

Florida Supreme Court Opinion

Blanco v. State,
249 So. 3d 536 (Fla. 2018)

Supreme Court of Florida

No. SC17-330

OMAR BLANCO,
Appellant,

vs.

STATE OF FLORIDA,
Appellee.

[July 19, 2018]

PER CURIAM.

Omar Blanco, a prisoner under sentence of death, appeals the circuit court's orders summarily denying his fifth motion for postconviction relief, which was filed under Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure 3.851 and 3.203. We have jurisdiction. *See* art. V, § 3(b)(1), Fla. Const.

In 1982, a jury convicted Blanco of first-degree murder and armed burglary. We affirmed Blanco's convictions and sentence of death on direct appeal. *Blanco v. State*, 452 So. 2d 520 (Fla. 1984). We also upheld the denial of his initial motion for postconviction relief and denied his petition for a writ of habeas corpus. *Blanco v. Wainwright*, 507 So. 2d 1377 (Fla. 1987). A federal court later vacated

the death sentence based on ineffective assistance of penalty phase counsel.

Blanco v. Dugger, 691 F. Supp. 308 (S.D. Fla. 1988), *aff'd sub nom. Blanco v. Singletary*, 943 F.2d 1477 (11th Cir. 1991).¹ In 1994, following a new penalty phase on resentencing, the jury recommended a death penalty by a vote of ten to two. We affirmed Blanco's sentence of death. *Blanco v. State*, 706 So. 2d 7 (Fla. 1997). We also upheld the denial of his fourth postconviction motion. *Blanco v. State*, 963 So. 2d 173 (Fla. 2007).

In May 2015, Blanco filed his current fifth postconviction motion under Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure 3.851 and 3.203. Within his motion, Blanco sought relief based on *Hall v. Florida*, 134 S. Ct. 1986 (2014), and *Atkins v. Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304 (2002). Blanco subsequently filed an amended postconviction motion in which he sought additional relief based on *Hurst v. Florida*, 136 S. Ct. 616 (2016). In January 2017, the circuit court issued an order summarily denying Blanco's intellectual disability claim as time-barred in light of this Court's decision in *Rodriguez v. State*, No. SC15-1278, 2016 WL 4194776

1. Blanco's second postconviction motion was filed during the federal habeas proceedings, but it was dismissed as moot when the federal court ordered resentencing.

Blanco's third postconviction motion was filed during the pendency of the resentencing proceedings. We affirmed. *Blanco v. State*, 702 So. 2d 1250 (Fla. 1997).

(Fla. Aug. 9, 2016) (unpublished order). This appeal followed.² While Blanco's postconviction case was pending in this Court, the Court directed Blanco to show cause why the circuit court's May 2017 order—entered by the circuit court on relinquishment—should not be affirmed in light of this Court's decision in *Hitchcock v. State*, 226 So. 3d 216 (Fla.), *cert. denied*, 138 S. Ct. 513 (2017). This Court also directed further briefing on the intellectual-disability-related issue.

We conclude that Blanco's intellectual disability claim is foreclosed by the reasoning of this Court's decision in *Rodriguez*. In *Rodriguez*, this Court applied the time-bar contained within rule 3.203 to a defendant who sought to raise an intellectual disability claim under *Atkins* for the first time in light of *Hall*. We also conclude that Blanco's *Hurst* claim is foreclosed by this Court's decision in *Hitchcock*. In *Hitchcock*, this Court applied *Asay* to mean that *Ring v. Arizona*, 536 U.S. 584 (2002), is the cutoff for any and all *Hurst*-related claims. Accordingly, we affirm the circuit court's orders denying Blanco's fifth motion for postconviction relief.

Any rehearing motion containing reargument will be stricken.

