

OHIO COURT OF APPEALS, FIRST APPELLATE DISTRICT, HAMILTON
COUNTY

State v. Harris

2025-Ohio-5438 · No. C-240539 · Decided December 5, 2025

SUMMARY

The Ohio First District Court of Appeals reviewed Christopher Harris's convictions for aggravated murder and having weapons while under disability arising from a shooting. The court rejected Harris's challenges concerning self-defense, sufficiency and manifest weight of the evidence, voir dire, prosecutorial misconduct, judicial bias, jury instructions, and the constitutionality of the weapons-under-disability statute. It affirmed the convictions, reversed the sentences in part, and remanded for resentencing.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Ohio Court of Appeals, First Appellate District, Hamilton County
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kinsley, Presiding Judge; Nestor, Judge; Moore, Judge
JURISDICTION	Ohio Court of Appeals, First Appellate District, Hamilton County
DECIDED	December 5, 2025
DOCKET	C-240539
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Christopher Harris appealed his convictions and sentence following a jury trial on aggravated murder and felony murder charges and a bench trial on firearm specifications and having weapons while under disability. The court affirmed the convictions, reversed portions of the sentence, and remanded for limited resentencing.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Self-defense was reviewed under manifest-weight principles. Sufficiency was reviewed by whether, viewing the evidence most favorably to the prosecution, any rational trier of fact could find the essential elements beyond a reasonable doubt. Voir-dire restrictions, jury instructions, judicial-bias-related mistrial and new-trial rulings, and prosecutorial-misconduct claims involving objected-to conduct were reviewed for abuse of discretion or, where applicable, prejudice. Unobjected-to prosecutorial-misconduct claims were reviewed for plain error. Felony sentencing was reviewed under R.C. 2953.08(G)(2)

	for clear and convincing support in the record and conformity with law.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Christopher Harris v. State of Ohio

TOPICS

criminal procedure self defense jury selection prosecutorial misconduct sentencing

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law criminal procedure appellate procedure sentencing constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the State disproved Harris's claim of self-defense beyond a reasonable doubt under the manifest-weight standard.
2. Whether sufficient and manifest-weight evidence established prior calculation and design for aggravated murder.
3. Whether the trial court improperly restricted voir dire concerning racial bias or improperly denied a challenge for cause to a prospective juror.
4. Whether the prosecutor committed misconduct during closing argument.
5. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by instructing the jury on defense of property.
6. Whether the trial court's conduct demonstrated judicial bias requiring a mistrial, new trial, or reversal.
7. Whether cumulative error deprived Harris of a fair trial.
8. Whether the weapons-under-disability charge should have been dismissed on Second Amendment grounds without a hearing.
9. Whether the trial court erred in imposing consecutive sentences without including the required findings in the judgment entry, failing to calculate jail-time credit, and ordering forfeiture of the firearm.

HOLDINGS

1. The State disproved at least one element of Harris's deadly-force self-defense claim, and the jury did not clearly lose its way in rejecting self-defense.
2. Sufficient evidence supported the aggravated-murder element of prior calculation and design, and the conviction was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.
3. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by redirecting defense counsel away from a lecture about race because it did not entirely preclude questions concerning racial bias and counsel abandoned the subject rather than asking permitted questions.
4. Harris could not establish prejudicial error from denial of his challenge for cause because he did not use all of his peremptory challenges, and the challenged juror stated that he could follow the law and remain

impartial.

