

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS, PEORIA DIVISION

Pierre A. Montanez v. John Burle, Warden

Montanez · No. 1:21-cv-1293-JEH · Decided January 13, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois denied Pierre A. Montanez’s amended petition for a writ of habeas corpus under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The court held that several grounds were untimely or procedurally defaulted and declined to issue a certificate of appealability. The claims principally concerned alleged Brady violations, prosecutorial misconduct, Confrontation Clause violations, and ineffective assistance of counsel.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, Peoria Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jonathan E. Hawley
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, Peoria Division
DECIDED	January 13, 2026
DOCKET	1:21-cv-1293-JEH
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Petitioner sought federal habeas relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254 from Illinois convictions and sentences for two first-degree murders, aggravated kidnapping, and aggravated vehicular hijacking. The court considered the amended petition after prior dismissal with leave to reinstate and denied relief.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d), relief on claims adjudicated on the merits is available only when the state-court decision was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of, clearly established Supreme Court precedent, or was based on an unreasonable determination of the facts. The court reviewed other Brady claims under the Brady materiality standard, considered procedural default and timeliness, and applied de novo review where the state-court record did not clearly establish the basis of decision.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Pierre A. Montanez v. John Burle, Warden

TOPICS

federal habeas corpus post-conviction relief due process evidence appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

federal habeas corpus state post-conviction relief constitutional criminal procedure evidence and disclosure
appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether grounds 1 and 9 of the amended habeas petition were untimely under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d), including whether they related back to the original petition or were based on a newly recognized retroactive constitutional right.
2. Whether grounds 1, 3(b), 7, 8, and 9 were procedurally defaulted.
3. Whether the alleged suppression of evidence concerning Ortiz's expected plea agreement violated Brady v. Maryland.
4. Whether the alleged failure to disclose a Chicago Police Department report, evidence of Caucasian hairs, inventory information, or discipline involving DNA analyst Amy Rehnstrom established Brady violations.
5. Whether Montanez was entitled to federal habeas relief under the deferential standard applicable to claims adjudicated by the state courts.
6. Whether a certificate of appealability should issue.

HOLDINGS

1. Grounds 1 and 9 were untimely because they were first raised in the amended petition more than one year after the federal limitations period expired and did not relate back to the original petition.
2. Ground 9 was not timely under § 2244(d)(1)(C) because Smith v. Arizona did not announce a rule the Supreme Court had made retroactive to cases on collateral review.
3. Grounds 1, 3(b), 7, 8, and 9 were procedurally defaulted and Montanez failed to establish cause and prejudice or actual innocence to excuse the defaults.
4. Montanez was not entitled to habeas relief on the claim that the State failed to disclose that Ortiz testified with an expectation of receiving a plea bargain.
5. Grounds 3(a), 4, 5, and 6 did not warrant habeas relief because Montanez failed to establish material suppression of favorable evidence.
6. The court declined to issue a certificate of appealability because reasonable jurists could not debate the timeliness, procedural-default, deference, or merits rulings.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A successful Brady claim has three components: “The evidence at issue must be favorable to the accused, either because it is exculpatory, or because it is impeaching; that evidence must have been suppressed by the State, either willfully or inadvertently; and prejudice must have ensued.”” (Section II.C)

