

Title: Susana Joaquin Vda. de Agregado vs. Judge Edgardo B. Bellosillo, Legal Researcher I
Leonila S. Huerto, Clerk III Theresa T. Banaban

Facts:

1. On September 10, 2002, Susana Joaquin Vda. de Agregado filed a complaint for sum of money and damages against Jose Marcell Panlilio et al.
2. The case was raffled to Branch 36 of the Quezon City Metropolitan Trial Court (MeTC) with Summons served on September 16, 2002.
3. Defendants failed to file an answer, leading Agregado to file a Motion to Declare them in Default.
4. Judge Bellosillo granted the motion on December 6, 2002, and set the presentation of evidence ex-parte by Agregado for February 5, 2003.
5. On March 3, 2003, Judge Bellosillo rendered a decision in favor of Agregado.
6. The decision was served on the defendant Jose Marcell Panlilio on April 4, 2003.
7. Defendants did not respond, prompting Agregado to file a Motion for Execution on April 22, 2003, setting the hearing on April 25, 2003.
8. On April 23, 2003, Atty. Dennis G. Manicad filed a Notice of Appeal claiming to have received the decision on April 8, 2003.
9. No one from the defendants attended the motion hearing on April 25, 2003.
10. By Order on April 25, 2003, Judge Bellosillo directed the Sheriff to clarify the date of receipt of the decision.
11. The Sheriff's Return confirmed the decision was served on April 4, 2003.
12. On April 30, 2003, Judge Bellosillo denied Agregado's Motion for Execution based on the documented date of receipt stated by Atty. Manicad.
13. Agregado filed a Motion for Reconsideration on June 4, 2003, personally serving it to Atty. Manicad's office and Branch 36 of the MeTC.
14. The motion was not scheduled for hearing and was informed as "deemed submitted for resolution" by Huerto.
15. The appeal was set to be raffled on July 17, 2003, prompting Agregado to file an administrative complaint against the court officials on July 20, 2003.
16. Respondents were directed to comment on the Complaint Affidavit on August 11, 2003.
17. Judge Bellosillo acknowledged the error in calculating the appeal period and justified his decisions.
18. Respondent Huerto admitted lapses in handling the Motion for Reconsideration.
19. Clerk III Banaban claimed no involvement with the appeal process.
20. The Office of the Court Administrator reviewed and recommended actions against the

respondents.

Issues:

1. Whether Judge Bellosillo violated Article 206 and Article 207 of the Revised Penal Code.
2. Whether Judge Bellosillo violated Section 3(e) of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (R.A. 3019).
3. Whether Judge Bellosillo violated Section 1, Article III of the 1987 Constitution (Bill of Rights).
4. Whether Judge Bellosillo violated judicial canons in the Code of Judicial Conduct.
5. Whether Leonila S. Huerto is guilty of infidelity in the custody of documents (Article 226, Revised Penal Code).
6. Whether Theresa T. Banaban is guilty of infidelity in the custody of documents.

Court's Decision:

1. The Supreme Court determined that Judge Bellosillo committed an error in relying on Atty. Manicad's claim without verifying the record carefully, which affected his procedural ruling and denied Agregado's Motion for Execution prematurely.
2. However, Judge Bellosillo was not found guilty of corruption or bad faith, and his error was categorized as a lapse in diligence. He was admonished to observe greater care in the future.
3. Legal Researcher-OIC Huerto was found guilty of simple neglect of duty due to her failure to properly handle the Motion for Reconsideration. She was suspended for one month and one day.
4. Clerk III Banaban was exonerated as she had no direct involvement in the misplacement of the motion or the appeal process.

Doctrine:

1. Judges must exercise care and diligence in verifying case records before making procedural rulings. (Reiterated Doctrine)
2. Failure to properly manage court documents and motions can amount to simple neglect of duty for clerks and other court staff.

Class Notes:

1. ****Elements of Simple Neglect of Duty****:
 - Failure to give proper attention to a required task.
 - Negligence causing undue inconvenience or harm.
 - Applicable statute: Infidelity in the Custody of Documents (Art. 226, Revised Penal Code).

- Case application: Huerto's failure to forward the Motion for Reconsideration.
2. **Judicial Canons in the Code of Judicial Conduct**:
- Canon 3.01: A judge shall be faithful to the law and maintain professional competence.
 - Canon 3.09: A judge should organize and supervise court personnel efficiently.
 - Case application: Judge Bellosillo's reliance on unverified information was a breach.
3. **Reglementary Period for Filing Appeals**:
- Prescribed by procedural rules: 15 days from the receipt of the decision.
 - Case application: The discrepancy in the claimed receipt dates affected procedural rulings.
4. **Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act (R.A. 3019)**:
- Section 3(e): Causes undue injury through manifest partiality or gross inexcusable negligence.
 - Case application: Alleged against Judge Bellosillo but not proven due to the lack of malicious intent.

Historical Background:

The administrative complaint arose amid concerns about procedural fairness and judicial conduct in Philippine courts. The case underscores the importance of administrative oversight and accountability in maintaining the integrity of the judiciary, demonstrating a responsive legal system addressing errors and lapses by judicial officers and staff to uphold justice effectively.