property for ten years. In addition to those common-law

elements, the statute also requires the claimant to have had an honest belief of actual ownership when he or she entered into possession of the property.

Plaintiff makes arguments related to each of the statutory elements, first claiming that defendants did not establish actual, open, notorious, exclusive, or continuous possession of the entire disputed strip. We recently summarized what proof is required to satisfy those elements of an adverse-possession claim:

“The element of actual use is satisfied if a claimant established a use of the land that would be made by an owner of the same type of land, taking into account the uses for which the land is suited. To establish a use that is open and notorious, plaintiffs must prove that their possession is of such a character as to afford the owner the means of knowing it, and of the claim. The exclusivity of the use also depends on how a reasonable owner would or would not share the property with others in like circumstances. A use is continuous if it is constant and not intermittent. The required constancy of use, again, is determined by the kind of use that would be expected of such land.”

*Stiles v. Godsey*, 233 Or. App. 119, 126, 225 P.3d 81 (2009) (internal quotations and citations omitted).

Here, the land in question is a three-foot-wide strip, covered mostly with gravel or bark dust, adjacent to a narrow driveway. Defendants and their predecessor have used the strip as an extension of that driveway since 1994, both to accommodate wide vehicles and to provide additional loading room for defendant Francine Morgan’s daycare clients. That use is consistent with ownership and with the land’s character. Moreover, that use was “open” and “notorious,” particularly when considered together with James’s act of locating his sewer line on the strip and, later, defendants’ maintenance of and improvements to the fence. Finally, defendants and their predecessor used the strip continuously from 1994 (when James bought the lot) to at least 2006 (when plaintiff bought lot 3100 from Robert), *i.e.*, for longer than the statutory 10-year adverse-possession period. Thus, the undisputed facts establish defendants’ actual, open, notorious, exclusive, and continuous use of the property.

Plaintiff’s contrary argument rests on the fact that the disputed strip is not completely separated from his residential lot by a fence; he emphasizes that the fence at issue does

not extend all the way to Southeast Boise Street, but starts partway down the driveway.... Here, even though the fence does not extend to the street, it adequately defines the entire disputed strip, indicating that it is separate from the land that abuts it to the west.

Plaintiff also contends that defendants' use of the disputed strip was not "exclusive" because Robert sometimes used the property even after the fence was built. But adverse-possession claimants are allowed the freedom to allow others to occasionally use their property, in the manner that neighbors are wont to do, without thereby abandoning their claim. In this case, Robert asked permission of defendants and their predecessors each time that he used the disputed strip; that permissive use was consistent with defendants' ownership of the land and does not defeat their claim to it.

We also reject plaintiff's argument that defendants' use of the disputed strip was not "hostile" because, he claims, defendants had a conscious doubt regarding the property line. Under ORS 105.620(2)(a), a claimant "maintains 'hostile possession' of property if the possession is under claim of right or with color of title." A "claim of right" may be established through proof of an honest but mistaken belief of ownership, resulting, for example, from a mistake as to the correct location of a boundary. The mistaken belief must be a "pure" mistake, however, and not one based upon "conscious doubt" about the true boundary. Furthermore, ORS 105.620(1)(b) requires that the claimants (or their predecessors) have had an "honest belief" of actual ownership that (1) continued through the vesting period, (2) had an objective basis, and (3) was reasonable under the circumstances.

In *Mid-Valley Resources, Inc. v. Engelson*, 170 Ore App 255 (2000), we concluded that the defendants had failed to establish pure mistake about the location of a boundary line because one of the defendants had a conscious doubt on that subject. That *Mid-Valley* defendant had testified that she had not known where the property line was when she was a child, and she still did not know at the time of trial whether a particular fence was located on that boundary. That defendant's uncertainty about the property line's location defeated the defendants' adverse-possession claim.