“Petitioner Pierre A. Montanez’s Amended Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254 (Doc. 9) is DENIED.” (Section IV)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In August 2002, Roberto Villalobos and Alejandra Ramirez were murdered after being in a vehicle with Montanez and codefendant Jose Luera. Witnesses placed Montanez with the victims before the murders and testified that Montanez purchased gasoline shortly afterward; the vehicle was later burned with Ramirez's body inside. Additional evidence included Montanez's DNA under Ramirez's fingernails, scratches and burns observed on Montanez, and statements Montanez made to police. Montanez was convicted of two first-degree murders, aggravated kidnapping, and aggravated vehicular hijacking and received life imprisonment plus consecutive terms.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Montanez was convicted in Illinois state court and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murders, plus consecutive sentences for aggravated kidnapping and aggravated vehicular hijacking. The Illinois Appellate Court affirmed on direct appeal, and the Illinois Supreme Court denied leave to appeal. His initial and successive state postconviction proceedings raised Brady, confrontation, ineffective-assistance, and related claims; the state courts denied relief or leave to file. Montanez filed a federal § 2254 petition in October 2021, which was dismissed with leave to reinstate, then filed an amended petition in April 2025. The district court denied the amended petition, declined to issue a certificate of appealability, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)
- Mayle v. Felix, 545 U.S. 644 (2005)
- Burton v. Stewart, 549 U.S. 147 (2007)
- Gonzalez v. Thaler, 565 U.S. 134 (2012)
- Martinez v. Jones, 556 F.3d 637 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Smith v. Arizona, 602 U.S. 779 (2024)
- Tyler v. Cain, 533 U.S. 656 (2001)
- Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288 (1989)
- Welch v. United States, 136 S. Ct. 1257 (2016)

- Rodriguez v. Warden, No. 3:25-CV-238 DRL-SJF, 2025 WL 2620942 (N.D. Ind. Sept. 11, 2025)
- Hisler v. Royce, No. 1:21-CV-3676, 2025 WL 903847 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 25, 2025)
- Garcia v. Cain, No. 1:24-CV-52-HSO, 2025 WL 1363109 (S.D. Miss. May 9, 2025)
- Holland v. Florida, 560 U.S. 631 (2010)
- Pace v. DiGuglielmo, 544 U.S. 408 (2005)
- Carpenter v. Douma, 840 F.3d 867 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin v. United States, 136 S. Ct. 750 (2016)
- Rhines v. Weber, 544 U.S. 269 (2005)
- Snow v. Pfister, 880 F.3d 857 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Clemons v. Pfister, 845 F.3d 816 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Richardson v. Lemke, 745 F.3d 258 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Perruquet v. Briley, 390 F.3d 505 (7th Cir. 2004)
- Thomas v. Williams, 822 F.3d 378 (7th Cir. 2016)
- People v. Robinson, 2020 IL 123849
- Wilson v. Cromwell, 69 F.4th 410 (7th Cir. 2023)
- Coleman v. Thompson, 501 U.S. 722 (1991)
- Martinez v. Ryan, 566 U.S. 1 (2012)
- Trevino v. Thaler, 569 U.S. 413 (2013)
- Strickler v. Greene, 527 U.S. 263 (1999)
- Carvajal v. Dominguez, 542 F.3d 561 (7th Cir. 2008)
- Wearry v. Cain, 577 U.S. 385 (2016)
- Giglio v. United States, 405 U.S. 150 (1972)
- United States v. Ervin, 540 F.3d 623 (7th Cir. 2008)
- United States v. Sanchez, 251 F.3d 598 (7th Cir. 2001)
- Kyles v. Whitley, 514 U.S. 419 (1995)
- Mays v. Hines, 592 U.S. 385 (2020)
- Gambaiani v. Greene, 137 F.4th 627 (7th Cir. 2025)
- Williams v. Taylor, 529 U.S. 362 (2000)
- Schmidt v. Foster, 911 F.3d 469 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Coleman v. Hardy, 690 F.3d 811 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Pierce v. Vanihel, 93 F.4th 1036 (7th Cir. 2024)
- People v. Montanez, 2021 IL App (1st) 191065-U
- People v. Montanez, 2022 IL App (1st) 191930
- People v. Montanez, 234 N.E.3d 777 (Ill. 2023)
- People v. Montanez, 2025 IL App (1st) 232292-U
- People v. Buckner, 376 Ill. App. 3d 251, 876 N.E.2d 87 (2007)
- Sanders v. Radtke, 48 F.4th 502 (7th Cir. 2022)

- Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473 (2000)
- Flores-Ramirez v. Foster, 811 F.3d 861 (7th Cir. 2016)

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/federal/united-states-district-court-for-the-central-district-of-ill/2026/pierre-a-montanez-v-john-burle-warden-z08623dx>