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IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

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MIKE BROWN, ACTING WARDEN, )

Petitioner, )

v. ) No. 20-826

ERVINE DAVENPORT, )

Respondent. )

- - - - -

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

The above-entitled matter came on for oral argument before the Supreme Court of the United States at 10:00 a.m.

APPEARANCES:

FADWA A. HAMMOUD, Solicitor General, Lansing, Michigan; on behalf of the Petitioner.

TASHA BAHAL, ESQUIRE, Boston, Massachusetts; on behalf of the Respondent.

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 (10:00 a.m.)

3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice  
4 Kavanaugh is participating remotely today.

5 We'll hear argument first this morning  
6 in Case 20-826, Brown versus Davenport.

7 Ms. Hammoud.

8 ORAL ARGUMENT OF FADWA A. HAMMOUD

9 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

10 MS. HAMMOUD: Mr. Chief Justice, and  
11 may it please the Court:

12 Davenport's concession that Brecht  
13 doesn't always subsume AEDPA narrows the dispute  
14 here. But the modified Brecht-only approach, he  
15 suggests, gives no deference to state courts'  
16 merits adjudications and absolves habeas  
17 petitioners of their burden under 2254(d)(1).

18 Even if federal judges relied only on  
19 material permissible under AEDPA within its  
20 Brecht analysis, the inquiry is not over. It is  
21 not enough for federal judges to believe in  
22 their own minds that an error substantially  
23 influenced the verdict. Before granting relief,  
24 they must look through AEDPA's highly  
25 deferential lens and ask whether all other

1 fair-minded jurists would disagree with the  
2 state court's conclusion.

3           When Congress enacted AEDPA, it did  
4 not give federal judges the option of ignoring  
5 this crucial deference. That is why, as a  
6 precondition to habeas relief, they must apply  
7 both Brecht and AEDPA. Failing to do so  
8 contravenes this Court's modern habeas  
9 jurisprudence, including Ayala, which reaffirmed  
10 that AEDPA's -- that AEDPA's limitations are  
11 distinct from Brecht.

12           The Sixth Circuit's Brecht-only  
13 approach failed to defer to the Michigan courts.  
14 It also extended this Court's holdings, relied  
15 on circuit precedent, conducted an independent  
16 review of the record, and used extrajudicial  
17 social science studies, all of which are  
18 prohibited under AEDPA. As Judge Thapar said in  
19 his en banc dissent, federal judges can't simply  
20 ignore AEDPA's guardrails whenever they find  
21 actual prejudice under Brecht.

22           We ask this Court to articulate the  
23 correct standard and to reverse the Sixth  
24 Circuit.

25           JUSTICE THOMAS: If you were writing

1 on a clean slate, how would you coordinate  
2 Brecht and AEDPA?

3 MS. HAMMOUD: One, in --

4 JUSTICE THOMAS: Would you say that --  
5 for example, that one subsumes the other?

6 MS. HAMMOUD: In a case of denial, in  
7 a case of denial of relief, applying the other  
8 would be a mere formality. Esparza, this Court  
9 found that the state court's conclusion --

10 JUSTICE THOMAS: So it really wouldn't  
11 matter if you deny?

12 MS. HAMMOUD: If you -- if you denied,  
13 applying the other would not -- formally  
14 applying it would not matter because it would be  
15 a mere formality. However, if a court were to  
16 grant relief under either, it must go to the  
17 next test. So, if they were to grant relief  
18 under Brecht, as the Sixth Circuit did, it must  
19 apply AEDPA as a precondition to the grant of  
20 relief.

21 And if a state court used the -- the  
22 wrong standard or it was contrary to this  
23 Court's precedent, then, if a petitioner  
24 prevails under AEDPA, Brecht must be applied as  
25 well prior to relief, Your Honor. I hope that

1 answered your question.

2 JUSTICE THOMAS: Thank you.

3 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Why -- that's  
4 how you think it would be applied, but why would  
5 a rational legislature set the system up this  
6 way? In other words, okay, let's have this  
7 inquiry under Brecht. Then let's have this  
8 separate inquiry under -- under AEDPA.

9 Would somebody just sitting down on a  
10 -- on a clean slate put that system together?

11 MS. HAMMOUD: Well, one, we know that  
12 they are different tests. They're distinct  
13 tests. They ask different questions. And when  
14 Congress enacted 2254(d)(1), that was three  
15 years after Brecht. So Brecht could never  
16 consider the limitations that AEDPA set in  
17 place.

18 And Brecht -- Brecht applies whether  
19 or not there's a state court determination. So  
20 they're not two of the same. Each hold  
21 different burdens as well. So --

22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, if  
23 that's really -- if they sat down and decided  
24 that's what we're going to do, don't you think  
25 they would have made it a little clearer than to

1 have us sitting here now and saying, well, how  
2 do -- how do we reconcile these two things?

3 Because, you know, they're addressed  
4 to the same question, I guess, at a broad level.  
5 In other words, it would seem to me odd that  
6 they would leave it implicit that AEDPA and  
7 Brecht would coexist.

8 MS. HAMMOUD: They -- they have to  
9 coexist because when -- when -- 2254  
10 specifically applies to a state court's merits  
11 determination. Brecht doesn't need a state  
12 court's merits adjudication for it to apply, and  
13 we know that this Court said in -- in Fry that  
14 on collateral review, whether there's a state  
15 court's merits adjudication or not, Brecht  
16 applies on collateral review.

17 Now, once there is a state court's  
18 merits adjudication, that was the heart of  
19 AEDPA, was to protect that, and that's the basic  
20 structure.

21 Now that there is a state court merits  
22 adjudication, then that needs to be protected,  
23 and it can't be ignored and it doesn't offer a  
24 menu of options. We must give it deference.

25 And so they do ask different



1 questions, and as Judge Thapar said, different  
2 questions often lead to different answers.

3 JUSTICE BARRETT: Ms. Hammoud --

4 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes.

5 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- do we have to  
6 overrule Ayala to side with you, and if not, how  
7 do we handle that "subsumes" language in Ayala?

8 MS. HAMMOUD: The Court does not have  
9 to overrule Ayala because the question that's  
10 presented here was never asked in Ayala. And,  
11 in fact, in Ayala, the Court applied both, and  
12 the Court made clear that AEDPA is a  
13 precondition to relief. And in Ayala, the Court  
14 did not grant relief.

15 So, in terms of the "subsumes"  
16 language, I think that the Court can clarify  
17 that if a federal court were to grant relief  
18 under Brecht, we ask this Court to do exactly  
19 and say what it said -- reiterate AEDPA's  
20 limitations, that AEDPA remains a precondition  
21 to relief.

