

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Shawn Burton v. Superintendent, SCI Forest, et al.

Civil Action No. 2:22-cv-905 · No. 2:22-cv-905 · Decided May 29, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania addresses Shawn Burton’s counseled amended petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The court dismisses the claims with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(4) and denies a certificate of appealability. The opinion discusses Burton’s first-degree murder conviction, successive collateral proceedings, and claims involving alleged new evidence, recantations, Brady, and Napue violations.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Patricia L. Dodge
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	May 29, 2026
DOCKET	2:22-cv-905
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	State prisoner Shawn Burton filed a counseled amended petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 after obtaining authorization from the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit to file a second or successive petition. He asserted Napue-based due process claims concerning allegedly false testimony and a freestanding actual-innocence claim. The district court dismissed all claims with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(4) and denied a certificate of appealability.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(4), the district court independently determines whether each claim in an authorized second or successive petition satisfies § 2244(b). State-court factual findings, including credibility determinations, are presumed correct under 28 U.S.C. § 2254(e)(1), subject to rebuttal by clear and convincing evidence. To satisfy § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii), the petitioner must show by clear and convincing evidence that, viewing the facts in light of the evidence as

	a whole, no reasonable factfinder would have found him guilty but for constitutional error.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Shawn Burton v. Superintendent, SCI Forest, et al.

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Burton's Napue-based claims alleging that the prosecution presented or failed to correct false trial testimony satisfied 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii).
2. Whether Burton's proposed due process theory—that the prosecution violated due process by failing to correct allegedly false testimony learned of during post-conviction proceedings—was barred as a novel, nonretroactive rule under *Teague v. Lane*.
3. Whether Burton's freestanding actual-innocence claim was cognizable in federal habeas and could satisfy § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii).
4. Whether the state PCRA court's findings that Goodwine's confessions and O'Toole's alleged admission were unreliable were rebutted by clear and convincing evidence.
5. Whether Burton was entitled to a certificate of appealability.

HOLDINGS

1. The claims are barred by *Teague* because the proposed due process rule was not dictated by precedent when Burton's conviction became final and would constitute a novel procedural rule applied retroactively on collateral review.
2. Burton's freestanding actual-innocence claim was not sufficiently grounded in established constitutional precedent to be cognizable on federal habeas review and was barred by *Teague*.
3. The remaining Napue claims did not satisfy § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii) because Burton failed to establish by clear and convincing evidence that, viewing the evidence as a whole, no reasonable factfinder would have found him guilty but for the alleged constitutional error.
4. A certificate of appealability was denied because reasonable jurists would not debate the dismissal of Burton's claims or the procedural basis for dismissal.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Unless both the procedural and substantive requirements of § 2244 are met, the District Court lacks authority to consider the merits of the petition.” (Discussion, Part II.A)

“Thus, in accordance with Marcy, this Court must conclude that the Napue claims Burton asserts in Claims I, II and III under his second scenario (his proposed rule that the right to due process has been violated because the prosecution allegedly learned during the PCRA proceeding that he was convicted on the basis of false evidence but has “failed to correct the false evidence”) are barred by Teague.” (Discussion, Part II.B)

“Based on the above, the Court will dismiss each claim in the Amended Petition because Burton has failed to satisfy the requirements of § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii).” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In 1993, Allegheny County Jail inmate Seth Floyd was found dead in his cell with a shoelace around his neck, and his death was determined to be homicide by asphyxiation. Trial witnesses testified that Burton and Melvin Goodwine were in Floyd's cell and were physically restraining him, and another witness testified that Burton made statements suggesting advance knowledge of the killing. Burton was convicted of first-degree murder and conspiracy and sentenced to life imprisonment. His later collateral claims relied principally on Goodwine's alleged confessions and alleged recantations or admissions by witnesses Marvin Harper and Brian O'Toole.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Burton was convicted in Pennsylvania state court of first-degree murder and criminal conspiracy and sentenced to life imprisonment. His direct appeal and first federal habeas petition were unsuccessful. After later developing claims based on alleged confessions by Melvin Goodwine and alleged recantations or admissions by trial witnesses, Burton pursued state PCRA relief; the Pennsylvania Superior Court ultimately affirmed denial of relief. The Third Circuit authorized a second or successive federal habeas petition, after which Burton filed the operative amended petition. The district court independently applied § 2244(b)(2)(B)(ii), concluded that the claims did not satisfy the statutory standard, and dismissed them.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Caspari v. Bohlen, 510 U.S. 383 (1994)
- Griffith v. Kentucky, 479 U.S. 314 (1987)
- Commonwealth v. Ali, 86 A.3d 173 (Pa. 2014)
- Commonwealth v. Burton, 2019 WL 2244758 (Pa. Super. Ct. May 24, 2019)
- Strickler v. Greene, 527 U.S. 263 (1999)
- Napue v. Illinois, 360 U.S. 264 (1959)
- Glossip v. Oklahoma, 145 S. Ct. 612 (2025)
- United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97 (1976)

- Albrecht v. Horn, 485 F.3d 103 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Estelle v. McGuire, 502 U.S. 62 (1991)
- Vickers v. Sup't Graterford SCI, 858 F.3d 841 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Bell v. Cone, 535 U.S. 685 (2002)
- Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 362 (2000)
- Harrington v. Richter, 562 U.S. 86 (2011)
- Burton v. Stewart, 549 U.S. 147 (2007)
- Benchoff v. Colleran, 404 F.3d 812 (3d Cir. 2005)
- In re Hoffner, 870 F.3d 301 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Goldblum v. Klem, 510 F.3d 204 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Jones v. Hendrix, 599 U.S. 465 (2023)
- McQuiggin v. Perkins, 569 U.S. 383 (2013)
- Schlup v. Delo, 513 U.S. 298 (1995)
- In re Dailey, 949 F.3d 553 (11th Cir. 2020)
- Gimenez v. Ochoa, 821 F.3d 1136 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Case v. Hatch, 731 F.3d 1015 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288 (1989)
- Edwards v. Vannoy, Edwards v. Vannoy, 593 U.S. 255 (2021)
- Marcy v. Superintendent Phoenix, 110 F.4th 210 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Herrera v. Collins, 506 U.S. 390 (1993)
- Dist. Attorney's Off. for Third Jud. Dist. v. Osborne, 557 U.S. 52 (2009)
- Lee v. Glunt, 667 F.3d 397 (3d Cir. 2012)
- Lee v. Houtzdale SCI, 798 F.3d 159 (3d Cir. 2015)
- Lee v. Tennis, 2010 WL 3812160 (M.D. Pa. 2010)
- Fielder v. Varner, 379 F.3d 113 (3d Cir. 2004)
- House v. Bell, 547 U.S. 518 (2006)
- Munchinski v. Wilson, 694 F.3d 308 (3d Cir. 2012)
- United States v. MacDonald, 641 F.3d 596 (4th Cir. 2011)
- Wilcott v. Wilson, 2010 WL 582367 (W.D. Pa. Feb. 15, 2010)
- Shinn v. Ramirez, 596 U.S. 366 (2022)
- Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 420 (2000)
- Williams v. Woodford, 384 F.3d 567 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Boyko v. Parke, 259 F.3d 781 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Cristin v. Brennan, 281 F.3d 404 (3d Cir. 2002)
- Williams v. Sup't Mahanoy SCI, 45 F.4th 713 (3d Cir. 2022)
- Schriro v. Landrigan, 550 U.S. 465 (2007)
- Tyler v. Cain, 533 U.S. 656 (2001)

- Green, 610 F. Supp. 3d 711 (W.D. Pa. 2022)

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