

SUPREME COURT OF LOUISIANA

State v. Chester

208 So. 3d 338 (La. 2016) · Decided December 16, 2016

SUMMARY

The Louisiana Supreme Court denied Chester’s writ application challenging the denial of post-conviction relief from his first-degree murder conviction and death sentence. The court rejected claims involving ineffective assistance of counsel, prosecutorial misconduct, DNA and blood-spatter evidence, actual innocence, and alleged juror misconduct.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Louisiana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per curiam
JURISDICTION	Louisiana
DECIDED	December 16, 2016
DISPOSITION	writ_denied
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Chester sought review of the Jefferson Parish District Court's dismissal of his claims for state post-conviction relief from a first-degree murder conviction and death sentence.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the district court's post-conviction rulings for legal error while declining to second-guess factual and credibility determinations. Intellectual-disability findings were reviewed deferentially because they are factual findings; ineffective-assistance claims were evaluated under Strickland; and juror-misconduct claims required a showing of a substantial and injurious effect from an outside influence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Louisiana Supreme Court per curiam opinion; precedential.
PARTIES	State of Louisiana v. Teddy Chester

TOPICS

state post-conviction relief post-conviction relief ineffective assistance miranda rights
cruel and unusual punishment

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Chester was entitled to post-conviction relief based on ineffective assistance of trial counsel.
2. Whether the prosecution violated *Brady v. Maryland* by failing to disclose allegedly favorable or impeachment evidence.
3. Whether alleged false testimony, prosecutorial argument, and destruction of evidence warranted post-conviction relief.
4. Whether Chester presented new evidence sufficient to establish a free-standing actual-innocence claim.
5. Whether alleged Bible consultation and jury experimentation constituted reviewable juror misconduct and prejudiced the verdict.
6. Whether Chester established intellectual disability exempting him from execution under *Atkins v. Virginia*.
7. Whether cumulative error required relief.
8. Whether Chester's claims had been fully litigated and whether further state collateral review was barred except under narrow successive-application exceptions.

HOLDINGS

1. Chester was not entitled to relief because he failed to show that counsel's failure to challenge the knowing and intelligent nature of his *Miranda* waivers prejudiced him; the State would have carried its burden of proving a valid waiver under the totality of the circumstances.
2. Chester was not entitled to relief based on counsel's failure to seek admission of the complete letters because the decision was strategic and he failed to establish deficient performance or prejudice.
3. Chester failed to establish ineffective assistance based on *voir dire*, investigation, DNA evidence, or penalty-phase presentation.
4. Chester was not entitled to relief because he failed to show suppression of material favorable evidence, knowing use of perjury, prejudicial penalty-phase argument, or bad-faith destruction of potentially exculpatory evidence.
5. Chester failed to meet Louisiana's demanding standard for a free-standing actual-innocence claim because his new evidence did not undermine the prosecution's entire case or demonstrate that no reasonable juror could have convicted him.
6. The district court erred in categorically excluding evidence concerning a juror's Bible consultation, but Chester was not entitled to relief because he failed to substantiate the allegations or show a substantial and injurious effect on the verdict. The alleged mannequin experiment was not reviewable because Chester did not allege that it introduced evidence not presented at trial.
7. Chester's intellectual-disability claim was untimely and therefore no longer reviewable; alternatively, he failed to prove intellectual disability under the governing three-part standard.

8. Louisiana does not aggregate harmless errors into reversible cumulative error, and Chester was not entitled to relief on that theory.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Moderate mental retardation and low intelligence or illiteracy do not of themselves vitiate the ability to knowingly and intelligently waive constitutional rights and make a free and voluntary confession.” (208 So. 3d at 345)

“new material, noncumulative and conclusive evidence” (208 So. 3d at 350)

“no reasonable juror could have voted to convict with knowledge thereof.” (208 So. 3d at 350)