22 JUSTICE BARRETT: So --

23 JUSTICE ALITO: What is your  
24 understanding of the meaning of the term  
25 "subsume"?

1 MS. HAMMOUD: Your Honor, we know that  
2 it can't mean ignore or make null. However, our  
3 reading of it is it could subsume, which means a  
4 court does not have to formally apply AEDPA if  
5 the petitioner was not entitled to relief under  
6 Brecht, doesn't have to go through a separate  
7 application, because there is no grant of relief  
8 in that case. So it kind of subsumed that  
9 conclusion, that decision --

10 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, if I look up the  
11 definition in the dictionary, will I find  
12 something like this, include as a component? Is  
13 that a meaning of the -- of the term "subsume"?

14 MS. HAMMOUD: And I know that the  
15 definition, Your Honor, has been debated with  
16 what does it mean, right? Judge Readler said it  
17 can't mean consume. Certainly, the Sixth  
18 Circuit thinks that it means you can completely  
19 leapfrog, that AEDPA would all -- that AEDPA  
20 would be -- all of AEDPA's limitations would be  
21 included in Brecht and that a federal court  
22 could leapfrog and ignore AEDPA.

23 We know that at least it can't mean  
24 that, which is why I think this case is a --

25 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, it means include

1 as a component. And so, if 2254(d) is included  
2 as a component of Brecht, then doesn't that mean  
3 that a court purporting to apply Brecht still  
4 has to satisfy 2254(d)?

5 MS. HAMMOUD: They're not two of the  
6 same. And, you know, when we -- when we look at  
7 the two tests differently, we know that Brecht  
8 doesn't answer -- doesn't ask the questions that  
9 AEDPA asks.

10 One, they're distinct. One is an  
11 independent review as to what -- as this Court  
12 said in O'Neal, me as a federal court judge  
13 believe in my own mind, and as opposed to AEDPA,  
14 they have to look and ask the question, is there  
15 fair-minded disagreement on this?

16 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, sometimes  
17 judicial opinions can -- can confuse things, so  
18 maybe it's helpful to go back to first  
19 principles.

20 Isn't federal habeas relief entirely  
21 statutory except in those circumstances in which  
22 there would otherwise be a suspension of the  
23 writ?

24 MS. HAMMOUD: And, yes, but this  
25 Court's --

1 JUSTICE ALITO: Yes. Okay. The  
2 answer to that is yes, 2254(d) is a statute. On  
3 what basis could a federal court say, we're not  
4 going to follow 2254(d), we're going to follow a  
5 judicially created standard in Brecht?

6 What do you understand to have been  
7 the basis for Brecht? Was it -- it wasn't in  
8 the federal habeas statute at that time, was it?

9 MS. HAMMOUD: No, Your Honor. In  
10 fact, this Court, one, they must -- they must  
11 both apply the federally mandated congressional  
12 statute --

13 JUSTICE ALITO: It was an --

14 MS. HAMMOUD: -- and --

15 JUSTICE ALITO: -- understanding -- it  
16 was our understanding, it was our application of  
17 the equity that a federal court exercises when  
18 it provides federal habeas relief. It was an  
19 equitable rule that was read into the previous  
20 statute, the previous version of the statute.

21 And so, if there were a conflict  
22 between that and a subsequently enacted statute,  
23 which would prevail?

24 MS. HAMMOUD: They must both prevail  
25 because Brecht does not need a state court's

1 merits adjudication in order to apply. And,  
2 two, both of them can exist at the same time,  
3 especially on collateral review.

4 JUSTICE KAGAN: But I do think, Ms.  
5 Hammoud, that the language in Davis v. Ayala and  
6 also in Fry, which Davis v. Ayala quotes and  
7 refers to as a holding, that that language goes,  
8 you know, something like this: It -- it says,  
9 we've looked at these two tests, and what we  
10 think is that the stricter standard is the --  
11 the --

12 MS. HAMMOUD: Brecht.

13 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- Brecht standard.

14 MS. HAMMOUD: Yeah.

15 JUSTICE KAGAN: And so, if a court  
16 does Brecht, that's good enough for us. If a  
17 court does Brecht only, that's good enough for  
18 us.

19 Now you might contest that. You might  
20 say, well, that was too hasty to just say that  
21 Brecht is stricter in all circumstances. But,  
22 in fact, that's what the Court twice said. It  
23 said in no uncertain terms that the one subsumes  
24 the other because the Brecht test is stricter  
25 than the Chapman test, so if a court does the

1 Brecht test, it's sufficient.

2 That's the way I view -- I read and I  
3 think as the only way to read both of these  
4 decisions. Now I -- I understand the point that  
5 they were wrong in saying that. I mean, I  
6 understand the argument you're making, but --  
7 but they say what they say, don't they?

8 MS. HAMMOUD: Justice Kagan, that is  
9 correct. That language was included in Fry,  
10 and -- and as Your Honor stated, Brecht and  
11 Chapman were compared in Fry. And, in fact, in  
12 Fry, there was no harmless error determination  
13 by a state subject to deference in Fry with no  
14 AEDPA overlay.

15 What our position is, is that when  
16 there is an AEDPA overlay, that's distinct from  
17 Fry. Sure, when one is comparing Brecht and  
18 Chapman, you can compare into which one is  
19 friendlier to a -- a criminal defendant.  
20 However, the AEDPA overlay asks different  
21 questions, and that is not what that specific  
22 judge thinks but whether there is fair-minded  
23 disagreement.

24 JUSTICE KAGAN: I hear you on that. I  
25 hear you. But what -- what I'm suggesting is

1 that that's an argument that could have been  
2 made to the Davis v. Ayala court, it's an  
3 argument that could have been made to the Fry  
4 court, but that the language in both of those  
5 cases essentially rejects that argument.

6 It basically says: Look, we think  
7 that the Brecht standard is -- you know, that  
8 it -- it's just going to do all the work here,  
9 so we think that the Brecht standard is enough.

10 MS. HAMMOUD: This Court in Fry did  
11 not consider this question, and this Court in  
12 Ayala did not consider this question. In fact,  
13 this Court in Ayala specifically stated that Fry  
14 did not abrogate AEDPA.

15 And this Court has repeatedly stated  
16 that the two tests are distinct, not only with  
17 different burdens as well in terms of who  
18 carries the burden under each test. We know  
19 that this -- from this Court that the state  
20 court's ruling has to have been so lacking in  
21 justification that there was an error well  
22 understood and comprehended in existing law  
23 beyond any possibility for fair-minded  
24 disagreement.

