

"First, a party opposing a peremptory challenge must demonstrate a prima-facie case of racial discrimination in the use of the strike. [Citations omitted.] To establish a prima-facie case, a litigant must show he or she is a member of a cognizable racial group and that the peremptory challenge will remove a member of the litigant's race from the venire. The peremptory-challenge opponent is entitled to rely on the fact that the strike is an inherently 'discriminating' device, permitting 'those to discriminate who are of a mind to discriminate.' The litigant must then show an inference or inferences of racial discrimination by the striking party. The trial court should consider all relevant circumstances in determining whether a prima-facie case exists, including statements by counsel exercising the peremptory challenge, counsel's questions during voir dire, and whether a pattern of strikes against minority venire members is present.

"Assuming a prima-facie case exists, the striking party must then articulate a race-neutral explanation 'related to the particular case to be tried.' A simple affirmation of general good faith will not suffice. However, the explanation 'need not rise to the level justifying exercise of a challenge for cause.' The critical issue is whether discriminatory intent is inherent in counsel's explanation for use of the strike; intent is present if the explanation is merely a pretext for exclusion on the basis of race.

"Last, the trial court must determine whether the party opposing the peremptory strike has proved purposeful discrimination. It is at this stage that the persuasiveness, and credibility, of the justification offered by the striking party becomes relevant. The critical question, which the trial judge must resolve, is whether counsel's race-neutral explanation should be believed."