

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

White v. Thornell

White · No. CV-25-08042-PCT-ROS · Decided March 25, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Arizona adopted a magistrate judge’s Report and Recommendation and denied Timothy White’s 28 U.S.C. § 2254 habeas petition with prejudice. The court held that some claims were procedurally defaulted, the Fourth Amendment claims were non-cognizable under *Stone v. Powell*, and the ineffective-assistance claim failed on the merits; it also denied a certificate of appealability.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Arizona
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Roslyn O. Silver
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Arizona
DECIDED	March 25, 2026
DOCKET	CV-25-08042-PCT-ROS
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought federal habeas relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The district court reviewed and adopted the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation because neither party filed objections, denied and dismissed the petition with prejudice, entered judgment for respondents, and denied a certificate of appealability.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), the district court reviews objected-to portions of a magistrate judge's report de novo; when no objections are filed, the court need only review the magistrate judge's legal conclusions de novo and may accept, reject, or modify the recommendations. The court also applied the federal habeas standards governing procedural default, Fourth Amendment cognizability under <i>Stone v. Powell</i> , ineffective assistance under <i>Strickland v. Washington</i> , and certificates of appealability under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2).
PARTIES	Timothy White v. Ryan Thornell, et al.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the claims in Grounds 1(a), 2(b), and 4 were procedurally defaulted and whether White established cause and prejudice or a miscarriage of justice based on actual innocence to excuse the

defaults.

2. Whether the Fourth Amendment claims in Grounds 2(a) and 3 were cognizable in federal habeas proceedings when the state courts had provided an opportunity for full and fair litigation.
3. Whether trial counsel was ineffective for failing to communicate a probation plea offer, including whether counsel's performance was deficient and whether White suffered prejudice.
4. Whether White was entitled to a certificate of appealability.

HOLDINGS

1. Grounds 1(a), 2(b), and 4 were procedurally defaulted because White failed to present them to the state courts in a procedurally appropriate manner, and he did not establish cause and actual prejudice or a miscarriage of justice based on actual innocence to excuse the defaults.
2. Grounds 2(a) and 3 were not cognizable in federal habeas proceedings because the state courts provided White an opportunity for full and fair litigation of his Fourth Amendment claims.
3. Ground 1(b) failed on the merits because White did not establish either deficient performance or prejudice under *Strickland v. Washington*.
4. A certificate of appealability was denied because reasonable jurists would not find the resolution of White's claims debatable and the issues did not warrant encouragement to proceed further.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

White was convicted in Arizona state court and pursued direct appeals and state post-conviction relief. In his federal petition, he asserted ineffective assistance of trial counsel, judicial misconduct, Fourth Amendment violations arising from a vehicle search, and double-jeopardy-related claims. The state-court record reflected that counsel attempted to contact White before trial, White did not maintain contact with counsel, and White later expressed opposition to probation and a desire for a retrial.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

White filed a pro se § 2254 petition on February 27, 2025, challenging his state criminal proceedings, convictions, and post-conviction proceedings. Respondents answered, arguing that several grounds were procedurally defaulted, two Fourth Amendment grounds were non-cognizable under *Stone v. Powell*, and one ineffective-assistance claim failed on the merits. Magistrate Judge Deborah M. Fine recommended denial and dismissal with prejudice and denial of a certificate of appealability; the district court adopted the R&R as its opinion without objections.

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 7 FOR THE DISTRICT OF
ARIZONA 8 9 Timothy White, No. CV-25-08042-PCT-ROS 10 Petitioner, ORDER 11 v. 12 Ryan
Thornell, et al., 13 Respondents. 14 15 Before the Court is Magistrate Judge Deborah M. Fine's
Report and 16 Recommendation ("R&R") recommending Petitioner's pro se Petition Under 28

U.S.C. § 17 2254 for a Writ of Habeas Corpus (“Petition”) be denied and dismissed with prejudice.

18 (Doc. 9.) Neither party filed objections to the R&R. The Court will accept and adopt the 19 R&R as follows. 20 I. BACKGROUND 21 Magistrate Judge Fine recounted the factual and procedural background of 22 Petitioner Timothy White’s trial, appeals, and post-conviction relief (“PCR”) proceedings 23 in state court. (Doc. 13 at 2–13).