25 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Counsel, all --

1 MS. HAMMOUD: Those are different  
2 tests. Yes, Your Honor?

3 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- all of those  
4 things you're saying, those language --  
5 fair-minded disagreement, nobody else can think  
6 of this this way -- that's not the language of  
7 the statute. The statute just says -- and I'm  
8 reading 2254(d) -- shall -- "habeas shall not be  
9 granted with respect to any claim that was  
10 adjudicated on the merits in a state" -- I'm  
11 sorry -- "resulted in a decision that was  
12 contrary to" --

13 MS. HAMMOUD: Correct.

14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- and this is the  
15 operative language -- "or involved in  
16 unreasonable application of clearly established  
17 federal law."

18 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes.

19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Explain to me in  
20 layman's terms when a court under Brecht, under  
21 Chapman, under any test that you want to set  
22 forth basically says the constitutional  
23 violation here had to have substantially injured  
24 -- caused substantial and injurious effect on a  
25 verdict, aren't they saying by definition that



1 whatever interpretation you give, it can't be  
2 reasonable? Isn't that what Davis meant by  
3 "subsumes"? Isn't that what Fry meant by -- by  
4 the same concept?

5 How can it ever be reasonable to  
6 conclude that there was no injury to a -- to a  
7 verdict when a judge finds there was?

8 MS. HAMMOUD: Thank you, Judge --  
9 Justice Sotomayor. I'm going to address both of  
10 your questions.

11 First, I want to go back to the  
12 statute, and the reading of the statute is writs  
13 shall not be granted -- that's a command --  
14 unless the state court's adjudication in  
15 layman's terms --

16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: But that's exactly  
17 what we said in Davis. In Davis, when we --

18 MS. HAMMOUD: That's --

19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- talked about  
20 the Brecht standard, that -- that Ayala had to  
21 meet the Brecht standard and that while a  
22 federal habeas need not formally apply both  
23 Brecht and habeas, AEDPA nevertheless sets forth  
24 a precondition to the grant of habeas.

25 MS. HAMMOUD: And that's exactly what

1 we -- what we want this Court to say.

2 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that's  
3 exactly what the Court said. You don't have to  
4 apply both.

5 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes. There -- the Court  
6 in -- in -- in its analysis in Ayala want to say  
7 that there's no basis for finding that Ayala  
8 suffered actual prejudice and there was no  
9 causal statement between the two. The decision  
10 of the California Supreme Court represented an  
11 entirely reasonable application of controlling  
12 precedent.

13 What the Sixth Circuit didn't do  
14 according to the statute that Your Honor just  
15 cited, 2254(d)(1), at no point did they consider  
16 whether or not it was an unreasonable  
17 application that --

18 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. Is  
19 that --

20 MS. HAMMOUD: -- the state court did.

21 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- is all you're  
22 asking us to do in this case today is to tell  
23 the courts below apply both Brecht and Chapman  
24 AEDPA? Is that all you're asking us to do  
25 today?

1 MS. HAMMOUD: We're asking the Court  
2 articulate that prior to the grant of -- of  
3 relief, they must apply both Brecht and AEDPA,  
4 and -- and we believe that --

5 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: All right. So --

6 MS. HAMMOUD: -- the Court --

7 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- you'd be happy  
8 if that's all we said here?

9 MS. HAMMOUD: I'm sorry?

10 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That's all you're  
11 asking us to do, to remand it and say apply  
12 both, don't rely on circuit precedent, and don't  
13 use social science data? Is that what you're  
14 asking us to do?

15 MS. HAMMOUD: By applying both, that's  
16 already included because they're different  
17 questions and they consider different actions.  
18 What's happening here is the -- is the state in  
19 -- in Ayala --

20 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Just answer my  
21 question. What do you want our judgment line to  
22 say?

23 MS. HAMMOUD: Exactly what -- what  
24 Your Honor had stated, is that prior to the  
25 grant of relief they must apply both. And we

1 believe it would be prudent and it would offer  
2 the state -- it would offer the bar and bench  
3 guidance if this Court were to go and articulate  
4 the difference between the two standards and  
5 exactly why the Sixth Circuit failed to give  
6 deference to state courts and to abide by  
7 congressionally mandated statute.

8           And we think that the best way to --  
9 to -- to answer that is for the Court to even go  
10 as far as applying it, but, at the end, in our  
11 question, we do ask that this Court articulate  
12 the correct standard.

13           JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, you've told  
14 us that the Sixth Circuit didn't do that, right?

15           MS. HAMMOUD: It did not do that.

16           JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And is it our  
17 common practice -- isn't it against our common  
18 practice to do something in the first instance?  
19 Don't we lay out standards and let the court  
20 below apply them?

21           MS. HAMMOUD: That's -- that's  
22 correct, Your Honor. And, Your Honor, we're  
23 asking this Court to, one, articulate exactly  
24 why the Sixth Circuit did not do that, and, two,  
25 the district court in this case, before -- prior

1 to it going to the Sixth Circuit, actually,  
2 their decision was that the state court -- they  
3 applied AEDPA and that the state court's merits  
4 adjudication was not objectively unreasonable.  
5 They asked those questions prior to it going to  
6 the Sixth Circuit.

7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I thought your  
8 --

9 JUSTICE BARRETT: Ms. --

10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: -- brief ended  
11 by asking that -- said the Court should reverse  
12 the Sixth Circuit's judgment, not remand it?

13 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes, reverse it on that  
14 jurisprudentially significant question, Your  
15 Honor.

16 JUSTICE BARRETT: And, Ms. Hammoud,  
17 can I ask you, what was the last adjudication on  
18 the merits? Why shouldn't we -- I mean, it  
19 seemed to me that below, in saying that the  
20 Michigan Supreme Court's probably was, you  
21 basically conceded that it was, but now you're  
22 saying that after -- your brief says that after  
23 considered reflection, you think it was the  
24 court of appeals'. Why shouldn't we hold you to  
25 your earlier concession?

1 MS. HAMMOUD: Your Honor, when -- when  
2 we filed our briefing in district court, in the  
3 district court's adjudication and review of our  
4 case, their decision was that the Michigan court  
5 of appeals was the last reasoned decision based  
6 on their analysis.

7 And since then, we have carried that  
8 position, but we've always said, whichever one,  
9 they still deserve deference. And in our  
10 briefing, we -- we did state that after  
11 reconsideration of that legal question, it's the  
12 Michigan court of appeals' decision that's the  
13 last reasoned decision because that's what  
14 deference is. You have to take them at their  
15 word. They made a decision not to decide the  
16 case, and they denied leave to appeal.

