

SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA

Dwight T. Eaglin v. State of Florida; Dwight T. Eaglin v. Julie L. Jones, etc.

176 So. 3d 900 (Fla. 2015) · No. Nos. SC12-1760 and SC13-1785 · Decided June 25, 2015

SUMMARY

The Florida Supreme Court affirmed the denial of Dwight T. Eaglin’s initial motion for postconviction relief and denied his petition for a writ of habeas corpus. Eaglin, who was sentenced to death for the murders of a correctional officer and an inmate during an attempted prison escape, alleged ineffective assistance of counsel concerning penalty-phase mitigation, his competency and waiver of mitigation, and suppression of inculpatory statements. The court held that the claims did not warrant relief.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Florida
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per Curiam; Labarga, C.J.; Pariente, J.; Lewis, J.; Quince, J.; Canady, J.; Polston, J.; Perry, J.
JURISDICTION	Florida
DECIDED	June 25, 2015
DOCKET	Nos. SC12-1760 and SC13-1785
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from the denial of an initial motion for postconviction relief under Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.851, consolidated with an original petition for a writ of habeas corpus alleging ineffective assistance of appellate counsel.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court deferred to the postconviction court's factual findings when supported by competent, substantial evidence and reviewed de novo the ultimate conclusions on the deficiency and prejudice prongs of ineffective-assistance claims. Claims conclusively refuted by the record were subject to summary denial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published precedential opinion
PARTIES	Dwight T. Eaglin v. State of Florida, Julie L. Jones, etc.

TOPICS

state post-conviction relief

habeas corpus

ineffective assistance

sentencing

miranda rights

PRACTICE AREAS

capital postconviction litigation

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death penalty

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether trial counsel were ineffective during the penalty phase by inadequately advising Eaglin regarding his limited waiver of background and mental-health mitigation and by failing to investigate and present additional mitigation.
2. Whether trial counsel were ineffective during the guilt phase for failing to argue that Eaglin's alleged bipolar manic episode prevented him from knowingly and voluntarily waiving his Miranda rights.
3. Whether the postconviction court improperly summarily denied claims alleging that the State used inconsistent theories against Eaglin and his codefendant and withheld exculpatory evidence in violation of Brady v. Maryland.
4. Whether appellate counsel were ineffective for failing to raise on direct appeal an alleged conflict arising from Dr. Harry Krop's later appointment as a competency expert for codefendant Michael Jones.

HOLDINGS

1. Eaglin failed to establish ineffective assistance of penalty-phase counsel. The challenge to the adequacy of the Koon colloquy was procedurally barred because it should have been raised on direct appeal; Koon did not apply because Eaglin did not waive all penalty-phase mitigation; and the alleged failures to investigate, advise, or present additional background and mental-health mitigation did not establish prejudice.
2. Eaglin failed to establish that trial counsel were deficient in litigating the motions to suppress or that an argument based on a bipolar manic episode would have resulted in suppression of his statements.
3. The postconviction court properly summarily denied Eaglin's claim that the State used inconsistent and irreconcilable theories in prosecuting Eaglin and codefendant Stephen Smith.
4. The postconviction court properly summarily denied Eaglin's claim that the State withheld exculpatory evidence concerning codefendant Michael Jones's proffer and later plea agreement.
5. Appellate counsel was not ineffective for failing to raise on direct appeal an alleged conflict of interest arising from Dr. Krop's later appointment as a competency expert for codefendant Jones.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“First, the claimant must identify particular acts or omissions of the lawyer that are shown to be outside the broad range of reasonably competent performance under prevailing professional standards. Second, the clear, substantial deficiency shown must further be demonstrated to have so affected the fairness and reliability of the proceeding that confidence in the outcome is undermined.” (176 So. 3d at 9-10)

“Even if counsel had presented testimony during the penalty phase that shed light on Eaglin’s abusive childhood, his dysfunctional family, and that he suffered from mental health disorders, our confidence in the

outcome of the penalty phase would not be undermined when viewed in the context of the penalty phase evidence and the mitigators and aggravators found by the trial court.” (176 So. 3d at 16-17)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Eaglin, while serving a life sentence for a prior murder at Charlotte Correctional Institution, participated in an escape attempt during which correctional officer Darla K. Lathrem and inmate Charles Fuston were fatally beaten with a hammer. Evidence included inmate testimony concerning Eaglin's escape plans and threats, his admissions after the incident, and DNA evidence linking the victims to his clothing and boot. During the penalty phase, counsel presented prison-negligence mitigation rather than background and mental-health mitigation, and the trial court found multiple aggravating circumstances, including a prior violent felony, commission while under a sentence of imprisonment, and the cold, calculated, and premeditated aggravator.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Eaglin was convicted of two first-degree murders and sentenced to death. The Supreme Court of Florida affirmed the convictions and sentences on direct appeal. The postconviction court denied Eaglin's amended Rule 3.851 motion after holding an evidentiary hearing on several claims and summarily denying others. Eaglin appealed that denial and simultaneously sought habeas corpus relief in the Supreme Court of Florida, which affirmed and denied the petition.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Eaglin v. State, 19 So. 3d 935, 939-50 (Fla. 2009)
- Spencer v. State, 615 So. 2d 688 (Fla. 1993)
- Huff v. State, 622 So. 2d 982 (Fla. 1993)
- Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984)
- Schoenwetter v. State, 46 So. 3d 535, 546 (Fla. 2010)
- Maxwell v. Wainwright, 490 So. 2d 927, 932 (Fla. 1986)
- Hurst v. State, 18 So. 3d 975, 1013 (Fla. 2009)
- Porter v. McCollum, 558 U.S. 30, 41, 44 (2009)
- Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 362, 397-98 (2000)
- Everett v. State, 54 So. 3d 464, 472 (Fla. 2010)
- Reed v. State, 875 So. 2d 415, 421-22 (Fla. 2004)
- Stephens v. State, 748 So. 2d 1028, 1033 (Fla. 1999)
- Koon v. Dugger, 619 So. 2d 246 (Fla. 1993)
- Spann v. State, 857 So. 2d 845, 853-54 (Fla. 2003)
- Boyd v. State, 910 So. 2d 167, 188 (Fla. 2005)

- Silvia v. State, 60 So. 3d 959, 974 (Fla. 2011)
- Asay v. State, 769 So. 2d 974, 986 (Fla. 2000)
- Jones v. State, 732 So. 2d 313 (Fla. 1999)
- Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)
- Johnson v. State, 135 So. 3d 1002, 1027-28 (Fla. 2014)
- Walton v. State, 847 So. 2d 438, 445-46 (Fla. 2003)
- Jennings v. State, 123 So. 3d 1101, 1124 (Fla. 2013)

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