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Maryland v. Pringle, 540 U.S. 366 (2003)

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Facts of the Case: On August 7 1999 at 31 a.m., an officer attached to Baltimore County Police service stopped a Nissan Maxima for speeding. The car had three occupants: Pringle, Otis Smith, and Dante Partlow, who was the owner of the car. As Pringle opened the glove compartment to retrieve the documents requested, the officer noticed that he had a large amount of rolled up notes. The officer found that Partlow had no standing violations. He, therefore, warned him and requested the occupants to vacate the car. He inquired whether there were any narcotics or weapons aboard, but Partlow indicated that he had none. The officer embarked on a search that yielded five plastic baggies containing cocaine from the backseat armrest. None of three men offered information on the ownership of the retrieved cocaine at the spot. Therefore, all of them were arrested and taken to the police station [2].

Procedural Posture: Pringle gave a written and oral confession, where he acknowledged ownership of the drugs. The police, thus, released his two companions under *Miranda v. Arizona* [3]. He confessed that they were going to a party, and he intended to sell the cocaine or use it for sex. He maintained that his two companions did not understand anything about his possession of the drugs. The jury found him guilty of possession of cocaine with the intention to distribute. The Court of Special Appeals of Maryland held the position of the jury to sentence him to prison for ten years without possibility of parole [5].

Issues:

Issue 1: Was there evidence to show that Pringle had control, dominion, or even knowledge of the drugs?

Issue 2: Did the arrest violate the Fourth and the Fourteenth Amendments of the US Constitution that mandate police officers to obtain arrest warrants before accosting suspects?

Was there a probable cause to show that a felony had been committed?

Holding:

Issue 1: In *Brinegar v. United States*, all probable substances were defined as a reasonable ground for suspicion that an individual is guilty [1]. According to *Ybarra v. Illinois*, an officer can proceed with searches and arrest to particularize this suspicion [6]. **Issue 2:**

The Maryland law gives police officers the discretion to arrest people without warrant in cases where there exists probable cause to suspect or believe that the person has committed or is committing a felony. In *Ornelas v. United States*, any facts looked at by an objectively sound officer and are justifiable can be referred to as probable cause [4]

Judgment/ Disposition: Reversed. The Court of Appeals of Maryland was divided by one vote and held that there was lack of specific facts that showed that could show that Pringle had control, knowledge or dominion over the drugs [5].

Rationale: The court held that the drugs were merely found at the back of the car, while Pringle was the driver. This was not sufficient proof that he had dominion or knowledge of the drugs. Under the Fourth Amendment, people have to be secured against unreasonable seizures or searches, and no warrants should be issued unless there is a probable cause. The officer, upon recovering the plastic bags with cocaine did not have probable cause to believe that Pringle committed the crime.

Dissent/Comment/Significance/Impact: *Maryland v. Pringle* demonstrates the importance of the police limiting their activities within the discretion accorded to them by the law [2]. By contravening the Fourth Amendment, the officers could not apply the evidence retrieved from the car to the case against Pringle. By accepting that Pringle was solely responsible for the drugs and freeing his companions, the officers weakened the evidence, because they could not prove that he had dominion, control, or knowledge over the drugs.

References

- [1] Brinegar v. United States, 338 U. S. 160, 175. Internet Resource.
- [2] Maryland v. Pringle, 540 U.S. 366 (2003). Internet Resource.
- [3] Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U. S. 436 (1966). Internet Resource.
- [4] Ornelas v. United States, 517 U. S. 690 (1996). Internet Resource.
- [5] Pringle v. State, 141 Md. App. 292, 785 A. 2d 790 (2001). Internet Resource.
- [6] Ybarra v. Illinois, 444 U. S. 85 (1979). Internet Resource.

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