17 JUSTICE BARRETT: But they offered --  
18 I mean, they -- it's unusual in that they didn't  
19 take the case, but they also had a bit of an  
20 opinion. I mean, they -- they offered some  
21 views about the merits.

22 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes. They -- and they  
23 offered that at the end of their denial. And  
24 our courts often -- sometimes -- and -- and --  
25 and sometimes they don't, and sometimes they

1 do -- offer guidance to lower courts. And in  
2 Michigan, that's consistent not -- not just with  
3 our state laws but with this Court's  
4 jurisprudence as to the fact that even if they  
5 offer guidance at the end, that's not considered  
6 to be the last merits adjudication on the case.

7 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. My  
8 difficulty with this case is I believe that you  
9 understand it, and I believe that the lawyers in  
10 front of me understand it, and my colleagues  
11 spent time on it. So did I.

12 And I have a terrible time  
13 understanding where all these different  
14 standards are and how they fit together. But --  
15 and I doubt that a lot of habeas judges will  
16 understand it either. Maybe they will, but many  
17 will not no matter what we say.

18 So I began to think of how could we  
19 deal with this. The problem comes up --

20 MS. HAMMOUD: And, Justice --

21 JUSTICE BREYER: -- because Brecht  
22 says, if you're the habeas person, you want  
23 habeas, I have to find, me, the habeas judge --

24 MS. HAMMOUD: That's correct.

25 JUSTICE BREYER: -- you have proved

1 that it was harmful. Right?

2 MS. HAMMOUD: That's correct, Your  
3 Honor.

4 JUSTICE BREYER: No problem. But the  
5 state court, the DA there, what she did was  
6 prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it wasn't  
7 harmless -- or, wait a minute --

8 MS. HAMMOUD: That it wasn't harmful.

9 JUSTICE BREYER: -- prove beyond a  
10 reasonable -- prove that it was harmless beyond  
11 a reasonable doubt.

12 And so then you get where Justice  
13 Kagan was and you say: But that's just  
14 contradictory. Ahh, not quite, because we've  
15 said that when you look at that state court  
16 decision, as long as a reasonable jurist could  
17 have found that it was harmless beyond a  
18 reasonable doubt, it has to stand up.

19 What's my problem? I think it was  
20 harmful, but I can't bring myself to say that no  
21 reasonable jurist could have agreed with that  
22 person over in the state court. And so you say  
23 that's what we should apply.

24 Now I have an idea. The purpose of  
25 this whole thing is to get the habeas judge to



1 pay some attention to what they did on this in  
2 the district court, in the federal -- in the  
3 state court. That's the purpose, isn't it? Pay  
4 attention, federal habeas judge, to the fact  
5 that those are good judges over there too, and  
6 they came out the opposite. You say it was  
7 harmful, but they said no reasonable -- beyond a  
8 reasonable doubt, it was -- it was harmless.  
9 Pay attention to it.

10 So why don't we just say that? Why  
11 don't we just say this is one of the questions  
12 where, if you ever have such a situation,  
13 federal habeas judge, please pay some attention?  
14 And instead of writing it in a legal standard  
15 that no one can understand, just tell them what  
16 to do: Pay some attention.

17 Now I grant you that would leave it  
18 all up to them. It would be very hard to  
19 review. But we leave lots of things to district  
20 judges. And there we get our objective: Pay  
21 attention to the fact that the state court did  
22 come out the opposite on this than you did.

23 What about that?

24 MS. HAMMOUD: This Court has already  
25 done that. This Court in Richter has

1 specifically stated federal judges can't use  
2 this test as a test of its -- its own confidence  
3 in the result they would reach in a de novo  
4 review, that they cannot grant petitions because  
5 merely they disagree with the state court's  
6 harmlessness determination.

7 In this case, not only did you have 11  
8 Michigan judges that believed it was harmless --

9 JUSTICE BREYER: All right. All  
10 right. Stop right there. Just say, okay, we  
11 said it already; we'll just repeat that.

12 MS. HAMMOUD: And --

13 JUSTICE BREYER: And we -- and we'll  
14 say whatever the technicalities here of this  
15 language, Chapman, Brecht, which nobody really  
16 has -- can understand, we'll need two hours of  
17 study, just do what we said there, pay some  
18 attention to the state court, the fact that they  
19 found the opposite.

20 MS. HAMMOUD: As -- as Judge Sutton  
21 had put it --

22 JUSTICE BREYER: Would you be happy  
23 with that?

24 MS. HAMMOUD: No. And I wish it  
25 worked, Your Honor. But this Court has said

1 that repeatedly. Two-and-a-half decades after  
2 Congress enacted AEDPA, this Court have said  
3 that.

4 And as Judge Sutton put it, there is  
5 vexing language, and he stated in his concurring  
6 opinion in the en banc denial, I suspect every  
7 federal judge in the nation would benefit from  
8 -- from articulating the standard and clarifying  
9 this language.

10 And that is why we believe that it's  
11 important that this state -- this Court  
12 articulate, because this question has not been  
13 asked, and it's not been in front of this Court  
14 before, that if a petitioner were to prevail  
15 under Brecht, can a state court -- can a federal  
16 court leapfrog AEDPA?

17 JUSTICE KAGAN: Ms. Hammoud --

18 MS. HAMMOUD: -- and consider it null?

19 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- I mean, I've been  
20 trying to figure out how this question matters.  
21 And I'm going to have some questions for Ms.  
22 Bahal on this point too because, frankly, I'm  
23 not sure that it matters all that much. But let  
24 me put this to you, which is, has there ever  
25 been a case where a court granted relief under

1 Brecht and then said, sorry, we can't grant  
2 relief because of AEDPA/Chapman?

3 MS. HAMMOUD: Your Honor, this -- this  
4 case is the perfect case to do that, and this  
5 case --

6 JUSTICE KAGAN: No, but has there ever  
7 been a case where any judge ever said that? I  
8 mean, I think the reason Ayala --

9 MS. HAMMOUD: Yes.

10 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- and -- and Fry look  
11 the way they do is essentially that the Court  
12 made a judgment that they could not imagine --

13 MS. HAMMOUD: Yeah.

14 JUSTICE KAGAN: -- a court saying  
15 that. And, in fact, as far as I can see, no  
16 court has ever said that.

17 MS. HAMMOUD: This is the first time  
18 that a court actually grants relief without  
19 applying AEDPA/Chapman. And the reason why we  
20 don't have more of those decisions is because  
21 circuit courts have been applying AEDPA/Chapman,  
22 and the Sixth Circuit did not conform to that.