5. The prosecutor's closing arguments did not deprive Harris of a fair trial or constitute reversible plain error.
6. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by instructing the jury that lethal force may not be used solely to defend property.
7. The record did not establish judicial bias or a due-process violation requiring a mistrial or new trial.
8. The court rejected Harris's claim that the weapons-under-disability charge was dismissed without a hearing because the record reflected that a hearing occurred and contained no transcript showing otherwise.
9. The trial court erred by failing to include in the sentencing entry the consecutive-sentence findings it had announced orally; the omission could be corrected by a nunc pro tunc entry on remand.
10. The trial court erred by failing to calculate and include Harris's jail-time credit in the sentencing entry, requiring a limited remand for resentencing.
11. Harris lacked standing to challenge forfeiture of the firearm because he denied owning it and testified that it belonged to his girlfriend.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The elements of a self-defense claim in a deadly force case are (1) the defendant was not at fault in creating the situation giving rise to the affray, (2) the defendant had a bona fide belief that he was in imminent danger of death or great bodily harm and his only means of escape was in the use of similar force, and (3) the defendant did not violate any duty to retreat.” (¶ 19)

“The presence or absence of prior calculation and design is necessarily a fact-intensive inquiry.” (¶ 30)

“Nothing in our opinion should be read to permit trial courts to blanketly exclude implicit and explicit bias as valid lines of inquiry in voir dire.” (¶ 50)

“The doctrine of cumulative error allows a conviction to be reversed if the cumulative effect of errors, deemed separately harmless, deprived the defendant of his right to a fair trial.” (¶ 88)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

After returning home early on January 1, 2023, Harris saw C.W. near a Cadillac and suspected that C.W. was tampering with or breaking into vehicles. Harris initially remained near his apartment, but then retrieved his girlfriend's loaded pistol, left the building, and approached C.W. A surveillance video showed Harris pointing what appeared to be a firearm at C.W. before both men fired multiple rounds; C.W. died from his injuries and Harris survived after extensive medical treatment. Harris claimed self-defense, while the State argued that he initiated the confrontation and acted with prior calculation and design.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

A Hamilton County grand jury indicted Harris on January 25, 2023, for aggravated murder, felony murder, and having weapons while under disability, with firearm specifications. The trial court denied Harris's constitutional

motion to dismiss the weapons charge, a jury found him guilty on the homicide counts, and the court found him guilty on the specifications and weapons-under-disability count. After merging counts and specifications, the trial court imposed an aggregate sentence of 90 months consecutive to life imprisonment with parole eligibility after 20 years, ordered restitution, and forfeited the firearm. On appeal, the court rejected challenges to the convictions but found that the sentencing entry omitted required consecutive-sentence findings and jail-time credit.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remand for limited resentencing. The trial court must correct the sentencing entry to include the consecutive-sentence findings announced in open court, calculate and state Harris's jail-time credit in open court, and incorporate that credit into the sentencing entry. The convictions remain affirmed.

CASES CITED

- State v. Messenger, 2022-Ohio-4562
- State v. Yeban, 2024-Ohio-2545
- State v. Thompson, 78 Ohio St.3d 380 (1997)
- State v. Glover, 2019-Ohio-5211
- Barberton v. Jenney, 2010-Ohio-2420
- State v. Martin, 20 Ohio App.3d 172 (1st Dist. 1983)
- State v. Barnes, 94 Ohio St.3d 21 (2002)
- State v. Smith, 2020-Ohio-4976
- State v. Mitchell, 2023-Ohio-2604
- State v. Turner, 2007-Ohio-1346
- State v. Robbins, 58 Ohio St.2d 74 (1979)
- State v. Nichols, 2025-Ohio-1515
- State v. Elam, 2022-Ohio-1895
- State v. Rose, 2024-Ohio-5689
- State v. Walker, 2021-Ohio-2037
- State v. Warth, 2023-Ohio-3641
- State v. Sekic, 2011-Ohio-3978
- State v. Gasper, 2023-Ohio-1500
- State v. Jenks, 61 Ohio St.3d 259 (1991)
- State v. Powell, 2020-Ohio-4283
- State v. Sipple, 2021-Ohio-1319
- State v. Walker, 2016-Ohio-8295