2. While Blanco's postconviction case was pending in this Court, the Court temporarily relinquished jurisdiction for the circuit court to enter a written order on the *Hurst*-related claim contained within Blanco's amended postconviction motion. In May 2017, the circuit court issued an order on relinquishment summarily denying Blanco's *Hurst* claim in light of this Court's decision in *Asay v. State*, 210 So. 3d 1 (Fla. 2016), *cert. denied*, 138 S. Ct. 41 (2017).

It is so ordered.

LEWIS, QUINCE, POLSTON, LABARGA, and LAWSON, JJ., concur.

CANADY, C.J., concurs in result.

PARIENTE, J., concurs in result with an opinion.

NOT FINAL UNTIL TIME EXPIRES TO FILE REHEARING MOTION AND,
IF FILED, DETERMINED.

PARIENTE, J., concurring in result.

I agree with the per curiam opinion's result because this Court's opinions regarding *Hurst* retroactivity are now final. *Hitchcock v. State*, 226 So. 3d 216 (Fla.), *cert. denied*, 138 S. Ct. 513 (2017); *Asay v. State* (*Asay V*), 210 So. 3d 1 (Fla. 2016), *cert. denied*, 138 S. Ct. 41 (2017). However, I continue to adhere to the views expressed in my dissenting opinion in *Hitchcock* that *Hurst* should apply retroactively to cases like Blanco's. *Hitchcock*, 216 So. 3d at 220-23 (Pariente, J., dissenting). Applying *Hurst* to Blanco's sentence of death, I would grant a new penalty phase based on the jury's nonunanimous recommendation for death by a vote of ten to two. Majority op. at 2.

An Appeal from the Circuit Court in and for Broward County,
Raag Singhal, Judge - Case No. 061982CF000453A88810

Ira W. Still, III, Coral Springs, Florida,

for Appellant

Pamela Jo Bondi, Attorney General, Tallahassee, Florida, and Leslie T. Campbell,
Assistant Attorney General, West Palm Beach, Florida,

for Appellee

Broward County Circuit Court
Order re: *Hurst*

Florida v. Blanco,
No. 82-000453-CF10A
(June 1, 2017)

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

v.

OMAR BLANCO,

Defendant.

CASE NO. 82-000453CF10A

JUDGE: SINGHAL

**ORDER DENYING DEFENDANT'S HURST CLAIM AS RAISED IN
AMENDED SUCCESSIVE MOTION TO VACATE JUDGMENTS OF CONVICTION**

THIS CAUSE comes before the Court on relinquishment by the Florida Supreme Court. Having carefully considered Defendant's April 18, 2016 Amendment/Supplement to Successive Motion to Vacate Judgments of Conviction and Sentence, the State's January 5, 2017 Supplemental Response to Defendant's Amendment/Supplement, arguments of the parties at the case management conferences, the court file, and otherwise being advised in the premises, the Court finds the following:

The Defendant seeks relief under *Hurst v. Florida*, 136 S. Ct. 616 (2016) on the basis that Florida's capital sentencing statute has been declared unconstitutional. However, subsequent to the filing of the Defendant's motion, the Florida Supreme Court issued *Asay v. State*, 210 So. 3d 1, 8 (Fla. 2016) and determined that defendants whose judgments and sentences became final before *Ring v. Arizona*, 536 U.S. 584 (2002) was decided are not entitled to relief. See *Asay*, 210 So. 3d at 22 ("After weighing all three of the above factors, we conclude that *Hurst* should not be applied retroactively to *Asay's* case, in which the death sentence became final before the issuance of *Ring*"). *Hurst* does not apply retroactively to the Defendant's case.

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that Defendant's Successive Motion to Vacate Judgments of Conviction and Sentence is **DENIED** as time-barred.

Defendant has thirty (30) days from the date of this Order to file an appeal.

3/1st **DONE AND ORDERED** in Chambers, Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida, this day of May, 2017 *nunc pro tunc* to the Court's January 24, 2017 order denying Defendant's Successive Motion to Vacate Judgments of Conviction.