23 I see that my time is up, and I would  
24 like to reserve the rest of my time for  
25 rebuttal.

1 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: You'll have  
2 rebuttal.

3 Justice Thomas?

4 JUSTICE THOMAS: No.

5 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice  
6 Breyer? No? No?

7 Anybody? Justice Kavanaugh?

8 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: No further  
9 questions, Chief.

10 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.

11 Thank you very much, counsel.

12 MS. HAMMOUD: Thank you, Mr. Chief  
13 Justice.

14 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll -- we'll  
15 hear now from you, Ms. Bahal.

16 ORAL ARGUMENT OF TASHA BAHAL

17 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT

18 MS. BAHAL: Mr. Chief Justice, and may  
19 it please the Court:

20 Brecht and AEDPA/Chapman are both  
21 preconditions to habeas relief and both  
22 standards have been met here. Mr. Davenport was  
23 actually prejudiced by the unconstitutional  
24 shackling, as the court of appeals found under  
25 Brecht. The state has not sought review of that

1 Brecht determination before this Court. The  
2 finding of actual prejudice necessarily means  
3 the state court adjudication on the merits was  
4 an unreasonable application of the Chapman  
5 standard.

6           There is a clear and logical  
7 relationship between Brecht and AEDPA/Chapman,  
8 with Brecht setting the higher hurdle. Chapman  
9 requires the state to prove on direct review the  
10 error was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt.  
11 That means the state must show there was no  
12 reasonable possibility the error contributed to  
13 the verdict.

14           AEDPA then asks whether a fair-minded  
15 jurist could agree with that Chapman  
16 determination. Brecht, in turn, asks whether  
17 there is more than a reasonable possibility the  
18 error contributed to the verdict.

19           Comparing the standards, where there  
20 is more than a reasonable possibility the error  
21 contributed to the verdict, as is the case here,  
22 no fair-minded jurist could agree there is no  
23 reasonable possibility the error contributed to  
24 the verdict.

25           Put differently, a fair-minded jurist

1 confronted with more than a reasonable  
2 possibility of harm could not find the error  
3 harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. That  
4 relationship between the standards was  
5 recognized by this Court in Fry and again in  
6 Ayala, and it's also been recognized in the  
7 practical experience of federal courts applying  
8 these standards for more than 20 years.

9 Through multiple rounds of briefing,  
10 the state has never identified a single case in  
11 which Brecht was satisfied but AEDPA/Chapman was  
12 not satisfied. Therefore, where a finding of  
13 actual prejudice under Brecht has been made and  
14 that finding does not rest on sources of law  
15 that would not be permissible to consider under  
16 2254(d), the Brecht inquiry answers the AEDPA  
17 questions.

18 I'd now be happy to take the Court's  
19 questions.

20 JUSTICE THOMAS: Counsel, would you  
21 comment or respond to Justice Alito's point as  
22 to the stature or status of Brecht as an  
23 equitable doctrine in comparison with AEDPA,  
24 which is statutory?

25 Does one have preference over the

1 other, the statutory over the equitable, or are  
2 they both to be treated -- given the same  
3 weight?

4 MS. BAHAL: Our position in this case,  
5 Your Honor, is that both Brecht and  
6 AEDPA/Chapman are both preconditions to habeas  
7 relief and that both have been satisfied in this  
8 case.

9 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, I understand  
10 that, but if you had to choose between one or  
11 the other, which has the higher status?

12 MS. BAHAL: The Brecht question asks a  
13 question that requires a more difficult hurdle  
14 for a defendant to satisfy, but I believe that  
15 they are both equally important in the granting  
16 of habeas relief.

17 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, Brecht is -- is  
18 a -- an opinion decision from this Court, and,  
19 as I said, it's equitable. AEDPA is statutory.  
20 And you don't think there's any difference as  
21 far as which has the higher stature and which  
22 one should command more of our attention?

23 MS. BAHAL: I -- I think they both  
24 must be satisfied before habeas relief should be  
25 granted, as they were in this case.



1 JUSTICE THOMAS: Well, if you think --  
2 if you don't think that they can be, if you  
3 don't think they are compatible, let's assume  
4 just for the sake of discussion that someone  
5 thinks they're incompatible, which takes  
6 precedence?

7 MS. BAHAL: I'm not sure I know how to  
8 answer the question as -- as we're not conceding  
9 that one test is more important or less  
10 important than the other. We think they both  
11 must be satisfied, as -- as they were here, and  
12 an act of Congress is important, as is this  
13 Court's precedent.

14 JUSTICE KAGAN: I mean, if that's  
15 true, Ms. Bahal, that both have to be satisfied,  
16 then why not just tell courts that both have to  
17 be satisfied? You know, it seems like kind of a  
18 waste of pages and a kind -- but, you know, just  
19 go through the motions, do it twice.

20 And I understand why you don't want  
21 that because that's not the way the Sixth  
22 Circuit decision reads, so it's unfair perhaps  
23 to ask you to answer this question because, you  
24 know, your client has a real interest in keeping  
25 this judgment.

1                   But, I mean, I guess -- I guess my  
2 question here is -- is, if, one, you know,  
3 generally subsumes the other, but maybe  
4 contra-Ayala and contra-Fry we could imagine a  
5 case in which that wasn't true, just have the  
6 courts go through both and we'll be sure?

7                   MS. BAHAL: Courts can do formal  
8 application of both. That -- that's up to the  
9 courts. The question here is whether --

10                  JUSTICE KAGAN: Yeah. I mean, the  
11 question is --

12                  MS. BAHAL: -- it's error not to.

13                  JUSTICE KAGAN: -- is whether to  
14 require it, right?

15                  MS. BAHAL: Yeah. The question --

16                  JUSTICE KAGAN: And so why not just  
17 say, you know, you -- you have to do it just so  
18 we're sure that no errors are taking place and  
19 that AEDPA is being considered in the right way?

20                  MS. BAHAL: To require parties and  
21 courts to go through the time, effort, energy of  
22 briefing arguing two separate questions, the  
23 2254(d) question first, when it's answered and  
24 then require that whole round of time, energy,  
25 effort to then answer the Brecht question when

1 we know the Brecht question will answer the  
2 AEDPA/Chapman inquiry seems unnecessary.

