

Case Brief

Crim law: the mens rea requirement

1/28/15

Identity of Case

State v. Fugate, 303 N.E. 2d 313 (2d. Dist. 1973)

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Summary of Facts/ Procedural History

Defendant Fugate committed armed robbery at a garage, and in the process killed the owner. He struck him on two different occasions with the barrel of the shotgun, causing severe head wounds. He then ordered his victim into the basement where he shot and killed him. A lot of this was caught on camera. Jury returned a conviction of armed robbery and murder first.

Defendant appeals on the sufficiency of the evidence that the killing was done purposefully, and cites a lot of cases which show the intent is the most essential element of the charge..."the cited cases have little more than academic interest in this case unless the jury was required to accept the testimony of Fugate that the shooting was accidental to the exclusion of all other evidence presented at trial."

Judgment affirmed.

Statement of the Issue

May the jury find that a shooting was purposeful (a subjective intent of the defendant) when the defendant testifies that it was accidental?

Holding

An intent to kill may be presumed where the natural and probable consequence of a wrongful act is to produce death, and such intent may be deduced from all the surrounding circumstances, including the instrument used to produce death and the manner of inflicting a fatal wound.

Reasoning

It was pretty obvious to the jury that the defendant meant to kill the victim from his action.

This law basically recognizes the fact that defendants don't want to go to jail, and they have the right to vigorously defend themselves (they won't be prosecuted for perjury, for example) but that the jury doesn't have to believe them just because they took an oath. They can consider the defendant's credibility along with everyone else's. It would be impossible to ever prove intent if you were forced to rely solely on the defendant's subjective explanation of his intent.

Evaluation