- State v. Cotton, 56 Ohio St.2d 8 (1978)
- State v. Maxwell, 2014-Ohio-1019
- State v. Taylor, 78 Ohio St.3d 15 (1997)
- State v. Fears, 86 Ohio St.3d 329 (1999)
- State v. Nicholson, 2024-Ohio-604
- State v. Jackson, 2005-Ohio-5981
- Morgan v. Illinois, 504 U.S. 719 (1992)
- Krupp v. Poor, 24 Ohio St.2d 123 (1970)
- Pavilonis v. Valentine, 120 Ohio St. 154 (1929)
- State v. Ford, 2019-Ohio-4539
- State v. LaMar, 2002-Ohio-2128
- State v. Were, 2008-Ohio-2762
- State v. Lorraine, 66 Ohio St.3d 414 (1993)
- State v. Lattimore, 2002 Ohio App. LEXIS 731 (1st Dist. Feb. 22, 2002)
- State v. Jones, 20 Ohio App.3d 331 (1st Dist. 1984)
- State v. Belmon, 2025-Ohio-4400
- State v. Rodgers, 2008-Ohio-2757
- Gomez v. United States, 490 U.S. 858 (1989)
- State v. Hale, 2008-Ohio-3426
- State v. Wilson, 2012-Ohio-3098
- State v. Carter, 21 Ohio St.2d 212 (1970)
- State v. Depew, 38 Ohio St.3d 275 (1988)
- Wainwright v. Witt, 469 U.S. 412 (1985)
- State v. Knuff, 2024-Ohio-902
- State v. Madison, 2020-Ohio-3735
- State v. Smith, 2025-Ohio-3131
- State v. Carter, 2017-Ohio-1328
- State v. Lang, 2011-Ohio-4215
- State v. Shelton, 2023-Ohio-2458
- Smith v. Phillips, 455 U.S. 209 (1982)
- State v. Grimes, 2005-Ohio-203
- State v. Smith, 14 Ohio St.3d 13 (1984)
- John F. Bushelman Constr. v. Glacid Group, 1996 Ohio App. LEXIS 2624 (1st Dist. June 26, 1996)
- State v. Richey, 64 Ohio St.3d 353 (1992)
- State v. Lott, 51 Ohio St.3d 160 (1990)
- State v. Stephens, 24 Ohio St.2d 76 (1970)
- State v. Frazier, 73 Ohio St.3d 323 (1995)

- State v. Martin, 21 Ohio St.3d 91 (1986)
- State v. Crump, 2021-Ohio-2574
- State v. Ishmail, 54 Ohio St.2d 402 (1978)
- State v. Houston, 2020-Ohio-5421
- Johnson v. Abdullah, 2021-Ohio-3304
- State v. Johnson, 2019-Ohio-4422
- State v. Jones, 2024-Ohio-5896
- State v. Loudermilk, 2017-Ohio-7378
- State v. Johnson, 140 Ohio App.3d 385 (1st Dist. 2000)
- State ex rel. Pratt v. Weygandt, 164 Ohio St. 463 (1956)
- State v. Smith, 2024-Ohio-2187
- State v. Sharp, 2020-Ohio-3497
- State v. Terry, 2025-Ohio-1195
- State v. Escobar, 2021-Ohio-4001
- Liteky v. United States, 510 U.S. 540 (1994)
- State v. Railey, 2024-Ohio-5502
- State v. Johnson, 2019-Ohio-3877
- State v. Ralls, 2022-Ohio-2110
- State v. Brunson, 2022-Ohio-4299
- State v. Bonnell, 2014-Ohio-3177
- State v. Brooke, 2007-Ohio-1533
- State v. Morris, 2023-Ohio-4622
- State v. McDonald, 2015-Ohio-1911
- State v. Merz, 2023-Ohio-582
- State v. Bowden, 2015-Ohio-3740
- State v. Thompson, 2025-Ohio-2168
- In re 1995 Mercedes C280, 2006-Ohio-1565
- State v. Langston, 2012-Ohio-6249