3 Courts can do it. That's fine. But,  
4 here, the question is whether it's error not to  
5 do it. And the --

6 JUSTICE BREYER: You can make up cases  
7 where -- where it could really lead to a  
8 different result. The habeas judge sits there  
9 and says, Smith, the juror saw the shackle. I'm  
10 sure he saw the shackle. And so it's -- it's --  
11 it's not harmless. It's harmful.

12 And then he says, of course, the court  
13 of appeals over there in the state, what they  
14 said is that Smith didn't see the shackle  
15 because he was looking out the window, and I  
16 don't believe that, but I think a reasonable  
17 juror could have believed it. See? Now we've  
18 got different results from the two tests.

19 And so they're saying, well, that  
20 could have happened. And then you say, well, it  
21 never happened. She says that's hardly  
22 surprising because nobody could understand the  
23 test, but -- but, regardless, it could happen.  
24 So what are we supposed to do?

25 And -- and that's sort of where I'm

1 stuck. I can imagine cases where it happens and  
2 they seem far and -- few and far between, but I  
3 can imagine it, and so what are we supposed to  
4 do?

5 MS. BAHAL: Well, in the hypothetical  
6 you just gave, Justice Breyer, that question  
7 goes to whether there was an underlying  
8 constitutional violation in the first place if  
9 someone sees the shackles or not. Here, the --

10 JUSTICE BREYER: There was.

11 MS. BAHAL: -- record is undisputed --

12 JUSTICE BREYER: There was. There was  
13 a -- well, let's make it just -- just make a  
14 different thing. I mean, you see, make a  
15 different thing was -- was -- was this witness  
16 believable. The habeas judge says, yeah, I  
17 think he's absolutely believable, and,  
18 therefore, this omission here of the witness was  
19 really harmful. You know, the other one says:  
20 No, it wasn't, it wasn't believable at all.

21 First judge: Ah, I think I agree with  
22 that second -- well, no, I don't, but I could  
23 see a reasonable juror might. Now that's being  
24 a little too honest, but you see the problem.

25 MS. BAHAL: The context that we're

1 advocating here and our approach here is limited  
2 to the context where there is an underlying  
3 constitutional violation. The weighing the  
4 credibility might not fall into that category.

5 And so the relationship between the  
6 standards as I described them is limited to  
7 where Chapman is the underlying clearly  
8 established law --

9 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, in --

10 MS. BAHAL: -- because there --

11 JUSTICE ALITO: I'm sorry, no, please  
12 finish.

13 MS. BAHAL: Because there is an  
14 underlying constitutional violation where  
15 Chapman applies, Brecht would subsume the  
16 AEDPA/Chapman inquiry.

17 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, Brecht calls on  
18 the federal habeas judge to make a personal  
19 judgment. The federal habeas judge could say, I  
20 personally have a grave doubt, I -- I -- I  
21 personally think that this had a substantial  
22 effect on the outcome.

23 But AEDPA looks at something  
24 different, and a judge -- couldn't a judge say:  
25 I personally think this had a substantial

1 effect, but a fair-minded jurist could reach --  
2 could reasonably reach the opposite conclusion?  
3 They're looking at two different things, aren't  
4 they?

5 MS. BAHAL: The standards are an  
6 apples-to-apples comparison because they're all  
7 looking at whether the constitutional trial  
8 error affected the verdict and they're setting  
9 different hurdles for that, with Brecht being  
10 the higher hurdle. You can't surpass the Brecht  
11 hurdle without also satisfying the AEDPA/Chapman  
12 hurdle.

13 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, why is that so?  
14 Isn't what I just said possible, a judge could  
15 say, I personally think that it had a  
16 substantial effect, but -- and I have no grave  
17 doubt about that? On the other hand, a  
18 reasonable jurist could reach the opposite  
19 conclusion. Is that -- is that irrational? Is  
20 it inconsistent?

21 MS. BAHAL: It would be like a  
22 prosecutor standing up at closing argument and  
23 saying, there is more than a reasonable  
24 possibility that this defendant is innocent, but  
25 I, the state, still proved him guilty beyond a

1 reasonable doubt.

2 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, no, it's not at  
3 all the same.

4 MS. BAHAL: The -- the Brecht  
5 standard, because it subsumes the AEDPA inquiry,  
6 you cannot have a finding of grave doubt on one  
7 hand with a -- a fair-minded jurist concluding  
8 on the other that the harm was harmless beyond a  
9 reasonable doubt.

10 JUSTICE ALITO: Well, maybe our --  
11 maybe our opinions have confused things by  
12 introducing this concept of one subsuming the  
13 other. Why shouldn't we just get rid of that?

14 AEDPA is a statute. It says in  
15 unequivocal terms you can't grant federal habeas  
16 relief unless the decision is based on an  
17 unreasonable application of federal law defined  
18 in a certain way. Period.

19 There's no way that federal relief,  
20 federal habeas relief, can be granted unless  
21 that is satisfied. So forget about what  
22 subsumes something subsuming the other. Brecht  
23 was an equitable decision. It continues to have  
24 force in a situation in which there isn't a --  
25 an applicable AEDPA provision, which is what Fry

1 addressed when there wasn't a harmlessness  
2 determination by the -- by -- by the state  
3 court. Isn't that -- doesn't that simplify  
4 things? And is there anything wrong with it?

5 MS. BAHAL: If you disagree with the  
6 logical relationship as I laid out and require  
7 formal application of both tests, application,  
8 formal application of AEDPA here confirms the  
9 result.

10 The Michigan Supreme Court opinion was  
11 contrary to clearly established law. The law  
12 that was to be applied was Chapman, which  
13 requires the state to prove the error harmless  
14 beyond a reasonable doubt.

15 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: This is not --  
16 the -- AEDPA was a sea change in habeas law, and  
17 this is why it's -- and this is the argument  
18 your friend makes -- different from Brecht. It  
19 said you've made your determination under Brecht  
20 and that's fine. We don't care whether there's  
21 one judge who disagrees with the state court.  
22 We want to make sure that that determination is  
23 unreasonable, that there's no reasonable jurist  
24 out there.

25 That's a totally different inquiry.



1 And the same with respect to the materials that  
2 are before it. Yes, state -- you know, you may  
3 have looked at a wide range of materials, you,  
4 the federal habeas judge, and made your  
5 determination. AEDPA says, for review, we want  
6 to look at only the Supreme Court cases. We  
7 don't care about the lower courts. It -- it  
8 elevated the importance of the state court  
9 determination.