RAAG SINGHAL
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

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Steven A. Klinger, Esq., Assistant State Attorney, 201 SE 6th Street, Suite 660A, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Broward County Circuit Court
Order re: *Hall-Atkins*

Florida v. Blanco,
No. 82-000453-CF10A
(Jan. 24, 2017)

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA,)	CASE NO. 82-000453CF10A
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	
)	
OMAR BLANCO,)	JUDGE: SINGHAL
)	
Defendant.)	
)	

**ORDER GRANTING STATE'S AUGUST 11, 2016 MOTION FOR REHEARING &
DENYING DEFENDANT'S SUCCESSIVE MOTION TO VACATE JUDGMENTS OF
CONVICTION**

THIS CAUSE came before the Court upon the State's August 11, 2016 Motion for Rehearing Based on Florida Supreme Court's Decision in *Rodriguez v. State*, SC15-1278 (Fla. August 9, 2016). Having considered the State's motion, Defendant's September 30, 2016 response, the State's October 10, 2016 reply, the State's October 24, 2016 Notice of Supplemental Authority, Defendant's November 11, 2016 Response, arguments of the parties at the case management conferences, the court file, and otherwise being advised in the premises, the Court finds the following:

This Court previously granted the Defendant's request for an evidentiary hearing on an intellectual disability claim raised in his May 26, 2015 Successive Motion to Vacate Judgments of Conviction and Sentence filed pursuant to Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure 3.203 and 3.851. The State seeks rehearing from the order granting the evidentiary hearing in light of new case law.

After careful consideration, the Court finds that granting rehearing is appropriate in light of *Rodriguez*. Despite the Florida Supreme Court's recognition that *Hall v. Florida*, 134 S. Ct. 1986 (2014) is retroactive, the Court has since limited the class of Defendants who may avail themselves of this remedy. In *Rodriguez v. State*, in an unpublished order, the high Court subsequently determined that the Defendant's failure to raise an intellectual disability claim,

post-*Atkins*,¹ resulted in his claim being time-barred. The Court did not extend *Hall* to include defendants who had never before raised an intellectual disability claim. In following the guidance of *Rodriguez*, the Court now determines that the Defendant's claim is time-barred and dispenses with the need for an evidentiary hearing. See also *Walls v. State*, 41 Fla. L. Weekly S466 (Fla. Oct. 20, 2016) (concurring op., Justice Pariente).

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that the State's Motion for Rehearing is **GRANTED**; it is further,

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that Defendant's Successive Motion to Vacate Judgments of Conviction and Sentence is **DENIED**.

Defendant has thirty (30) days from the date of this Order to file an appeal.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers, Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida, this ____ day of January, 2017.

RAAG SINGHAL
Circuit Court Judge

JAN 24 2017

RAAG SINGHAL
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

TRUE COPY

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¹ *Atkins v. Virginia*, 536 U.S. 304 (2002).

Broward County Circuit Court
Order re: *Hall-Atkins*

Florida v. Blanco,
No. 82-000453-CF10A
(Nov. 16, 2015)

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SEVENTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA**

STATE OF FLORIDA,)	CASE NO.: 82-000453CF10A
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	JUDGE: RAAG SINGHAL
)	
OMAR BLANCO,)	
)	
Defendant.)	

**ORDER DENYING STATE’S MOTION FOR REHEARING OF ORDER ON CASE
MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE**

THIS CAUSE is before this Court upon the State’s Motion for Rehearing of Order on Case Management Conference, issued September 21, 2015. Having carefully considered the State’s motion, filed October 1, 2015, the Defendant’s response, filed October 16, 2015, all relevant motions and orders in the court file, and the applicable law, having heard argument of counsel at a hearing held October 30, 2015, and being otherwise fully advised in the premises, this Court finds that the State has not raised any arguments that require this Court to reconsider its Order on Case Management Conference.

