

All charges dropped against man convicted in double slaying



Daniel Taylor is interviewed at the Menard Correctional Center in Chester, Ill., in 2010. (Zbigniew Bzdak / Chicago Tribune)

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Two decades after a Chicago man was convicted of a double murder in spite of evidence that he was in a police lockup when the slaying took place, Cook County prosecutors today dropped all charges against him, bringing to a close one of the city's more controversial cases.

The announcement came during a brief hearing at the Leighton Criminal Court Building and will result in Daniel Taylor's freedom. He is incarcerated in Menard Correctional Center.

Taylor's lead attorney, Karen Daniel of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at [Northwestern University's](#) law school, was overseas but said in an email that she was "happily stunned."

"Daniel, and the public, are entitled to a full accounting of the causes of this 20-year injustice," she said.

Taylor's case stems from a November 1992 double murder that police and prosecutors said was committed by eight young men. Taylor made a lengthy confession that he said was coerced by veteran detectives. However, other police officers testified that Taylor was in police custody at the time of the double murder.

In a statement, the Cook County state's attorney's office said its Conviction Integrity Unit decided to dismiss Taylor's conviction after a review that included interviews of new witnesses and an examination of additional documents.

"I vowed to review this case with an open mind and that is exactly what our Conviction Integrity Unit has done," [Alvarez](#) said. "Based upon the collective results of our investigation, we do not believe that it would be in the interest of justice to proceed on this matter."

Alvarez also said her office has initiated a review as well of the convictions of two of Taylor's co-defendants – though one of them has publicly admitted his involvement in the double murders.

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and Confessions" and uncovered additional t but that police and prosecutors had not handled developed was an admission from Dennis Mixon, one of those convicted in the double murder, that he was involved in the murders but that Taylor and the other co-defendants were not. Mixon even named an accomplice in the double murder – a man who now is in prison for another murder.

More recently, the Illinois Attorney General's office launched an inquiry into the case and turned over information to Taylor's attorneys that also pointed to his innocence. That information, attorneys in the office said, had not been turned over by Cook County prosecutors to either Taylor's trial lawyers or the attorneys handling his appeal. The 7th Circuit U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals also has expressed concern about Taylor's case, noting his powerful claim of innocence and questioning his confession.

Still, until today, prosecutors had insisted that the police records showing him in custody at the time of the slayings were wrong and that Taylor's conviction was solid. A continuing review by State's Attorney [Anita Alvarez](#)'s Conviction Integrity Unit persuaded Alvarez that Taylor's conviction should be set aside.

Dismissing the charges against Taylor raises questions about how prosecutors will handle the case of Deon Patrick, the only other individual convicted of the double murder who maintains his innocence and still remains in prison. Two had their charges thrown out before trial, one was acquitted at trial and five were convicted. Of those five, two have been released after serving their sentences, leaving Taylor, Patrick and Mixon serving sentences of life without parole.

Taylor was 17 and lived in shelters and on the streets when he and the others, most of them teens, were arrested for the murders of Jeffrey Lassiter and Sharon Haugabook in an apartment not far from Clarendon Park on the city's North Side. In their confessions, the eight said they met at Clarendon Park to plot the murders, then went

to the scene of the crime. Four stayed outside as lookouts while Taylor, Mixon and two others went in and shot Lassiter and Haugabook to death, according to the confessions.

The first hitch in the case emerged in the moments after Taylor confessed. He told detectives that he thought he had been arrested the night of the murders. Police searched for records and found an arrest report that showed Taylor was picked up at 6:45 p.m. – two hours before the 8:45 p.m. murders – and was not released until 9:45 p.m.

Prosecutors Thomas Needham, later a top lawyer at the police department, and Jeanne Bischoff tried the case, telling jurors the records that Taylor was in the lockup were wrong. Jurors later told the Tribune they believed that Taylor had been released early or had even slipped out of the jail to commit the crime and then returned.

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