

Gideon v. Wainwright / Opinion Analysis

Justice Hugo Black wrote the Majority Opinion of the Court:

**GIDEON v. WAINWRIGHT, CORRECTIONS
DIRECTOR.**

CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA.

No. 155. Argued January 15, 1963.—Decided March 18, 1963.

Charged in a Florida State Court with a noncapital felony, petitioner appeared without funds and without counsel and asked the Court to appoint counsel for him; but this was denied on the ground that the state law permitted appointment of counsel for indigent defendants in capital cases only. Petitioner conducted his own defense about as well as could be expected of a layman; but he was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. Subsequently, he applied to the State Supreme Court for a writ of habeas corpus, on the ground that his conviction violated his rights under the Federal Constitution. The State Supreme Court denied all relief. *Held*: The right of an indigent defendant in a criminal trial to have the assistance of counsel is a fundamental right essential to a fair trial, and petitioner's trial and conviction without the assistance of counsel violated the Fourteenth Amendment. *Betts v. Brady*, 316 U. S. 455, overruled. Pp. 336-345.

Reversed and cause remanded.

writ of habeas corpus is legal term for an order from a higher court asking for all records of a case so they can review it. A person applies (petitions) for a *writ of habeas corpus* when they ask a court to review their case.

Source: Hugo Lafayette Black and Supreme Court of the United States, "U.S. Reports: Gideon v. Wainwright, 372 U.S. 335. 1962," Periodical, <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep372335/>.

Constitutional Provisions

Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

"In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence."

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Reflect

3. Put this part of the opinion in your own words:

4. What is the purpose of this piece of the opinion?

5. Who is the primary audience for this opinion?

Question

6. What do you still wonder about this source?