The State argues that because there is no holding from the United States Supreme Court or the Florida Supreme Court making the decision in Hall v. Florida, 134 S.Ct. 1986 (2014) retroactive this Court should find that the Hall decision does not apply retroactively to postconviction cases. The State cites to Justice Wells’s concurring opinion in Chandler v. Crosby, 916 So.2d 728 (Fla. 2005) that discusses the requirements of Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.851 for a successive postconviction motion. The rule requires in relevant part that the fundamental constitutional right asserted in a successive motion has been “held to apply retroactively.” Fla. R. Crim. P. 3.851(d)(2)(B). However, unlike the federal Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), rule 3.851 does not specifically state that the fundamental constitutional right must have been “made retroactive to cases on collateral review *by the Supreme Court.*” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(b)(2)(A) (emphasis added).

The State also argues that this Court misinterpreted and misapplied the procedural history in Haliburton v. Florida, 135 S. Ct. 178 (2014) because Haliburton was remanded to the

Florida Supreme Court at the State's request and without a determination on the merits. However, an uneven application of the Hall decision to similarly situated defendants would contradict the United States Supreme Court's holding in Teague v. Lane, 489 U.S. 288, 316 (1989) that "habeas corpus cannot be used as a vehicle to create new constitutional rules of criminal procedure unless those rules would be applied retroactively to *all* defendants on collateral review through one of the two exceptions" set forth in the Teague decision. The United States Supreme Court specifically stated in Teague that it "can simply refuse to announce a new rule in a given case unless the rule would be applied retroactively to the defendant in the case and to all others similarly situated." Id. at 316.

Finally, the State argues that this Court misapprehended the application of the Florida Supreme Court's analysis in Falcon v. State, 162 So. 3d 954 (Fla. 2015) to the instant case, because Hall is merely an application of Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304 (2002) to the facts of that defendant's case, a revision of a state procedure. The Hall decision is not merely a refinement of the Atkins decision. Rather, without the limitations set by the Hall decision on the state's discretion to define intellectual disability and to develop appropriate ways to enforce the constitutional restriction on the execution of the intellectually disabled, the Atkins decision "could become a nullity, and the Eighth Amendment's protection of human dignity would not become a reality." Hall, 134 S.Ct. at 1999.

Therefore, for the reasons set forth herein, it is

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that the State's Motion for Rehearing is hereby **DENIED**. A status hearing for purposes of setting an evidentiary hearing is set for November 18, 2015 at noon, at the Broward County Courthouse, **Courtroom 4810**. Counsel for the parties may appear by telephone but must make arrangements with this Court's Judicial Assistant prior to the hearing.

DONE AND ORDERED on this 16 day of November, 2015, in Chambers, Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida.



RAAG SINGHAL
CIRCUIT JUDGE

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Broward County Circuit Court
Order re: *Hall-Atkins*

Florida v. Blanco,
No. 82-000453-CF10A
(Sept. 21, 2015)

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

v.

OMAR BLANCO,

Defendant.

JUDGE: RAAG SINGHAL

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finds that it fails to allege new or different grounds for relief and the prior determination was on the merits; or, if new and different grounds are alleged, the trial court finds that the failure to assert those grounds in a prior motion constituted an abuse of the procedure; or, if the trial court finds there was no good cause for failing to assert those grounds in a prior motion; or if the trial court finds the claim fails to meet the time limitation exceptions set forth in subdivision (d)(2)(A), (d)(2)(B), or (d)(2)(C).

Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.851(d)(2)(B) provides that a defendant can overcome the time limitations in subdivision (d)(1) if he asserts a new fundamental constitutional right that has been held to apply retroactively.

In the instant motion, the Defendant raises a new ground for relief that was not previously determined on the merits. Although the Defendant could have and should have raised this intellectual disability claim within one year of the Atkins decision, under the Florida Supreme Court's Atkins jurisprudence he would have been precluded from presenting evidence to establish his intellectual disability because he was not within the bright line cut-off IQ score of 70 or below. Cherry v. State, 959 So. 2d 702 (Fla. 2007).