10 So the idea that it's informal or --  
11 or, you know, you could -- they -- they ask the  
12 same question, I think -- and it's -- maybe I'm  
13 just repeating Justice Alito's point, but they  
14 don't ask the same question.

15 MS. BAHAL: They -- they ask the  
16 question as to whether what the state court did  
17 was an unreasonable application of clearly  
18 established federal law.

19 In this case, where the underlying  
20 constitutional violation requires Chapman, that  
21 is a very different review than when the  
22 underlying determination is, for instance,  
23 sufficiency under Jackson or inefficient of  
24 counsel under Strickland. Both Jackland --  
25 Jackson and Strickland require deference to the

1 state, and then, when you add AEDPA on top of  
2 that, this Court has called that dual deference.

3           When you're applying Chapman as the  
4 underlying standard, that requires the state to  
5 prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the error  
6 was harmless. It's a -- it's a question, as  
7 this Court called it in -- in the Neder case,  
8 whether the evidence could rationally lead to a  
9 different verdict. If it could, then reversal  
10 is required.

11           The AEDPA lens in this case needs to  
12 be viewed in the context of Chapman, unlike the  
13 other standards.

14           JUSTICE BARRETT: But, Ms. Bahal, I  
15 don't understand you to be arguing for  
16 straight-up Brecht. Don't you kind of argue for  
17 Brecht but as limited with the guardrails of  
18 AEDPA and that why the Sixth Circuit's decision  
19 was okay here is that it was Brecht, but they  
20 only considered clearly established Supreme  
21 Court law -- just putting aside, just assuming  
22 that they did -- and -- and all of the -- the  
23 differences that Judge Thapar points out in his  
24 dissent from the denial of en banc review, you  
25 say, well, they did all that; it was just the

1 substantive standard. So you're advocating this  
2 hybrid thing, which seems to me kind of  
3 confusing. That's not really what Brecht said.

4 So why not, just for the sake of  
5 clarity, to make it -- you know, as Justice  
6 Breyer's pointed out, it's hard to unpack all  
7 this. For the sake of clarity, why not just  
8 tell courts apply both, kind of -- explain it  
9 like Judge Easterbrook did, apply AEDPA and even  
10 if AEDPA's relitigation bar would permit it, you  
11 know, apply Brecht too, and they have to pass  
12 both in order to get relief?

13 MS. BAHAL: So I -- I agree, the  
14 approach we advocate here is applying Brecht,  
15 and if the Brecht inquiry finds actual prejudice  
16 without relying on sources of law that would be  
17 impermissible under 2254(d), we know the answer  
18 to the AEDPA inquiry.

19 If there are sources that are relied  
20 upon, then formal application of --

21 JUSTICE BARRETT: But Brecht --

22 MS. BAHAL: -- AEDPA might make sense.

23 JUSTICE BARRETT: -- didn't require  
24 that because Brecht preceded 2254(d)(1). So  
25 you're not really asking just for the

1 application of Brecht. You're trying to meld  
2 the two together in a new test, right?

3 MS. BAHAL: I -- I don't think of it  
4 as a new test. I think of it as a assurance or  
5 a check that the Brecht test will actually  
6 subsume the AEDPA inquiry.

7 But, again, here, formal application  
8 of AEDPA confirms the result. The state court  
9 adjudication on the merits was contrary to  
10 clearly established law. They found the error  
11 harmless because there was an unacceptable risk  
12 of impermissible factors coming into play. That  
13 is not the Chapman test.

14 That was a standard from this Court's  
15 opinion in Holbrook that applied to determine if  
16 there was a constitutional violation by having  
17 four uniformed officers sitting behind the bar  
18 in the courtroom. That is not what should have  
19 been applied here.

20 My friend on the other side agrees  
21 that Chapman is the underlying law. So formal  
22 --

23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: What about --

24 MS. BAHAL: -- application  
25 here confirms the result.

1 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: Ms. Bahal, what  
2 about the fact that all the jurors testified  
3 that the shackles did not influence the verdict?

4 MS. BAHAL: Thank you, Justice  
5 Kavanaugh. This Court has made clear, first in  
6 Holbrook and again in Deck, that relying on  
7 juror testimony as to whether the effect of  
8 shackles affected their verdict is unreliable  
9 because a juror will not always be aware of the  
10 effect of seeing a defendant in shackles. It  
11 has sort of a subconscious effect on the jurors.  
12 And so it is not at all surprising that a juror  
13 was not able to testify on the remand  
14 proceedings that -- that, yes, I saw the  
15 shackles and, yes, they affected the verdict.

16 This Court recognized in Holbrook and  
17 Deck that the effect of shackling is implicit in  
18 the juror and they will not be able to  
19 articulate the reasons why the shackling is  
20 prejudicial.

21 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: And a second  
22 question. Chief Judge Sutton in his opinion,  
23 joined by Judge Kethledge, seemed to suggest  
24 that you apply AEDPA. If the state court's  
25 issued a ruling on the harmlessness question

1 under Chapman, then you apply AEDPA. If the  
2 state court did not issue a ruling on the merits  
3 of the harmlessness question, then you apply  
4 Brecht.

5 So not really applying both in every  
6 case but first making that determination, did  
7 the state court actually conduct a harmlessness  
8 analysis. If so, AEDPA. If not, Brecht.

9 Anything to say for that approach?

10 MS. BAHAL: The -- the statute itself  
11 requires where there is an adjudication on the  
12 merits that AEDPA will apply. Here, both sides  
13 agree there was an adjudication on the merits.  
14 And so the 2254(d) question does apply, as does  
15 Brecht.

16 We think the Brecht question answers  
17 the 2254 inquiry, but that is one way that AEDPA  
18 can be informally applied through Brecht. Both  
19 -- both tests apply, and both tests have been  
20 satisfied here.

21 JUSTICE ALITO: You mentioned that the  
22 state supreme court referred to an unacceptable  
23 risk. Is there any reason why that phrase in a  
24 very short opinion should not be understood to  
25 mean a risk that cannot be ruled out beyond a

1 reasonable doubt?

2 MS. BAHAL: They cited the test from  
3 Holbrook. We know the context in which the  
4 Holbrook court used that test. It was a test to  
5 determine whether there was a constitutional  
6 violation in the first place.

7 The state concedes in their briefing  
8 that it was not a harmless error test. The test  
9 to be applied, as we all agree, was the Chapman  
10 test. There's no indication from the supreme  
11 court opinion that they applied Chapman. They  
12 certainly didn't cite it, and there's no  
13 indication that they applied it at all. They  
14 did not hold the state to that burden of proving  
15 the error harmless beyond a reasonable doubt.

