

Serial: **221681**

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI**

**No. 2013-M-00205**

***RONNIE SMITH A/K/A RONNIE  
EDWARD SMITH***

***Petitioner***

***v.***

***STATE OF MISSISSIPPI***

***Respondent***

**ORDER**

Now before the en banc Court are (1) Ronnie Smith's Application to File a Post-Conviction Petition in the Trial Court and (2) his Motion for the Court to Convene a Quorum of Five (5) Justices to Decide Smith[']s Post[-]Conviction Petition for Collateral Relief.

Smith filed this, his sixth application outside the three-year limitations period. Miss. Code Ann. § 99-39-5(2) (Rev. 2015). He raises one claim: that the elements instruction omitted venue.

This Court will not consider venue questions raised for the first time in post-conviction proceedings. Order, ***Page v. State***, 2013-M-01645 (Miss. Dec. 17, 2015) (citing Order, ***Mason v. State***, 2015-M-00423 (Miss. Oct. 22, 2015)); ***Moreno v. State***, 79 So. 3d 508, 511 (Miss. 2012). As in ***Page*** and ***Mason***, proof of venue here was more than sufficient: The victim was found stabbed to death in his kitchen, and a crime-scene investigator testified that the victim's residence was in the First Judicial District of Hinds County.

After due consideration, we find the application should be dismissed. In addition, we find the quorum motion should be dismissed as moot.

In 2014, Smith was warned that “any future filings deemed frivolous may result in the imposition of sanctions.” Order, **Smith v. State**, 2014-M-00117 (Miss. Feb. 19, 2014). Then in 2017, he was sanctioned \$100 and warned that “future filings deemed frivolous may result not only in additional monetary sanctions, but also in restrictions on his filing applications for post-conviction collateral relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis*. Order, **Smith v. State**, 2013-M-00205 (Miss. Sept. 27, 2017) (citing Order, **Bownes v. State**, 2014-M-00478 (Miss. Sept. 20, 2017)).

After due consideration, we do not find Smith’s petition to be frivolous. But as we have in the past, we continue to warn Smith that future filings deemed frivolous may result not only in additional monetary sanctions, but also restrictions on filing applications for post-conviction collateral relief (or pleadings in that nature) *in forma pauperis*. Order, **Dunn v. State**, 2016-M-01514 (Miss. Nov. 15, 2018).

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the application is dismissed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the quorum motion is dismissed as moot.

SO ORDERED, this the 13th day of December, 2018.

/s/ James D. Maxwell II

JAMES D. MAXWELL II, JUSTICE  
FOR THE COURT

TO DISMISS APPLICATION: WALLER, C.J., KITCHENS, P.J., KING, COLEMAN,  
MAXWELL, BEAM, CHAMBERLIN, AND ISHEE, JJ.

TO DENY APPLICATION: RANDOLPH, P.J.

TO DISMISS QUORUM MOTION AS MOOT: WALLER, C.J., RANDOLPH AND  
KITCHENS, P.J., MAXWELL,

BEAM, CHAMBERLIN AND  
ISHEE, JJ.

TO DISMISS QUORUM MOTION:

KING, J.

TO DENY QUORUM MOTION:

COLEMAN, J.

KING, J., OBJECTS TO THE ORDER IN PART WITH SEPARATE WRITTEN  
STATEMENT JOINED BY KITCHENS, P.J.

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**KING, JUSTICE, OBJECTING TO THE ORDER IN PART WITH SEPARATE  
WRITTEN STATEMENT:**

¶1. Although Ronnie Smith’s application for post-conviction relief and quorum motion do not merit relief, I disagree with this Court’s warning that future filings which this Court deems frivolous may result in monetary sanctions or restrictions on filing applications for post-conviction collateral relief *in forma pauperis*.

¶2. This Court seems to tire of reading motions that it deems “frivolous” and imposes monetary sanctions on indigent defendants. The Court then bars those defendants, who in all likelihood are unable to pay the imposed sanctions, from future filings. In choosing to prioritize efficiency over justice, this Court forgets the oath that each justice took before assuming office. That oath stated in relevant part, “I . . . solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich. . . .”