Here, by contrast, the undisputed evidence clearly establishes that defendants and their predecessor, James, always believed that the fence marked the north-south line between lots 3200 and 3100. James assumed when he bought lot 3200 in 1994 that the fence

was on the property line, and he perpetuated that belief in defendants by telling them, when they bought the property, that it was “fully fenced.” Robert, then the record owner of the disputed strip, confirmed those mistaken beliefs when he did not object to installation of the sewer line, to defendants’ use of the strip, or to defendants’ extension of the fence. No evidence in the record supports plaintiff’s assertion that defendants had a “conscious doubt” about whether the fence was actually located on the line separating their property from plaintiff’s. Defendants did suggest in their depositions that they had not given much thought to the property line’s location until the dispute arose with plaintiff. Read in context, however, those statements simply confirm defendants’ *certainty* that the property line was the same as the fence line; the statements do not indicate that defendants had any conscious doubt as to the boundary’s location.

Moreover, no evidence calls into question the reasonableness of defendants’ belief that they owned the disputed strip. That strip of land is small in relation to the size of lots 3200 and 3100, it regularly has been used as an extension to the width of an existing driveway, it is well suited to that purpose, and it is partly fenced off from plaintiff’s property. Under the circumstances, defendants’ belief that they owned the disputed strip was reasonable.

In sum, the undisputed evidence establishes clearly and convincingly that defendants and their predecessor, James, had an “honest belief” that the disputed strip was part of lot 3200 and that they continuously maintained actual, open, notorious, exclusive, and hostile possession of that strip for well over 10 years, from 1994 at least until plaintiff bought lot 3100 in 2006.<sup>6</sup> We conclude that defendants’ adverse-possession claim to the disputed strip vested in 2004, giving them title and extinguishing any claim that plaintiff might otherwise have had to that land.

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<sup>6</sup> We reject plaintiff’s argument that defendants cannot satisfy the 10-year adverse-possession period by tacking their possession to that of James. An adverse-possession claimant may tack his possessory interests to those of a predecessor “if there is evidence that the predecessor intended to transfer whatever adverse possessory rights he or she may have acquired.” *Fitts v. Case*, 243 Ore App 543, 549, 267 P3d 160 (2011). Here, James clearly intended his transfer of lot 3200 to defendants to include the disputed strip, given his belief that the fence marked the boundary line and his advertisement of lot 3200 as “fully fenced.”

## Notes and Questions

1. *Tien* involves an error in a conveyance. The parties' predecessors in interest thought they had bargained to transfer land that they didn't. This is a common source of adverse possession litigation. Other recurring fact patterns include mistaken deed descriptions, surveying errors, and accidental encroachments by neighbors. Adverse possession claims may also follow the souring of relationships, perhaps between cotenants or one involving permissive land use. None of these cases necessarily involve bad faith actors; although the doctrine may indeed be applied in favor of the mere trespasser, depending on the jurisdiction's interpretation of the state of mind required to satisfy the "hostility" element. We will discuss this issue further below.
2. Title based on adverse possession is as good as any. To think through the implications of that observation, imagine the following facts. Neighbor A mistakenly builds a fence on her neighbor's land and gains title to the enclosed land by adverse possession. Neighbor B then notices the encroachment and demands that A move the fence. She agrees, but changes her mind two years later and rebuilds it. B sues for trespass. Who wins?
3. **Open and notorious possession.** Whatever its merits, adverse possession is strong medicine. The doctrine therefore provides safeguards to prevent a title owner from losing her property without adequate notice by, for example, requiring that the possession be open and notorious—it has to be the kind of act that an owner would notice.

But even overt acts may not be obvious threats to ownership rights. A fence on someone else's property certainly seems open and notorious, but what if it is just an inch or two over the border? What about the three-foot incursion at issue in *Tien*? What if it had been built while the plaintiff was in occupation of his lot? Do we expect owners to commission surveys anytime a neighbor builds near the property line?

For some courts, the answer is no. *Mannillo v. Gorski*, 255 A.2d 258, 264 (N.J. 1969), for example, holds that minor encroachments are not open and notorious without actual knowledge on the part of the title owner. But where



would that leave an innocent encroacher, whose trespass may be costly to remedy? In *Mannillo*, the court balked at placing the trespasser, whose steps and concrete walk extended 15 inches into the plaintiffs' property, at her neighbor's mercy.