“It has universally found harmless errors, however numerous, do not aggregate to reach the level of reversible error.” (208 So. 3d at 354)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Chester was convicted of participating in the shooting death of taxi driver John Adams during an armed robbery or attempted armed robbery. Evidence included blood-spatter and DNA evidence, testimony from the Pollard sisters, Chester's letters urging Quince Pollard to alter or withhold testimony, and two custodial statements in which Chester admitted being present in the taxi when Ratcliff shot Adams. Chester later challenged the conviction and death sentence through state post-conviction proceedings, asserting ineffective assistance, prosecutorial misconduct, actual innocence, juror misconduct, and intellectual disability.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Chester was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death in Jefferson Parish. The Louisiana Supreme Court affirmed the conviction and sentence in 1998, and the United States Supreme Court denied certiorari. After years of post-conviction filings, the district court dismissed his substantive claims, rejected his intellectual-disability claim after an Atkins hearing, and summarily dismissed his remaining claims. The Louisiana Supreme Court denied the writ, held that the denial was final, and ordered the district court to record a conforming minute entry.

DISPOSITION

writ_denied

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The district court was ordered to record a minute entry consistent with the Louisiana Supreme Court's per curiam opinion. No substantive remand for further evidentiary proceedings was ordered.

CASES CITED

- State v. Chester, 724 So. 2d 1276 (La. 1998)
- Chester v. Louisiana, 528 U.S. 826 (1999)

- Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)
- State v. Green, 655 So. 2d 272 (La. 1995)
- State v. Brooks, 648 So. 2d 366 (La. 1995)
- Oregon v. Bradshaw, 462 U.S. 1039 (1983)
- Solem v. Stumes, 465 U.S. 638 (1984)
- State v. Brown, 414 So. 2d 689 (La. 1982)
- State v. Holmes, 5 So. 3d 42 (La. 2008)
- State v. Istre, 407 So. 2d 1183 (La. 1981)
- State v. Anderson, 379 So. 2d 735 (La. 1980)
- Ortiz-Sandoval v. Clarke, 323 F.3d 1165 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Kimmelman v. Morrison, 477 U.S. 365 (1986)
- State v. Lee, 181 So. 3d 631 (La. 2015)
- State v. Blank, 192 So. 3d 93 (La. 2016)
- State v. Singer, 45 So. 3d 171 (La. 2010)
- State v. Duke, 724 So. 2d 730 (La. 1998)
- Beech Aircraft Corp. v. Rainey, 488 U.S. 153 (1988)
- Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)
- State v. Clayton, 427 So. 2d 827 (La. 1982)
- Arizona v. Youngblood, 488 U.S. 51 (1988)
- State v. Conway, 816 So. 2d 290 (La. 2002)
- State v. Pierre, 125 So. 3d 403 (La. 2013)
- State v. Ingram, 57 So. 3d 299 (La. 2011)
- State v. Hernandez, 177 So. 3d 342 (La. App. 5 Cir. 2015)
- United States v. Beach, 296 F.2d 153 (4th Cir. 1961)
- State v. Langley, 711 So. 2d 651 (La. 1998)
- Oliver v. Quarterman, 541 F.3d 329 (5th Cir. 2008)
- Fields v. Brown, 503 F.3d 755 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304 (2002)
- State v. Williams, 831 So. 2d 835 (La. 2002)
- Brumfield v. Cain, 808 F.3d 1041 (5th Cir. 2015)
- State v. Dunn, 974 So. 2d 658 (La. 2008)
- Roper v. Simmons, 543 U.S. 551 (2005)
- State v. Tucker, 181 So. 3d 590 (La. 2015)
- State v. Strickland, 683 So. 2d 218 (La. 1996)
- State v. Tart, 672 So. 2d 116 (La. 1996)
- State v. Copeland, 530 So. 2d 526 (La. 1988)
- State v. Graham, 422 So. 2d 123 (La. 1982)

- State v. Sheppard, 350 So. 2d 615 (La. 1977)
- Mullen v. Blackburn, 808 F.2d 1143 (5th Cir. 1987)
- Foster v. State, 639 So. 2d 1263 (Miss. 1994)

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