

SUPREME COURT CASES 12

Use with Chapter 16.

MIRANDA V. ARIZONA (1966)

★ BACKGROUND OF THE CASE ★

The *Miranda* decision actually related to four cases dealing with similar Constitutional issues. In three state cases and one federal case, the people involved had been convicted on the basis of confessions made after long periods of interrogation. None were informed of their right to counsel and to remain silent.

In the title case, Ernesto Miranda had been arrested by Phoenix, Arizona, police for questioning on charges of kidnapping and rape. Miranda was advised neither of his right to an attorney nor of his right to remain silent. After 2 hours of interrogation, he signed a written confession. He was later found guilty.

★ CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE ★

Miranda's appeal to the United States Supreme Court was based on the Fifth Amendment's guarantee that "no person . . . shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." The Court took the case to further explore and clarify certain problems arising from earlier decisions related to the rights of individuals taken into police custody.

The precise question in *Miranda* was: Under what circumstances may an interrogation take place that will produce a confession Constitutionally admissible in a court of law?

★ THE COURT'S DECISION ★

The Supreme Court in a 5 to 4 vote overturned Miranda's conviction. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote the majority opinion.

The Court held that a prosecutor could use no statement "stemming from custodial interrogation of the defendant unless it demonstrates the use of procedural safeguards effective to secure the privilege against self-incrimination. By custodial interrogation, we mean questioning initiated by law enforcement officers after a person has been taken into custody or otherwise deprived of his freedom in any significant way."

Warren was very concerned about what goes on in the "privacy" of interrogation. He observed that a suspect under interrogation is subjected to great psychological pressures designed "to put the defendant in such an emotional state as to impair his capacity for rational judgment. . . ." The Court's decision intended "to combat these pressures and to permit a full opportunity to exercise the privilege against self-incrimination. . . ."

In order that a suspect's right be fully protected, Warren stated, "procedural safeguards must be employed." The Chief Justice explained, "He must be

warned prior to any investigation that he has the right to remain silent, that anything he says may be used against him in a court of law, that he has the right to the presence of an attorney, and that, if he cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for him prior to any questioning if he so desires."

Once these warnings are given, the accused individual may choose to stop answering questions at any time, or he may halt an interrogation until his attorney is present. Otherwise, he may waive his exercise of these rights. In this instance, Warren warned, subsequently there would be "a heavy burden . . . on the Government to demonstrate that the defendant knowingly and intelligently waived his privilege against self-incrimination and his right to . . . counsel."

The Court held that such safeguards were "not intended to hamper the traditional function of police officers in investigating crime. . . ." The Court still permitted "general on-the-scene questioning as to facts surrounding a crime or other general questioning of citizens in the fact-finding process. . . ." Similarly, the Court concluded, "volunteered statements of any kind are not barred by the Fifth Amendment."

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*** THINKING ABOUT THE CASE ***

1. What does the Fifth Amendment guarantee?

2. What did the Court mean by “custodial interrogation”?

3. What kind of questioning does the *Miranda* decision allow?

4. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? “In the Court’s zeal to protect the rights of the accused, those of the victim or the law enforcement officer often take second place.” Give reasons for your answer.