¶3. I disagree with this Court’s warning that future filings may result in additional monetary sanctions or restrictions on filling applications for post-conviction collateral relief *in forma pauperis*. The imposition of monetary sanctions upon a criminal defendant

proceeding *in forma pauperis* only serves to punish or preclude that defendant from his lawful right to appeal. Black's Law Dictionary defines sanction as "[a] provision that gives force to a legal imperative by either rewarding obedience or *punishing disobedience*." *Sanction*, Black's Law Dictionary (10th ed. 2014) (emphasis added). Instead of punishing the defendant for filing a motion, I believe that this Court should simply deny or dismiss motions which lack merit. As Justice Brennan wisely stated,

The Court's order purports to be motivated by this litigant's disproportionate consumption of the Court's time and resources. Yet if his filings are truly as repetitious as it appears, it hardly takes much time to identify them as such. I find it difficult to see how the amount of time and resources required to deal properly with McDonald's petitions could be so great as to justify the step we now take. Indeed, the time that has been consumed in the preparation of the present order barring the door to Mr. McDonald far exceeds that which would have been necessary to process his petitions for the next several years at least. I continue to find puzzling the Court's fervor in ensuring that rights granted to the poor are not abused, even when so doing actually increases the drain on our limited resources.

*In re McDonald*, 489 U.S. 180, 186–87, 109 S. Ct. 993, 997, 103 L. Ed. 2d 158 (1989) (per curiam).

¶4. The same logic applies to the restriction on filing subsequent applications for post-conviction relief. To cut off an indigent defendant's right to proceed *in forma pauperis* is to cut off his access to the courts. This, in itself, violates a defendant's constitutional rights, for

Among the rights recognized by the Court as being fundamental are the rights to be free from invidious racial discrimination, to marry, to practice their religion, to communicate with free persons, to have due process in disciplinary proceedings, and to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. As a result of the recognition of these and other rights, the right of access to courts, which is necessary to vindicate all constitutional rights, also became a fundamental right.

Joseph T. Lukens, *The Prison Litigation Reform Act: Three Strikes and You're Out of Court-It May Be Effective, but Is It Constitutional?*, 70 Temp. L. Rev. 471, 474–75 (1997).

This Court must not discourage convicted defendants from exercising their right to appeal. *Wisconsin v. Glick*, 782 F.2d 670, 673 (7th Cir. 1986). Novel arguments that might remove a criminal defendant from confinement should not be discouraged by the threat of monetary sanctions and restrictions on filings. *Id.* As United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall stated,

In closing its doors today to another indigent litigant, the Court moves ever closer to the day when it leaves an indigent litigant with a meritorious claim out in the cold. And with each barrier that it places in the way of indigent litigants, and with each instance in which it castigates such litigants for having “abused the system,” . . . the Court can only reinforce in the hearts and minds of our society’s less fortunate members the unsettling message that their pleas are not welcome here.

*In re Demos*, 500 U.S. 16, 19, 111 S. Ct. 1569, 1571, 114 L. Ed. 2d 20 (1991) (Marshall, J., dissenting).

¶5. Instead of simply denying or dismissing those motions which lack merit, the Court seeks to punish the defendant for the frequency of his motion filing. However, an individual who, even incorrectly, believes that she has been deprived of her freedom should not be expected to sit silently by and wait to be forgotten. “Historically, the convictions with the best chances of being overturned were those that got *repeatedly reviewed on appeal* or those chosen by legal institutions such as the Innocence Project and the Center on Wrongful Convictions.” Emily Barone, *The Wrongly Convicted: Why More Falsely Accused People*

*are Being Exonerated Today Than Ever Before*, Time, <http://time.com/wrongly-convicted/>

(last visited Nov. 14, 2018) (emphasis added). The Washington Post reports that

the average time served for the 1,625 exonerated individuals in the registry is more than nine years. Last year, three innocent murder defendants in Cleveland were exonerated 39 years after they were convicted—they spent their entire adult lives in prison—and even they were lucky: We know without doubt that the vast majority of innocent defendants who are convicted of crimes are never identified and cleared.

Samuel R. Gross, *The Staggering Number of Wrongful Convictions in America*, Wash. Post, July 24, 2015, [http://wapo.st/1SGHcyd?tid=ss\\_mail&utm\\_term=.4bed8ad6f2cc](http://wapo.st/1SGHcyd?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.4bed8ad6f2cc). Rather than imposing sanctions and threatening to restrict access to the courts, I would simply dismiss or deny motions which lack merit. Therefore, although I find no merit in both Smith's application for post-conviction relief and his quorum motion and agree they should be dismissed, I disagree with this Court's warning of additional sanctions and restrictions.

**KITCHENS, P.J., JOINS THIS SEPARATE WRITTEN STATEMENT.**