The question whether this Court should dismiss Defendant's instant successive motion as time barred rests on whether the decision in Hall applies retroactively. In Hall, the United States Supreme Court addressed the issue how intellectual disability should be defined in order to implement the principles and the holding of the Atkins decision. Hall, 134 S.Ct. at 1993. The Court held that the Florida statute, as interpreted by Florida courts, is unconstitutional because it sets a mandatory cutoff IQ score of 70 without taking into account the standard error of measurement ("SEM") and precludes further consideration of other evidence bearing on intellectual disability. Id. at 1995; 2000-01. The Court found that by doing so

Florida's rule disregards established medical practice in two interrelated ways. It takes an IQ score as final and conclusive evidence of a defendant's intellectual capacity, when experts in the field would consider other evidence. It also relies on purportedly scientific measurement of the defendant's abilities, his IQ score, while refusing to recognize that the score is, on its own terms, imprecise.

Id. at 1995.

The State points out that neither the United States Supreme Court nor the Florida Supreme Court has ruled that the Hall decision should apply retroactively. In addition, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that the Hall decision is not retroactive. In re Henry, 757 F.3d 1151 (11th Cir. 2014).

The mere fact that the United States Supreme Court has not specified that the Hall decision should apply retroactively is not dispositive of the issue. In fact, it was in the context of collateral review that the United States Supreme Court held that Florida's cutoff rule "creates an unacceptable risk that persons with intellectual disability will be executed, and thus is unconstitutional." Hall, 134 S.Ct. at 1990. If the decision did not apply retroactively to those cases that are final there would be disparate outcomes in cases on collateral review. Hall would be the only defendant whose conviction and sentence have become final, who could present evidence in support of his claim that he is intellectually disabled under Atkins. All other defendants whose convictions and sentences have become final prior to the issuance of the Hall decision would be precluded from presenting such evidence. This would amount to depriving similarly situated defendants of the opportunity to establish their intellectual disability claim under Atkins. As noted by the dissent in In re Henry, "[t]he postconviction context of the Court's decision in Hall tells us that, at a minimum, the Supreme Court intended its holding to apply retroactively to all cases on collateral review." In re Henry, 757 F.3d at 1166.

The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that the Hall decision does not apply retroactively, but the analysis of the court was guided by federal principles. Furthermore, as pointed out by the dissent, the majority decided the issue of retroactivity without the benefit of full briefing because the issue was not even raised by the State in that case. In re Henry, 757 F.3d at 1164.

Although the Supreme Court of Florida has not yet ruled on the retroactive application of the Hall decision, it has recently considered the retroactive application of the United States Supreme Court's decision in Miller v. Alabama, 132 S.Ct. 2455 (2012) (holding that the mandatory life imprisonment without parole for juvenile offenders would violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment). The analysis of the Florida Supreme Court in Falcon v. State, 162 So. 3d 954 (Fla. 2015) is instructive. Like juvenile

offenders who “are fundamentally different from adults for sentencing purposes,” the intellectually disabled offenders have reduced capacity, which has led the United States Supreme Court to conclude that the Constitution substantively restricts the power of the state to impose the death sentence in the case of an intellectually disabled offender. Atkins, 536 U.S. at 320.

In determining whether a change in the law should apply retroactively, this Court must apply a three-pronged test: (a) the change must emanate from the Florida Supreme Court or the United States Supreme Court; (b) it must be constitutional in nature; and (c) it must constitute a development of fundamental significance. Witt v. State, 387 So. 2d 922, 931 (Fla. 1980). The State concedes that the first two requirements are met, but argues that the change announced in Hall does not constitute a development of fundamental significance.

