

8th Grade

2nd Place

Maria Reo, Paw Paw Middle School

Teacher: Matthew Baleja

Q: Suppose that jurors are using their cell phones to Google for background information while serving on jury duty. Should jurors in Michigan be allowed to use electronic communications during a trial?

Imagine being accused of a crime and granted a jury trial. The press is giving their opinions on the case, many biased toward the prosecutor, and trying to sway the jurors' decisions. Allowing this would be unfair and in violation of the Sixth Amendment. Therefore, jurors in Michigan shouldn't be allowed to use electronic communications during a trial.

Core democratic values are fundamental beliefs of Americans that provide structure for the government and the citizens. Justice is the core democratic value that says the legal system should try to be fair to everyone. All American citizens have the right to a fair trial, as stated in the Fifth and Sixth Amendments. (Legal Information Institute, Cornell University) During court trials information about the trial is all over the news. Jurors shouldn't be able to access this information because it can be false or biased and influence their decisions. Allowing this isn't an example of justice.

Many issues have arisen over the accused party being denied a fair trial. In the court case *Sheppard v. Maxwell*, Samuel Sheppard was convicted of murdering his wife. He challenged the ruling saying the trial had been unfair, because the jurors had been able to access the wide-spread, biased publicity around his case. The Supreme Court found that the judge had denied Sheppard a fair trial in an 8-to-1 ruling. (U.S. Supreme Court Center, 1966) The media had influenced the jurors against Sheppard just as it still can today if electronic communications are not taken away from jurors while they are serving on a trial. People accused of crimes must be protected from the publicity regarding their case or they haven't been granted a fair trial as the Supreme Court found in Sheppard's case.

The media has major influence on most political matters. The election of 1800 was the first election in which the press played a big role. Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson was accused of being pro-French. Newspapers said that if he was put into power the United States would get dragged into the French Revolution and claimed he wanted to dismantle religion just because he was interested in science. On the other hand, many newspapers said that Federalist John Adams wanted to take away Americans' rights and become king. (Deverell and White, 2009, page 266) All of this bad press could have swayed voters' opinions on who to vote for just like the media does today during court cases, presidential elections, and other political issues. If jurors are allowed to use electronic communications during trials their opinions could be influenced by the media and they, therefore, could make the wrong decision.

The media is a great way to share information and opinions, but when it becomes so prejudicial that it may influence the minds of jurors serving on trial, it has gone too far. American citizens on trial must be protected from the media to allow them a fair trial. Jurors shouldn't be able to use electronic communications during a trial, as it's unfair and denying the accused justice.

Citations

Deverell, Williams and Deborah Gray White. (Eds.) (2009). United States History:

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