Case Notes

Name of the case: *Gideon v. Wainwright*

Year of the case: 1963

Appellant (plaintiff): Gideon

Appellee: Wainwright

Facts of the case:

Decision of the lower court: The Florida court declined to provide Gideon legal counsel because the accusation made against him did not constitute a “capital offense”

Legal aspects of the case: The case involved a discrepancy in the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, so the Supreme Court sought to hear the case to resolve the misunderstanding. The case focused on the 6th Amendment (right to counsel) and the 14th Amendment which applied the rights of the federal government to the states. Florida had a law that enabled the state to only provide legal counsel in certain instances, but Gideon argued that the Constitution entitled him to such representation in all cases.

Decision of the Supreme Court: The Court abandoned precedent to broaden the definition of the 6th Amendment to include more than just Federal cases. The majority argued that the 6th Amendment, applied to the states through the 14th Amendment, demanded free counsel for everyone who could not pay for their own regardless of the type of case. This decision represents a loose interpretation of the Constitution because it gives rights to the people not explicitly given in the Constitution.

The Rule of Precedent: After this case was decided, the states appoint all people without limited funds a lawyer.