As neither party objects to this portion of the R&R, the 24 Court hereby accepts and adopts it. See *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 152 (1989) (“There 25 is no indication that Congress... intended [the Federal Magistrates Act, 28 U.S.C. § 26 636(b)(1)(C)] to require a district judge to review a magistrate’s report to which no 27 objections are filed.”); see also *Fed.*

R. Civ. P. 72(b)(3) (“The district judge must determine 28 de novo any part of the magistrate judge’s disposition that has been properly objected to.”). 1 Petitioner filed his pro se Petition (Doc. 1) on February 27, 2025, seeking 2 exoneration and dismissal of his criminal case by raising several grounds for relief: 3 In Ground 1(a), Petitioner asserts that his trial counsel was ineffective for failing to “object to a double jeopardy violation.” In Ground 1(b), Petitioner 4 asserts that his trial counsel was ineffective for failing to communicate a plea agreement to Petitioner.

In Ground 2(a), Petitioner asserts that the trial judge 5 presiding over his case committed judicial misconduct by denying a motion to suppress evidence. In Ground 2(b), Petitioner asserts that the trial judge 6 committed misconduct “by allowing the double je[o]opardy violation in his court room.” In Ground 3, Petitioner asserts that his Fourth Amendment 7 rights were violated by a law enforcement officer “not checking & attending to the temp[orary] tag in the rear window,” which initiated an 8 unconstitutional search of the vehicle.

In Ground 4, Petitioner alleges that his protection against double jeopardy was violated by “the ineffective 9 assistance of coun[sel] by not offering me a plea agreement.” 10 (Doc. 9 at 8.) 11 Respondents filed an Answer on April 30, 2025, conceding that the Petition was 12 timely but arguing that “Petition Grounds 1(a), 2(b), and 4 are procedurally defaulted 13 without excuse; Grounds 2(a) and 3 are non-cognizable in federal habeas proceedings; and 14 Ground 1(b) fails on the merits.” (Id.)

Respondents mailed their Answer to Petitioner at his 15 address of record, (Doc. 8 at 22), and Petitioner has not replied as of the date of this Order. 16 On June 29, 2025, Magistrate Judge Fine issued an R&R recommending the Petition 17 be denied and dismissed with prejudice and that a certificate of appealability be denied. 18 (Doc. 9.) Neither party filed objections to the R&R.

19 II. LEGAL STANDARD 20 A district judge “may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or 21 recommendations made by the magistrate judge.” 28 U.S.C. § 636(b). The district court 22 must review de novo the portions to which an objection is made. *Id.* When no

objection is made, the district court need only review de novo a magistrate judge's conclusions of law.

See *Robbins v. Carey*, 481 F.3d 1143, 1147 (9th Cir. 2007) (citing *Turner v. Duncan*, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)).

III. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Procedural Default

In the R&R, the Magistrate Judge found Grounds 1(a), 2(b), and 4 of the Petition are procedurally defaulted. "Petitioner's Ground 1(a) claim is subject to an express procedural bar" because he "failed to present his Ground 1(a) claim to the state courts in a procedurally appropriate manner in his PCR proceedings." (Doc.

9 at 15–16.) Similarly, Ground 2(b) is procedurally defaulted because "Petitioner did not raise his Ground 2(b) claim in his supplemental brief in his direct appeal of his convictions and sentences" nor "in his PCR petition in the trial court." (Id. at 16.) Lastly, Ground 4 is procedurally defaulted because "Petitioner did not raise his Ground 4... claim in his PCR petition in the trial court." (Id. at 17.)

The Magistrate Judge further found that "Petitioner had not met his burden" of "establishing either (1) both cause and actual prejudice, or (2) a miscarriage of justice/actual innocence" to excuse the procedural defaults of Grounds 1(a), 2(b), and 4. (Id. at 17–19.)

B. Non-Cognizability

The Magistrate Judge found Petitioner's Fourth Amendment claims under Grounds 2(a) and 3 are not cognizable under *Stone v. Powell*, 428 U.S. 465, 494–95 (1976) ("[W]here the State has provided an opportunity for full and fair litigation of a Fourth Amendment claim, a state prisoner may not be granted federal habeas corpus relief on the ground that evidence obtained in an unconstitutional search or seizure was introduced at his trial.").