16 If there are no further questions, I  
17 would ask this Court to please affirm.

18 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: I guess I have  
19 one further one. We talk about informally  
20 applying AEDPA and formally applying it. What  
21 do you understand that difference to be?

22 MS. BAHAL: I use that terminology in  
23 light of this Court's opinions in Fry and --

24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: No, no, I know  
25 -- I know we've used the terminology. I just

1 want you to explain to me -- why don't you  
2 explain to me what we meant.

3 (Laughter.)

4 MS. BAHAL: So the -- the formal  
5 application of -- of AEDPA, as I understand it,  
6 requires making a determination as to what is  
7 the last reasoned opinion. Informal application  
8 through an understanding that the Brecht test  
9 will subsume the AEDPA inquiry means no matter  
10 what the last reasoned opinion from the state  
11 court is, it was unreasonable because there has  
12 been a finding of actual prejudice.

13 And so the informal application  
14 doesn't require specifically making the  
15 determination as to the last reasoned opinion.

16 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice  
17 Thomas?

18 JUSTICE THOMAS: No, Chief.

19 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Justice Alito?  
20 No? All right.

21 Justice Kavanaugh, do you have  
22 anything further?

23 JUSTICE KAVANAUGH: No further  
24 questions.

25 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you.



1 MS. BAHAL: Thank you.

2 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Rebuttal, Ms.  
3 Hammoud?

4 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF FADWA A. HAMMOUD  
5 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER

6 MS. HAMMOUD: Thank you, Mr. Chief  
7 Justice.

8 If I may, I'd like to address Justice  
9 Thomas's and Justice Alito's question in terms  
10 of which takes precedent when there's a  
11 congressional mandate. And when there is a  
12 state court merits application -- adjudication,  
13 this is the way we believe the test should work  
14 because that is the basic structure of AEDPA.

15 If this -- if there is a state --  
16 state court merits adjudication, then they must  
17 start with AEDPA first. The point that we were  
18 trying to make is let's say a petitioner  
19 prevails because a state court used the wrong  
20 test, for example, stated that Chapman is not  
21 beyond a reasonable doubt but by probable cause  
22 standard.

23 The petitioner then wouldn't go to a  
24 direct Chapman, pure Chapman application. Then,  
25 as the Court in -- stated in Fry, Brecht would

1 apply. So, in terms of what the Court should  
2 articulate, if there is a state court merits  
3 adjudication, then AEDPA's highly deferential  
4 standards kicks in and it makes -- it makes  
5 sense that they should start there.

6 And if a Petitioner prevails under  
7 AEDPA, then we move over to the next test. I  
8 know that my friend had stated that the Sixth  
9 Circuit did just that when they asked -- when --  
10 when they asked the question in Brecht, and,  
11 again, that's an independent question, we know  
12 me as a judge.

13 We have to take the Sixth Circuit at  
14 their word when they specifically stated that  
15 the answer in the circuit is that Brecht is  
16 always the test and there is no reason to ask  
17 whether the state court unreasonably applied  
18 Chapman.

19 So to say that Brecht encompasses  
20 AEDPA is simply not true because, again, they  
21 ask different questions. And in this -- in this  
22 specific case, and in cases to follow, it is  
23 important that this Court, like the test that --  
24 that had been suggested, when there is a state  
25 court merits adjudication, we start with

1 AEDPA/Chapman.

2           If a Petitioner prevails, then you  
3 move over to Brecht. But what happened here, if  
4 a state court finds that there is substantial or  
5 an injurious effect on the verdict, I think that  
6 that's already been articulated. The question  
7 is different.

8           Just because I, a federal judge,  
9 disagreed or even as this Court's jurisprudence  
10 had articulated, if -- if I, a federal judge  
11 believed they are wrong, they must still ask the  
12 question, is it beyond all fair-minded  
13 disagreement or could fair -- fair-minded, not  
14 biased, fair-minded jurists agree with the state  
15 court's conclusion? And that's --

16           JUSTICE KAGAN: But Ms. Hammoud --

17           MS. HAMMOUD: -- at the heart of  
18 AEDPA.

19           JUSTICE KAGAN: -- this is not really  
20 a case where somebody is saying, look, I believe  
21 one thing, let's call it X, but at the same  
22 time, I think a fair-minded person could  
23 disagree with me, because what you're looking to  
24 the fair-minded person to decide is something  
25 completely different.

1           The standard in Brecht is so much  
2 higher than the standard in Chapman that even  
3 when you import that level of deference, what  
4 the court said in Ayala, what the court said in  
5 Fry is even when you import some deference,  
6 the -- there's such a gap between the Chapman  
7 and the Brecht standard that the Brecht standard  
8 is necessarily going to be the greater one.

9           MS. HAMMOUD: Thank you, Justice  
10 Kagan. I agree when you when you're comparing  
11 Brecht and Chapman. Those are two harmless  
12 error tests. AEDPA is completely different.

13           JUSTICE KAGAN: Right, but --

14           MS. HAMMOUD: AEDPA is an overlay.

15           JUSTICE KAGAN: -- AEDPA -- you're  
16 exactly right. AEDPA is an overlay on Chapman.  
17 And essentially what we decided in Ayala and in  
18 Fry is that even with that AEDPA overlay, the  
19 Brecht standard doesn't get close to -- the  
20 Chapman standard doesn't get close to the Brecht  
21 standard.

22           MS. HAMMOUD: Thank you, Your Honor.  
23 The question -- AEDPA was not at play in Fry.  
24 And never once, and the court in Ayala  
25 reaffirmed that, did it displace AEDPA.

1           And the Court in Ayala went through an  
2 extensive analysis, and I understand the two  
3 sentences that talk about subsumes. And this is  
4 why this case is a perfect vehicle for this  
5 Court to apply both of the tests, and  
6 distinguish between the different standards, the  
7 different limitations, the different burdens,  
8 but this Court in Ayala went through and did an  
9 extensive analysis showing how Ayala did not  
10 meet the test under Brecht, and, separately,  
11 under AEDPA/Chapman.

12           And that's what we're asking the Court  
13 to do here today because those differences  
14 matter and because there is confusion and  
15 tension. And this Court should clarify, we  
16 believe, through its -- through its application  
17 and articulate the test, that you have  
18 articulated but not answered this question.

19           And the Sixth Circuit certainly did  
20 not give the states deference. Thank you, Your  
21 Honors.

22           CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,  
23 counsel. The case is submitted.

24           (Whereupon, at 10:52 a.m., the case  
25 was submitted.)

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