

Gideon v. Wainwright / Cartoon Analysis—Answer Key



Source: Monk, Linda R. *The Bill Of Rights: A User's Guide*. Close-Up Publishing: 1991. p. 152.

Analyze the cartoon below in terms of its meaning related to the *Gideon v. Wainwright* case. Answering the following questions will help you correctly interpret the cartoon's meaning.

1. What do you see in the cartoon? Make a list. Include objects, people, and any characteristics that seem to be exaggerated.
There is a man with a big smile. He appears to be naked except for a barrel that hangs over his shoulders. On the barrel are two pieces of paper, one that says, "Rent this Space," and another that says, "Ace Bail Bonds." He is carrying a briefcase. There is also a woman. She has a somewhat bewildered expression on her face. On her shirt are the words, "The Poor."
2. Which of the things on the list from Question 1 are symbols? What does each stand for?
The man represents public defenders who are assigned to handle the cases of the poor. The woman represents poor or indigent defendants who cannot afford to hire their own attorney. The barrel is a symbol of poverty, suggesting that the lawyer himself is not adequately paid or supported. Perry Mason is a famous fictional television character who always won his cases and is symbolic of good representation.
3. What is happening in the cartoon?

The man is talking to the woman telling her to relax because he is a competent lawyer. He also mentions that he is from the public defender's office and that in spite of the recent cutback, she'll get competent representation. She is asking, "Did Perry Mason ever wear a barrel into court?" showing that she is doubting his ability to represent her adequately.

4. What is the cartoonist's message? Do they think that the decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright* has resulted in fair representation for poor defendants?

The cartoonist does not think that the decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright* has resulted in fair representation for poor defendants. While they are given court-appointed lawyers, these lawyers are often so underpaid that they have to take on additional jobs to make money. They are often overworked and are sometimes incompetent. It may be a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

5. Do you agree or disagree with the message? Explain your answer.

Student answers will vary. Students who agree with the message might cite a case in which a poor defendant was given a lawyer who did not seem to do a good job. Students who disagree might mention that some very bright lawyers opt to become public defenders and might cite a case where a public defender did an exceptional job of defending an indigent client.