It is conceivable that the application of the foregoing rule may in some cases result in undue hardship to the adverse possessor who under an innocent and mistaken belief of title has undertaken an extensive improvement which to some extent encroaches on an adjoining property. In that event ... equity may furnish relief. Then, if the innocent trespasser of a small portion of land adjoining a boundary line cannot without great expense remove or eliminate the encroachment, or such removal or elimination is impractical or could be accomplished only with great hardship, the true owner may be forced to convey the land so occupied upon payment of the fair value thereof without regard to whether the true owner had notice of the encroachment at its inception. Of course, such a result should eventuate only under appropriate circumstances and where no serious damage would be done to the remaining land as, for instance, by rendering the balance of the parcel unusable or no longer capable of being built upon by reason of zoning or other restrictions.

*Id.*<sup>1</sup> Is this result—a forced transaction in which the innocent trespasser becomes the owner, but must pay—the best accommodation of the relevant

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<sup>1</sup> As *Manillo's* resort to equity shows, adverse possession is not the only way to address boundary disputes. Other options include the equitable doctrine of acquiescence, *see, e.g.*, *Hamlin v. Niedner*, 955 A.2d 251, 254 (Me. 2008) (“To prove that title or a boundary line is established by acquiescence, a plaintiff must prove four elements by clear and convincing evidence: (1) possession up to a visible line marked clearly by monuments, fences or the like; (2) actual or constructive notice of the possession to the adjoining landowner; (3) conduct by the adjoining landowner from which recognition and acquiescence, not induced by fraud or mistake, may be fairly inferred; and (4) acquiescence for a long period of years[.]”); the doctrine of agreed boundaries, *Finley v. Yuba Cnty. Water Dist.*, 160 Cal. Rptr. 423, 428 (Cal. App. 1979); estoppel, *see, e.g.*, *Douglas v. Rowland*, 540 S.W.2d 252 (Tenn. App. 1976), and laches. *See generally* L. C. Warden, *Mandatory injunction to compel removal of encroachments by adjoining landowner*, 28 A.L.R.2d 679 (Originally published in 1953) (discussing factors influencing issuance of an injunction).

Laches raises a conceptual difficulty, as it seems to cover some of the same ground as adverse possession. Laches is an equitable defense analogous to the legal defense provided by a statute of limitations: if a plaintiff unreasonably delays in bringing suit and the defendant is prejudiced by the delay, laches will bar the suit as a

interests? If the true owner wasn't on notice of the incursion, why can she be forced to surrender her land, even for payment?

4. **Tacking.** What happens if a series of possessors occupy a property, but none of them are present long enough for the limitations period to run? *Tieu* notes in passing the concept of tacking, which enables a succession of adverse possessors to collectively satisfy the statutory period. The usual approach is to allow tacking so long as the successive possessors are in "privity": a relationship in which the prior possessor knowingly and intentionally transfers whatever interest she holds to the subsequent possessor. *See, e.g.*, *Stump v. Whibco*, 715 A.2d 1006 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. 1998) ("Tacking is generally permitted "unless it is shown that the claimant's predecessor in title did not intend to convey the disputed parcel.") (citations and quotation omitted). So the clock continues to run if one possessor sells or leases the occupied land, but there is no privity if one trespasser wanders onto the lot after another leaves (or worse, dispossesses the earlier trespasser by force).
  
5. **"Hostility."** Adverse possession requires possession that is "hostile." Hostility is not animosity. "Hostile possession can be understood as possession that is opposed and antagonistic to all other claims, and that conveys the clear message that the possessor intends to possess the land as his or her own." 16 POWELL ON REAL PROPERTY § 91.01[2]. The requirement thus prevents permissive occupancy from ripening into ownership; a lessor need not worry that the tenant will claim title by adverse possession. For this reason, the simplest way to stop an adverse possessor is just to give them explicit permission to stay.

