

Gideon v. Wainwright
Justice Hugo L. Black, Who Wrote the Opinion, Monologue
(363 Words)

[Justice Black sits on the bench and says:] I'm Justice Hugo Black. It's not often that the Supreme Court comes to a unanimous decision, but *Gideon v. Wainwright* was one of those cases. To put it into perspective, *Brown v. Board of Education* was another unanimous decision. All of the Justices were so clear that, as I wrote in the opinion:

[Justice Black opens a law book and reads from it:] "... lawyers in criminal courts are necessities, not luxuries."

"Even the intelligent and educated layman has small and sometimes no skill in the science of law. If charged with crime, he is incapable, generally, of determining for himself whether the indictment is good or bad.

He is unfamiliar with the rules of evidence. Left without the aid of counsel, he may be put on trial without a proper charge, and convicted upon incompetent evidence, or evidence irrelevant to the issue or otherwise inadmissible.

He lacks both the skill and knowledge adequately to prepare his defense, even though he have a perfect one. He requires the guiding hand of counsel at every step in the proceedings against him.

Without it, though he be not guilty, he faces the danger of conviction because he does not know how to establish his innocence."

[Justice Black closes the volume and reads this on the back of the book:] This opinion set the stage for public defender systems in the states. The attorney who defended Mr. Gideon when he was tried again was Fred Turner. Mr. Turner dismantled the so-called evidence against Mr. Gideon in a way that a layperson could not. It only took the jury an hour to come to a verdict of not guilty.

Mr. Turner demonstrated how important it is for people accused of a crime to have legal representation. Even if they can't afford an attorney, the court must appoint one -- when a defendant is faced with a serious criminal charge -- so that justice is served. And when justice is served, our communities also are served -- and so is our society as a whole. Here is Mr. Turner.