Specifically, Petitioner had failed to demonstrate "that he was not afforded an adequate hearing on his Fourth Amendment claims asserted in Grounds 2(a) and 3" by the state court, which precludes federal habeas corpus relief on these claims. (Doc. 9 at 19–22.)

C. Merits

The Magistrate Judge found that Ground 1(b) for ineffective assistance of counsel fails on the merits.

To prevail on this claim, Petitioner had to show that his trial counsel's performance (1) was objectively deficient, and (2) caused Petitioner prejudice. *Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668, 687 (1984). The Magistrate Judge found Ground 1(b) fails under both *Strickland* prongs.

First, Petitioner's counsel was not deficient in failing to communicate a plea offer stipulating to probation during the week before Petitioner's trial because "[t]he [trial] record is clear that Petitioner did not maintain contact with trial counsel and that trial counsel made significant efforts to contact Petitioner prior to trial and opposed to trying Petitioner in absentia." (Doc.

9 at 26–27.) Second, Petitioner failed to 3 establish prejudice from his counsel’s failure to communicate the plea offer: 4 Petitioner has not shown that if he had been informed of the plea offer of probation, there is a “reasonable probability” that he would have accepted 5 the plea offer. At sentencing, Petitioner explicitly stated, “I don’t want to do no probation, be put in no homes or anything, trying to make money off me 6 saying stupid stuff.” Petitioner also expressed his desire to appeal his convictions so that he could proceed to retrial.

These statements belie 7 Petitioner’s current position that he would have accepted a plea offer of probation. 8 9 (Id. at 28) (citations omitted). 10 D. Certificate of Appealability 11 Lastly, the Magistrate Judge recommended that a certificate of appealability be 12 denied.

To obtain a certificate of appealability, a petitioner must make “a substantial 13 showing of the denial of a constitutional right.” 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). This standard is 14 satisfied by showing either (1) “jurists of reason could disagree with the district court’s 15 resolution of [the] constitutional claims” or (2) “jurists could conclude the issues presented 16 are adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.” *Miller-El v. Cockrell*, 537 U.S. 17 322, 327 (2003) (citing *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000)).

If a habeas claim is 18 dismissed on procedural grounds, a petitioner must show that jurists of reason would find 19 it debatable (1) “whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional 20 right,” and (2) “whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling.” *Slack*, 529 21 U.S. at 484. 22 The Magistrate Judge reasoned that a certificate of appealability should be denied 23 because dismissal of Petitioner’s constitutional claims is warranted “by a plain procedural 24 bar and reasonable jurists would not find the procedural ruling debatable, because 25 Petitioner has not made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right, and 26 because jurists of reason would not find the Court’s rejection on constitutional grounds of 27 Petitioner’s claims to be debatable.” (Doc.

9 at 28–29.) 28 1 IV. CONCLUSION 2 As explained in the R&R, each of Plaintiff’s grounds for habeas relief fails because || they are procedurally defaulted without excuse, non-cognizable, or fail on the merits. The Court finds the R&R is thorough and well-reasoned, without any clear error of law or fact. 5 || See *United States v. Remsing*, 874 F.2d 614, 617-18 (9th Cir.

1989). Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), the Court accepts and adopts the R&R as the opinion of the Court. For the 7 || reasons stated in the R&R, the Court denies and dismisses the Petition with prejudice and 8 || denies issuance of a certificate of appealability. 9 Accordingly, 10 IT IS ORDERED the Report and Recommendation (Doc. 9) is adopted as the 11 || opinion of the Court.

12 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED the Petition Under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 for a Writ of 13 || Habeas Corpus (Doc. 1) is DENIED and DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE. The Clerk of Court is directed to enter judgment in favor of Respondents and close this case. 15 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED

pursuant to Rule 11(a) of the Rules Governing 16]] § 2254 Cases, a certificate of appealability is DENIED because reasonable jurists would 17 || not find the Court's resolution of Petitioner's claims debatable nor are the issues presented 18 || adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.

19 Dated this 25th day of March, 2026. 20 fo - 22 Honorable Ros yn ©. Silver 3 Senior United States District Judge 24 25 26 27 28 _5-