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matter of equity. But if an owner tries to recover land within the limitations period, doesn't that imply that there has been no unreasonable delay? *Clanton v. Hathorn*, 600 So. 2d 963, 966 (Miss. 1992) (observing that the adverse possession statute "would seem to occupy the field"); *Kelly v. Valparaiso Realty Co.*, 197 So. 2d 35, 36 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1967) (where adverse possession was unavailable due to failure to pay taxes on the land "we do not feel that equity can be invoked to circumvent the statutory law of adverse possession"); *see generally* 27A Am. Jur. 2d Equity § 163 ("Only rarely should laches bar a case before the statute of limitations has run."). *But see* *Pufahl v. White*, No. 2050-S, 2002 WL 31357850, at \*1 (Del. Ch. Oct. 9, 2002) (although laches claim cannot lead to title, the "laches defense may, however, be applicable to the plaintiffs' request to enjoin the defendants to remove the encroachment").

6. A “claim of right,” sometimes called claim of title,<sup>2</sup> means that the possessor is holding the property as an owner would. Some states require that an adverse possessor have a specific belief about the property they are claiming. Although the required belief varies by state, the most common rule requires that the adverse possessor sincerely (and reasonably) believe that she is using her own property. This rule has the advantage of disallowing intentional adverse possession. But it has the disadvantage of requiring adverse possessor to prove a past belief for which little evidence may be available, thus adding uncertainty to an already uncertain doctrine. For this reason, among others, some states (including California) have abolished the claim-of-right requirement. Some states adopt almost the opposite view of the good faith requirement, and instead demand that the adverse possessor demonstrate defiance of the real owner – refusing to accept the real owner’s legitimate claim to superior title. One example of this approach precludes adverse possession by any occupant who offers to purchase the property from its real owner – on the ground that this offer of purchase acknowledges the superior claim of the real owner.

Richard Helmholz has argued that though adverse possession doctrine generally does not require the adverse possessor to plead good faith, judicial practice is to disfavor those who know they are trespassing compared to those acting out of a good faith mistake. Richard H. Helmholz, *Adverse Possession and Subjective Intent*, 61 WASH. U. L. Q. 331, 332 (1983).

Perhaps another way to reconcile the benefits of adverse possession with the distaste for bad faith possessors would be to allow dishonest possessors to keep the land, but pay for the privilege. Thomas W. Merrill, *Property Rules, Liability Rules, and Adverse Possession*, 79 NW. U. L. REV. 1122, 1126 (1984) (suggesting “requiring indemnification only in those cases where the [true owner] can show that the [adverse possessor] acted in bad faith.

7. **Continuous Possession.** Adverse possessors are not required to live on the occupied property, what matters is acting like a true owner would. That use,

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<sup>2</sup> Which is not the same thing as “color of title,” as discussed below.

however, must be continuous, not sporadic. *Compare, e.g.,* Lobdell v. Smith, 690 N.Y.S.2d 171, 173 (N.Y. App. Div. 3d Dep't 1999) (although undeveloped land “does not require the same quality of possession as residential or arable land,” no adverse possession where claimant “seldom visited the parcel except to occasionally pick berries or hunt small game”), *with* Nome 2000 v. Fagerstrom, 799 P.2d 304, 310 (Alaska 1990) (claimants of a rural parcel suitable for recreational and subsistence activities “visited the property several times during the warmer season to fish, gather berries, clean the premises, and play... That others were free to pick berries and fish is consistent with the conduct of a hospitable landowner, and undermines neither the continuity nor exclusivity of their possession.”). Regular use of a summer home may constitute continuous use. *See, e.g.,* Nechow v. Brown, 120 N.W.2d 251, 252 (Mich. 1963).

8. **Color of title.** Color of title describes taking possession under a defective instrument (like a deed based on a mistaken land survey). States often apply more lenient adverse possession standards to claims made under color of title. *Compare, e.g.,* Fl. St. § 95.16, *with id.* § 95.18. Why do you think that is?

Entry under color of title may also affect the scope of the land treated as occupied by the adverse possessor. 2 C.J.S. *Adverse Possession* § 252 (“Adverse possession under color of title ordinarily extends to the whole tract described in the instrument constituting color of title.”). It can also provide a shorter statute of limitations.

9. **Adverse possession by and against the government.** Although government agencies may acquire title by adverse possession, the general rule is that the government’s title to property cannot be lost by adverse possession. That is, even if some satisfies all the ordinary requirements for adverse possession, they do not gain title over the land, if the land is owned by the federal or state government. Why do you think there is a rule against adverse possession of government property? Do you think that is a good rule? Do you think some or all private landowners should be similarly immune from adverse possession? If so, which ones?

