



**60th ANNIVERSARY OF
U.S. SUPREME COURT
RULING IN
GIDEON V. WAINWRIGHT**

Did you know?

Until 1963, poor people accused of committing a crime did not have a voice to speak for them. It wasn't until Clarence E. Gideon changed the course of history that those accused of crimes had the right to an attorney. Clarence E. Gideon was accused of breaking into a poolroom and taking money from a vending machine. Gideon's request for counsel was denied, and the 51-year-old drifter with an eighth-grade education defended himself against the legal case presented by the State's prosecuting attorney. He represented himself, was found guilty, and sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Gideon submitted a handwritten petition to the United States Supreme Court from his Florida prison cell, arguing that the United States Constitution should not allow poor people to be convicted and sent to prison without legal representation. On March 18, 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that Gideon's trial and conviction without the assistance of an attorney was fundamentally unfair and violated the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. On his retrial with the assistance of an attorney, Clarence Earl Gideon was acquitted.

Today, people who cannot afford to hire a lawyer in criminal cases, have the right to have an attorney represent them in court. Thus, Public Defender Offices came to exist. Public Defenders are State employees and are appointed by a court to defend accused individuals that cannot afford their own legal representation. Public Defenders provide legal representation, consultation, and advice to their clients and represent them during a criminal proceeding. The wide range of cases include everything from a misdemeanor up to a 1st degree murder involving the death penalty.

We celebrate the 60th Anniversary of Gideon whose name has different meanings, for example, "the one who cuts off." That is exactly what this case did; it cut off the injustice of the poor in this nation, and the lack of assistance to the most needed ones. It also means "warrior". Public Defenders are the warriors that everyday step into court to provide high quality representation and fight for the constitutional rights of their clients. Gideon opened the way for "Equal Justice Under the Law", regardless of income, and defended the Public Defender's essential role to ensure a fair and just criminal legal system.

"Each Era Finds an Improvement in Law for the Benefit of Mankind"

Clarence E. Gideon