

In the Supreme Court of the United States



STATE OF OKLAHOMA,

Petitioner,

v.

CHARLES MICHAEL COOPER,

Respondent.

**On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the
Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals**

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTION PRESENTED

Whether *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020), should be overruled.

LIST OF PROCEEDINGS

Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals

No. F-2018-830

Charles Michael Cooper, Appellant v.
State of Oklahoma, Appellee

Date of Final Opinion: April 8, 2021

Oklahoma District Court (Pontotoc County)

No. CF-2016-535

The State of Oklahoma, Plaintiff v.
Charles Michael Cooper, Defendant

Date of Judgment and Sentence: August 10, 2018

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OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, dated April 8, 2021, is included in the Appendix at App.1a-12a. The order of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, dated August 19, 2020, remanding the case for an evidentiary hearing is included below at App.22a-27a. The Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law of the District Court in and for Pontotoc County, State of Oklahoma, dated November 18, 2020, is included below at App.13a-21a. These opinions and orders were not designated for publication.



JURISDICTION

The judgment of the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals was entered on April 8, 2021. App.1a. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a).



STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

18 U.S.C. § 1151 (in relevant part) **Indian country defined**

[T]he term ‘Indian country’, as used in this chapter, means (a) all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation.

18 U.S.C. § 1153(a) **Offenses committed within Indian country**

Any Indian who commits against the person or property of another Indian or other person any of the following offenses, namely, murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, maiming, a felony under chapter 109A, incest, a felony assault under section 113, an assault against an individual who has not attained the age of 16 years, felony child abuse or neglect, arson, burglary, robbery, and a felony under section 661 of this title within the Indian country, shall be subject to the same law

and penalties as all other persons committing any of the above offenses, within the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States.



STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Thousands of state criminal prosecutions have been called into question by this Court's decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020). Like in many other pending petitions before this Court, this case presents the question whether *McGirt* should be overruled. See, e.g., *Oklahoma v. Williams*, No. 21-265; *Oklahoma v. Mitchell*, No. 21-254. Review is warranted to examine that question. The petition for a writ of certiorari in this case should either be granted or, in the alternative, held if the petition in any other case presenting the same question is granted.

1. On August 16, 2016, respondent brutally murdered Cindy Allen, who suffered from a disability that made it difficult to walk. Tr. 8.* Cindy was found on her stomach in her bed. Tr. 13-14. She was wearing underwear, a bra, and some kind of nightgown, but her underwear was partially pulled down in the front, and her bra was pulled up exposing her breasts. Tr. 13-14. There was a green and black, plaid-colored pair of pajama pants tied around Cindy's neck. Tr. 14.

Respondent confessed that he entered Cindy's house through a window. Tr. 26. Respondent took a pair of latex gloves with him. Tr. 14-19. Respondent

* All fact citations are to respondent's trial transcript (Tr.), which is available below. See Sup. Ct. R. 12.7.

attacked Cindy on her bed, choking her with his hands and placing one knee on the floor for leverage. Tr. 26. He then took one of the victim's shirts and wrapped it around her neck to finish strangling her. As he did so, he digitally penetrated her vagina with his right middle finger. Tr. 27. Cindy fought for her life, leaving scratches on respondent's hands. Tr. 30. After he killed Cindy, respondent set her house on fire. Tr. 28-29.

Respondent was convicted of first degree murder, first degree arson, first degree burglary, and second degree rape by instrumentation. The trial court sentenced respondent to life imprisonment without parole for murder, thirty-five years imprisonment for arson, twenty years imprisonment for burglary, and fifteen years imprisonment for rape.

2. After this Court issued its decision in *McGirt*, the Court of Criminal Appeals remanded the case to the trial court for an evidentiary hearing. On remand, the court found that respondent is an Indian based on the parties' stipulation that he has 39/64 Indian blood and is enrolled in the Chickasaw Nation. App.14a-15a. The court further concluded, based on *McGirt*, that the crimes occurred on the reservation of the Chickasaw Nation. App.15a-21a.

The Court of Criminal Appeals vacated the convictions, holding that "*McGirt* governs this case and requires us to find the District Court of Pontotoc County did not have jurisdiction to prosecute Cooper." App.3a-4a.

Three judges wrote separate opinions. Judge Lumpkin concurred in the result. App.7a-9a. He expressed his view that the Court's opinion in *McGirt*

“contravened * * * the history leading to the disestablishment of the Indian reservations in Oklahoma,” but concluded that he was bound to follow it. App.7a.

Judge Lewis specially concurred based on his previous concurrences in *Bosse* and *Hogner* in which he—in relevant part—explained that *McGirt* required reversal. App.10a; see *Hogner v. State*, 2021 OK CR 4, ¶¶ 1-5, ___ P.3d ___ (Lewis, J., concurring in results); *Bosse v. State*, 484 P.3d 286, 299 (Okla. Crim. App. 2021) (Lewis, J., specially concurring).

Judge Hudson also concurred in the result, reiterating his “previously expressed views on the significance of *McGirt*, its far-reaching impact on the criminal justice system in Oklahoma and the need for a practical solution by Congress.” App.11a.



REASONS FOR GRANTING THE PETITION

In the decision below, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals applied *McGirt* to free yet another criminal from state custody, exacerbating the crisis in the criminal-justice system in Oklahoma. As the State of Oklahoma has explained, reconsideration of *McGirt* is the only realistic avenue for ending the ongoing chaos affecting every corner of daily life in Oklahoma. *See, e.g.*, Pet. at 21-32, *Oklahoma v. Bosse*, No. 21-186. This case presents yet another opportunity to end the damage caused by *McGirt*. This petition should either be granted or, if a petition presenting the same question is granted, held pending a decision in the granted case and then disposed of as is appropriate.

McGirt was wrongly decided, and the Court's review is urgently needed because no recent decision has had a more immediate and disruptive effect on life in an American State. *McGirt* contravened longstanding precedent on the disestablishment of Indian reservations. 140 S. Ct. at 2485 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). It did so by wrongly reasoning that historical materials showing the original public meaning of statutes may be considered in the disestablishment inquiry "only" to "clear up" statutory ambiguity. *See id.* at 2467-2468, 2469-2470 (majority opinion). But consideration of history is necessary precisely because it is unclear whether Congress's alienation of Indian lands at the turn of the century changed the Indian country status of the land. *See id.* at 2488 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting). Under the correct framework prescribed by this Court's precedent, it is clear that Congress disestablished the Creek territory in Oklahoma, as

well as the territories of the four other Oklahoma tribes. And with that conclusion, it is clear the decision below is incorrect and warrants reversal.

Overruling *McGirt* and restoring the state jurisdiction it stripped is important not only for this case and the victim of the terrible crimes at issue. As the Chief Justice correctly predicted, the “burdens” of the *McGirt* decision on the State of Oklahoma have been “extraordinary.” 140 S. Ct. at 2500. The challenges from that seismic shift in jurisdiction have rippled through every aspect of life in Oklahoma. Most immediately, *McGirt* has jeopardized the state’s jurisdiction over thousands of criminal cases—this case being just one of them.

The question presented in this case is materially identical to those presented in other petitions already pending before this Court. *See supra* at 3. In the event certiorari is more appropriate in this case than in another case, the Court should grant review in this case to answer the question common to all of them. Alternatively, this Court should hold this petition pending the resolution of that question in another case.



CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted. In the alternative, if the petition in another case presenting the same question is granted, the petition in this case should be held pending a decision there and then disposed of as is appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

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