10. **Disabilities.** The title owner of land may be subject to a disability (e.g., status as a minor, mental incapacity) that may extend the time to bring an ejectment action against an unlawful occupant. States generally spell out such exceptions by statute.
11. **Actual possession.** Adverse Possession requires that the trespasser actually enter the property (for real estate) or have physical control over the property (for personal property). Merely looking at the property yearningly is not sufficient. Moreover, not just any entry will suffice. The adverse possessor must use the property in the way a real owner might. States vary in how demanding a requirement this is. Some states specify required uses. For example, adverse possession in New York demands that the adverse possessor either improve, cultivate, or enclose the property – that is add a building, plant crops, or erect a fence. Other states give courts discretion to decide whether a specific use constitutes actual possession.
12. **Exclusive.** Adverse possession requires a use that is exclusive in two senses. First, the adverse possessor cannot be sharing the property with the real owner. Second, the adverse possessor must be seen to be excluding others from the property. This does not mean that the adverse possessor must act alone; groups of people can adverse possess property together. But they must use the property in a way that shows an intent not to allow just anyone to use it.
13. Do you think the outcome in *Teiu v. Morgan* was just. Can you think of a more just outcome? Would it be more just to give title to the defendant (as the court did) and also require the defendant to compensate the plaintiff for the fair value of the land the defendant acquired by adverse possession?
14. What if defendants had only built the sewer line, but had not built the fence or placed gravel and bark on the strip. Would that change the outcome?
15. California statutes on adverse possession include the following provision:

Cal. Code Civ. Proc 325. The Time of Commencing Actions for the Recovery of Real Property

(a) For the purpose of constituting an adverse possession by a person claiming title, not founded upon a written instrument, judgment, or decree, land is deemed to have been possessed and occupied in the following cases only:

(1) Where it has been protected by a substantial enclosure.

(2) Where it has been usually cultivated or improved.

(b) In no case shall adverse possession be considered established under the provision of any section of this code, unless it shall be shown that the land has been occupied and claimed for the period of five years continuously, and the party or persons, their predecessors and grantors, have timely paid all state, county, or municipal taxes that have been levied and assessed upon the land for the period of five years during which the land has been occupied and claimed. Payment of those taxes by the party or persons, their predecessors and grantors shall be established by certified records of the county tax collector.

If the property at issue in *Teiu v. Morgan* had been in California, what do you think the outcome would have been? Why? For the purposes of this question, assume that the James Stevens and the defendants paid all taxes that were assessed on Tax Lot 3200, but did not pay any other property taxes. Note also that in California there is no way to pay taxes on part of a parcel.

16. California statutes also include the following provisions:

California Code, Code of Civil Procedure - CCP § 871.1

As used in this chapter, “good faith improver” means:

(a) A person who makes an improvement to land in good faith and under the erroneous belief, because of a mistake of law or fact, that he is the owner of the land.

(b) A successor in interest of a person described in subdivision (a).

California Code, Code of Civil Procedure - CCP § 871.5

When an action or cross-complaint is brought [relating to a good faith improver] the court may ... effect such an adjustment of the rights, equities, and interests of the good faith improver, the owner of the land, and other interested parties (including, but not limited to, lessees, lienholders, and encumbrancers) as is consistent with substantial justice to the parties under the circumstances of the particular case. The relief granted shall protect the owner of the land upon which the improvement was constructed against any pecuniary loss but shall avoid, insofar as possible, enriching him unjustly at the expense of the good faith improver....

Would these statutes be relevant to the dispute in *Teiu v. Morgan*, if the property at issue were in California? If you were the plaintiff, what would you argue under this statute? If you were the defendant, what would you argue under this statute? If you were the law clerk to the judge, what would you recommend the judge do?

17. Suppose that, in *Teiu v. Morgan*, James Stevens build his driveway on the plaintiff's land with full knowledge that he did not own that land, but thought that no one would notice or care. Would that change the outcome? Would it change your view of what the just outcome would be?