

A PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE NEWKIRK CENTER FOR SCIENCE & SOCIETY,  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL & MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

*The National Registry*  
of  
**EXONERATIONS**

**CURRENTLY 2,049 EXONERATIONS**  
**MORE THAN 17,770 YEARS LOST**

USING THE REGISTRY

ISSUES

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## GLOSSARY

*In general, an **exoneration** occurs when a person who has been convicted of a crime is officially cleared based on new evidence of innocence.*

*A more precise definition follows.*

**Exoneration**—A person has been exonerated if he or she was convicted of a crime and later was either: (1) declared to be factually innocent by a government official or agency with the authority to make that declaration; or (2) relieved of all the consequences of the criminal conviction by a government official or body with the authority to take that action. The official action may be: (i) a complete pardon by a governor or other competent authority, whether or not the pardon is designated as based on innocence; (ii) an acquittal of all charges factually related to the crime for which the person was originally convicted; or (iii) a dismissal of all charges related to the crime for which the person was originally convicted, by a court or by a prosecutor with the authority to enter that dismissal. The pardon, acquittal, or dismissal must have been the result, at least in part, of evidence of innocence that either (i) was not presented at the trial at which the person was convicted; or (ii) if the person pled guilty, was not known to the defendant and the defense attorney, and to the court, at the time the plea was entered. The evidence of innocence need not be an explicit basis for the official action that exonerated the person. A person who otherwise qualifies has not been exonerated if there is unexplained physical evidence of that person's guilt.

**Exoneree**—A person who was convicted of a crime and later officially declared innocent of that crime, or relieved of all legal consequences of the conviction because evidence of innocence that was not presented at trial required reconsideration of the case.

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**Arson Case**—the exoneree was convicted of arson, or the exoneration depended at least in part on evidence that the exoneree did not commit arson.

**Child Sex abuse Hysteria (CSH)**—A case in which the exoneree was convicted of child sex abuse as part of a wave of child sex abuse prosecutions in the 1980s and 1990s based on aggressive and suggestive interviews of children who were thought to be victims. These cases generally included bizarre and implausible claims by the supposed victims, frequently featuring satanic rituals.

**Co-Defendant Confessed (CDC)**—A codefendant of the exoneree, or a person who might have been charged as a codefendant, gave a confession that also implicated the exoneree.

**Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU)**—A Conviction Integrity Unit in the prosecutorial office that prosecuted the exoneree helped secure the exoneration. (This does not necessarily mean that the prosecutorial office in question made a factual determination that the defendant is innocent.)

**False Confession (FC)**—A confession is a statement made to law enforcement at any point during the proceedings which was interpreted or presented by law enforcement as an admission of participation in or presence at the crime, even if the statement was not presented at trial. A statement is not a confession if it was made to someone other than law enforcement. A statement that is not at odds with the defense is not a confession. A guilty plea is not a confession.

**False or Misleading Forensic Evidence (F/MFE)**—Exoneree's conviction was based at least in part on forensic information that was (1) caused by errors in forensic testing, (2) based on unreliable or unproven methods, (3) expressed with exaggerated and misleading confidence, or (4) fraudulent.

**Homicide (H)**—Exoneree was convicted of either murder or manslaughter.

**Inadequate Legal Defense (ILD)**—The exoneree's lawyer at trial provided obviously and grossly inadequate representation.

**Jailhouse Informant (JI)**— A witness who was incarcerated with the exoneree testified or reported that the exoneree confessed to him or her.

**Mistaken Witness Identification (MWID)**—At least one witness mistakenly identified the exoneree as a person the witness saw commit the crime.

**No Crime (NC)**—The exoneree was convicted of a crime that did not occur, either because an accident or a suicide was mistaken for a crime, or because the exoneree was accused of a fabricated crime that never happened.

**Official Misconduct (OM)**—Police, prosecutors, or other government officials significantly abused their authority or the judicial process in a manner that contributed to the exoneree's conviction.

**Perjury or False Accusation (P/FA)**—A person other than the exoneree committed perjury by making a false statement under oath that incriminated the exoneree in the crime for which the exoneree was later exonerated, or made a similar unsworn statement that would have been perjury if made under oath.

**Posthumous exoneration (PH)**—An exoneration of a person after that person died, including cases in which a living codefendant was exonerated under circumstances that clearly indicate that the deceased person would have been exonerated if he or she were alive.

**Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)**—The exoneree was convicted of injuring or killing an infant by violent shaking, based on a medical diagnosis that is now highly controversial.

## ABOUT THE REGISTRY

The National Registry of Exonerations is a project of the Newkirk Center for Science & Society at University of California Irvine, the University of Michigan Law School and Michigan State University College of Law. It was founded in 2012 in conjunction with the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law. The Registry provides detailed information about every known exoneration in the United States since 1989—cases in which a person was wrongly convicted of a crime and later cleared of all the charges based on new evidence of innocence.

## CONTACT US

We welcome new information from any source about exonerations already on our list and about cases not in the Registry that might be exonerations.

Tell us about an exoneration that we may have missed

Correct an error or add information about an exoneration on our list

Other information about the Registry

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