

Essay on supreme court case

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



United States v, Jones (2012)

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Background of the Case and Key Facts

In *United States v. Jones*, the US government had, without a warrant, installed a Global Positioning System (GPS) device onto the car belonging to the wife of a nightclub operator on suspicion of drug trafficking. The GPS system was used to track the whereabouts of the nightclub operator for 28 days. Antoine Jones had come under suspicion of trafficking narcotics and had become a joint target for the Metropolitan Police Department and the FBI (Arcila, 2012). Several investigative techniques had been employed as part of an investigative procedure and this included the use of visual surveillance on the nightclub, using a pen register and wiretap to capture Jones's cellular communication, and installing a camera fixated on the nightclub's front door. Based on the information collected using the above strategies, the government applied for a warrant from the United States District Court for the District of Columbia in 2005. The warrant was aimed at authorizing the use of an electronic tracking device on Jones Wife's Jeep Grand Cherokee (Supreme Court of the United States, 2012). The warrant was issued within 10 days.

The device was installed on the 11th day in Maryland as opposed to be in the District of Columbia where the warrant was issued. The installation was done when the Jeep was parked in a public parking lot and even change of batteries for the GPS device was done while the vehicle was parked in another parking lot in Maryland. Using signals from multiple satellites, the

GPS device was able to relay an equivalent of 2000 pages of data over the 28-day period (Supreme Court of the United States, 2012). The government succeeded in obtaining multiple counts of indictment on Jones and alleged co-conspirators in acts of distributing and possessing illegal substances. Jones filed a motion aimed at suppressing evidence collected using the GPS device but the District Court granted motion only in part by suppressing data collected during the duration when the car was parked at the garage.

Constitutional Questions

While this act of installation enabled the government to secure and indictment of Jones and his accomplices on drug trafficking conspiracy charges, this act of installing the GPS device raised some constitutional issues. Questions raised by the installation of the device included questions whether the process of using the GPS gadget to track the whereabouts of the vehicle on public streets violated the Fourth Amendment because it constituted a search (Garnett, 2012).

The Fourth Amendment of the US constitutions specifies the rights of residents to be protected in their houses, persons, papers, and property against irrational seizures and searches (Gans, 2007). Since the installation of the GPS device was aimed at obtaining specific information, then the Supreme Court ruled that the act constituted a search under Fourth Amendment meaning (Gans, 2007).

The District Court held that Jones was travelling in an automobile on public routes should not expect to be guaranteed reasonable expectations with regards to mobility. Jones was sentenced to life imprisonment in March 2007.

However, the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia reversed the conviction based on the admission of evidence that the installation of the GPS device was done without warrant thereby violating the Fourth Amendment.

On 23 January 2012, the Supreme Court, in a unanimous vote, held that the act of installing the GPS on Jones's vehicle coupled with the act of using the device to monitor the suspect's movement constituted a " search" under the provisions of the Fourth Amendment. It was argued that if following Jones stroll on public places did not constitute as search as the courts had ruled before, should the idea of using a tracking device and satellites to gather information not constitute a search because the process is used to gather information? All nine justices agreed, though for different reasons that the ploy of using the GPS device violated the provisions of the Fourth Amendment (Garnett, 2012).

A group of Justices led by Justice Scalia gave an illustration that showed that the ruling on the installation of a GPS device ought to be treated in a similar manner that a warrantless physical trespass should be treated. Dissenting opinions from other judges relied on the criteria of treating privacy expectations. What is evident with regard to opposing opinions in this case occur as a result of methodological disagreements in drawing meaning from the provisions of the Fourth Amendment (Gans, 2007). Justices Alito, Ginsburge, Kagan, and Bryer filed concurring opinions disagreeing with trespass arguments presented by Justice Scalia by arguing that the facts presented were obsolete and potentially narrow (Garnett, 2012). However,

Justice Sonya, in his concurring opinion, agreed with trespass arguments presented by Justice Scalia in addition to stressing the need for the definition of what constituted reasonable privacy expectation (Garnett, 2012). This was in light of the dangers posed by encroachment of technology on the privacy of individuals.

Ruling; The Supreme Court ruled that the installation of the GPS gadget on Jones vehicle for purposes of monitoring its whereabouts constituted a “ search” under the provisions of the Fourth Amendment (Supreme Court of the United States, 2012).

References

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