Thus, the determinative question in this case is whether Hall constitutes a development of fundamental significance. Witt, 387 So. 2d at 931. A decision is of fundamental significance when it either “places beyond the authority of the state the power to regulate certain conduct or impose certain penalties,” or it is “of sufficient magnitude to necessitate retroactive application ascertained by the three-fold test of Stovall¹ and Linkletter².” Witt, 387 So. 2d at 929. The three-fold test under Stovall and Linkletter requires the court to consider: “(a) the purpose to be served by the new rule; (b) the extent of reliance on the old rule; and (c) the effect on the administration of justice of a retroactive application of the new rule.” Witt, 387 So. 2d at 926.

The Hall decision clearly places a substantive limitation on the power of the state to define intellectual disability in order to implement the principles and holding of Atkins. Hall, 134 S.Ct. at 1993. Before Hall, Florida law defined intellectual disability by reference to the cutoff IQ score of 70 or below without taking into account the SEM. After the decision in Hall, Florida is precluded from defining intellectual disability as merely a number and is required to take into account the SEM and consider a range of IQ scores along with evidence of deficits in adaptive functioning and onset age in determining whether a defendant is intellectually disabled. See In re Henry, 757 F.3d at 1169 (Judge Martin dissenting). Thus, the Hall decision took away the power of the State to define intellectual disability and falls within the first category of changes of

¹ Stovall v. Denno, 388 U.S. 293 (1967).

² Linkletter v. Walker, 381 U.S. 618 (1965).

fundamental significance that take away the power of the state to regulate certain conduct or impose certain sentences. See Falcon, 162 So. 3d at 961-62.

Furthermore, this Court can only draw one valid conclusion from the procedural history of Haliburton v. Florida, 135 S.Ct. 178 (2014), namely, that the United States Supreme Court intended Hall to apply retroactively to cases on postconviction relief. On September 19, 2006, the defendant in Haliburton filed a second successive postconviction motion arguing that his death sentence should be vacated because he is intellectually disabled. That motion was summarily denied by the trial court for failure to show that defendant's IQ was 70 or below. On July 18, 2013, the Florida Supreme Court affirmed the denial of Haliburton's second successive motion. Haliburton v. State, 123 So. 3d 1146 (Fla. 2013). Haliburton filed a petition for writ of certiorari in the United States Supreme Court. On October 6, 2014, the United States Supreme Court granted the petition for writ of certiorari, vacated defendant's judgment, and remanded the case to the Florida Supreme Court for further consideration in light of Hall. Haliburton v. Florida, 135 S.Ct. 178 (2014). On February 5, 2015, the Florida Supreme Court vacated its order of affirmance dated July 18, 2013 and remanded the case to the trial court for an evidentiary hearing. Haliburton v. State, 163 So.3d 509 (Fla. 2015). Remanding Haliburton for further proceedings in light of Hall, is a clear indication that the United States Supreme Court intended the decision in Hall to apply retroactively to cases on collateral review. By vacating its own opinion in Haliburton and remanding the case to the trial court for an evidentiary hearing, the Florida Supreme Court applied Hall retroactively to a case on collateral review.

If Hall were not applied retroactively, some intellectually disabled offenders could be executed, while others, with indistinguishable cases, could have their death sentence commuted to a life sentence merely because their convictions and sentences were not final when the Hall decision was issued. See Falcon, 162 So. 3d at 962. This Court finds that the Defendant in this case has alleged sufficient facts to be afforded an evidentiary hearing to establish whether he is intellectually disabled pursuant to Atkins and Hall. Therefore, for the reasons set forth herein, it is

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that this Court grants an evidentiary hearing on Defendant's claim of intellectual disability. A status hearing is set for September 24, 2015 at 11

a.m., at the Broward County Courthouse, **Courtroom 4810**, for purposes of setting an evidentiary hearing date.

DONE AND ORDERED on this _____ day of September, 2015, in Chambers, Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida.

RAAG SINGHAL
Circuit Court Judge

RAAG SINGHAL
CIRCUIT JUDGE

SEP 21 2015

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