

SUPREME COURT OF ILLINOIS

People v. Miller

202 Ill. 2d 328 (Ill. 2002) · No. No. 89795 · Decided November 21, 2002

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Illinois held that applying the multiple-murder sentencing statute to a 15-year-old juvenile convicted under a theory of accountability violated the proportionate penalties clause of the Illinois Constitution. The court affirmed the trial court's sentence of 50 years' imprisonment rather than mandatory natural life imprisonment without parole. The court also addressed its jurisdiction to review the State's direct appeal from the trial court's constitutional ruling.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Illinois
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Justice Fitzgerald
JURISDICTION	Illinois
DECIDED	November 21, 2002
DOCKET	No. 89795
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The State directly appealed from the Cook County circuit court's judgment holding the multiple-murder sentencing statute unconstitutional as applied to Miller and imposing a 50-year sentence instead of mandatory natural life imprisonment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Constitutionality of the statute and the circuit court's finding of unconstitutionality were reviewed de novo; the statute was presumed constitutional, and the challenger bore the burden of establishing invalidity.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published Illinois Supreme Court opinion; binding statewide precedent.
PARTIES	People of the State of Illinois v. Leon Miller

TOPICS

- sentencing
- constitutional law
- appellate jurisdiction
- standard of review
- cruel and unusual punishment

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

constitutional law

juvenile sentencing

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Illinois Supreme Court had jurisdiction over the State's direct criminal appeal from the circuit court's finding that the sentencing statute was unconstitutional.
2. Whether mandatory natural-life imprisonment under the multiple-murder sentencing statute was unconstitutional as applied to a 15-year-old juvenile convicted under an accountability theory for acting as a lookout.

HOLDINGS

1. Supreme Court Rule 603 provides an independent basis for the Illinois Supreme Court to review a circuit court's declaration that a statute is unconstitutional in a criminal case, and the court therefore had jurisdiction over the State's direct appeal.
2. The multiple-murder sentencing statute, as applied to Miller—a 15-year-old juvenile convicted under an accountability theory and serving as a lookout—violated the proportionate penalties clause of the Illinois Constitution because mandatory natural-life imprisonment without parole was unconstitutionally disproportionate.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“When these three statutes converge, a court never considers the actual facts of the crime, including the defendant's age at the time of the crime or his or her individual level of culpability.” (at 308)

“Accordingly, we hold that the penalty mandated by the multiple-murder sentencing statute as applied to this defendant is particularly harsh and unconstitutionally disproportionate.” (at 308)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On November 19, 1997, Tommy Jones and Keith Alexander were shot and killed outside a Chicago apartment complex. Miller, who was 15, agreed to act as a lookout after two other participants displayed guns; he never handled a gun and fled once the shooting began. He was convicted of both murders under Illinois's accountability statute and faced mandatory natural-life imprisonment under the multiple-murder sentencing statute.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Miller, a 15-year-old juvenile, was transferred to adult criminal court, tried by a jury, and convicted of two murders under an accountability theory. The circuit court declined to impose the mandatory natural-life sentence, concluding that the statute violated the Illinois proportionate penalties clause and the Eighth Amendment, and imposed a 50-year sentence. The State appealed directly to the Illinois Supreme Court, which exercised jurisdiction under Supreme Court Rule 603 and affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- People v. Truitt, 175 Ill. 2d 148, 151, 676 N.E.2d 665 (1997)
- People v. Wooters, 188 Ill. 2d 500, 504, 722 N.E.2d 1102 (1999)
- People v. Young, 82 Ill. 2d 234, 246-47, 412 N.E.2d 501 (1980)
- People v. Davis, 177 Ill. 2d 495, 501-04, 687 N.E.2d 24 (1997)
- People v. Malchow, 193 Ill. 2d 413, 418, 739 N.E.2d 433 (2000)
- People v. Taylor, 102 Ill. 2d 201, 204-08, 464 N.E.2d 1059 (1984)
- People v. Cooks, 271 Ill. App. 3d 25, 35-42, 648 N.E.2d 190 (1995)
- People v. Wages, 261 Ill. App. 3d 576, 589, 633 N.E.2d 855 (1994)
- People v. Rice, 257 Ill. App. 3d 220, 228-29, 628 N.E.2d 837 (1993)
- People v. Rodriguez, 134 Ill. App. 3d 582, 593, 480 N.E.2d 1147 (1985)
- People v. Hamm, 149 Ill. 2d 201, 219, 595 N.E.2d 540 (1992)
- People v. Gonzales, 25 Ill. 2d 235, 240, 184 N.E.2d 833 (1962)
- People v. Farmer, 165 Ill. 2d 194, 209-10, 650 N.E.2d 1006 (1995)
- People v. Miller, 171 Ill. 2d 330, 333-34, 664 N.E.2d 1021 (1996)
- People v. Steppan, 105 Ill. 2d 310, 320, 473 N.E.2d 1300 (1985)
- People ex rel. Bradley v. Illinois State Reformatory, 148 Ill. 413, 421-23, 36 N.E. 76 (1894)
- Trop v. Dulles, 356 U.S. 86, 101, 78 S. Ct. 590 (1958)
- Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304, 122 S. Ct. 2242 (2002)
- Harmelin v. Michigan, 501 U.S. 957, 1000, 111 S. Ct. 2680 (1991)
- Rummel v. Estelle, 445 U.S. 263, 274-75, 100 S. Ct. 1133 (1980)
- Coker v. Georgia, 433 U.S. 584, 597, 97 S. Ct. 2861 (1977)
- People v. Kolakowski, 319 Ill. App. 3d 200, 217, 745 N.E.2d 62 (2001)
- People v. Godinez, 91 Ill. 2d 47, 54-56, 434 N.E.2d 1121 (1982)
- Thompson v. Oklahoma, 487 U.S. 815, 838, 108 S. Ct. 2687 (1988)