

SOUTH DAKOTA SUPREME COURT

State v. Rogers

2016 S.D. 83 (2016) · No. #27817-a-GAS · Decided November 22, 2016

SUMMARY

The South Dakota Supreme Court affirmed James Lewis Rogers Jr.'s conviction for first-degree murder and sentence of life imprisonment without parole. The court held that exigent circumstances justified law enforcement's warrantless entry into Rogers's apartment to determine whether the victim needed immediate medical assistance. It also upheld admission of Rogers's pre-Miranda statements because the officers' questions were general on-the-scene inquiries and, alternatively, any error was harmless.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	South Dakota Supreme Court
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Severson; Gilbertson; Kern; Wilbur; Zinter
JURISDICTION	South Dakota
DECIDED	November 22, 2016
DOCKET	#27817-a-GAS
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from denial of motion to suppress evidence and statements
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo for constitutional questions; clearly erroneous for factual findings
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	James Lewis Rogers, Jr. v. State of South Dakota

TOPICS

- fourth amendment
- search and seizure
- exclusionary rule
- miranda rights
- fifth amendment
- probable cause
- warrant requirement
- harmless error
- criminal procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- criminal law
- constitutional law
- evidence

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether exigent circumstances justified the warrantless entry and search of Rogers' apartment
2. Whether Rogers' statements to police before Miranda warnings should be suppressed

HOLDINGS

1. Exigent circumstances existed because officers reasonably believed Walsh could still be alive and in danger, justifying warrantless entry to protect or preserve life.
2. The statements were admissible either because they were general on-the-scene questions or because their admission was harmless error.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Exigent circumstances exist when a situation demands immediate attention with no time to obtain a warrant.” (¶ 12)

“The need to protect or preserve life or avoid serious injury is justification for what would be otherwise illegal absent an exigency or emergency.” (¶ 15)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Police received a tip that James Rogers had killed Caitlin Walsh and her body was in a suitcase in his apartment. Officers went to the apartment, heard Rogers crying and saying 'I'm sorry,' and knocked. When Rogers eventually opened the door, Chief Wainman pulled him out, asked what he had done, and Rogers said he 'did something very wrong.' Rogers indicated Walsh was 'in the closet.' Chief Wainman entered the apartment, smelled decomposition, and found a heavy suitcase in the closet with liquid oozing out. After obtaining a warrant five hours later, police retrieved Walsh's remains from the suitcase. Before Miranda warnings, Rogers said 'I never meant to hurt her' and later admitted to stabbing her with a machete.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Rogers was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. He appealed the circuit court's denial of his motion to suppress evidence from a warrantless search and his statements made before Miranda warnings.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- State v. Fischer, 2016 S.D. 12, 875 N.W.2d 40
- State v. Fierro, 2014 S.D. 62, 853 N.W.2d 235
- State v. Deneui, 2009 S.D. 99, 775 N.W.2d 221
- State v. Bowker, 2008 S.D. 61, 754 N.W.2d 56

- State v. Dillon, 2007 S.D. 77, 738 N.W.2d 57
- State v. Hess, 2004 S.D. 60, 680 N.W.2d 314
- State v. Meyer, 1998 S.D. 122, 587 N.W.2d 719
- Brigham City v. Stuart, 547 U.S. 398 (2006)
- Mincey v. Arizona, 437 U.S. 385 (1978)
- Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)
- State v. McCahren, 2016 S.D. 34, 878 N.W.2d 586
- State v. Berget, 2013 S.D. 1, 826 N.W.2d 1
- State v. Younger, 453 N.W.2d 834 (S.D. 1990)
- Neder v. United States, 527 U.S. 1 (1999)
- State v. Zakaria, 2007 S.D. 27, 730 N.W.2d 140