



DNA Exonerations in the United States

Fast facts:



- 1989: The **first DNA** exoneration took place
- 364 DNA exonerees to date
- 37: States where exoneration have been won
- 14: Average number of years served
- 5,061: Total number of years served
- 26.5: Average age at the time of wrongful conviction
- 43: Average age at exoneration
- 20 of 364 people served time on death row
- 41 of 364 pled guilty to crimes they did not commit
- 70%: **Involved eyewitness misidentification**
- 41% of these cases were a cross-racial misidentification
- 32% of these cases involved multiple misidentifications of the same person
- 27% of these cases involved misidentification through the use of a composite sketch
- 44%: **Involved misapplication of forensic science**
- 28%: **Involved false confessions**
- 49% of the false confessors were 21 years old or younger at the time of arrest

33% of the false confessors were 18 years old or younger at the time of arrest

- 10% of the false confessors had mental health or mental capacity issues
- 17%: **Involved informants**
- 264: DNA exonerees compensated
- 187: DNA exonerations worked on by the Innocence Project
- 160: Actual assailants identified. Those actual perpetrators went on to be convicted of 152 additional violent crimes, including 82 sexual assaults, 35 murders, and 35 other violent crimes while the innocent sat behind bars for their earlier offenses.

Demographics of the 364:

224 (62%) African American

109 (30%) Caucasian

27 (7%) Latinx

2 (1%) Asian American

1 (<1%) Native American

1 (<1%) Self-identified "Other"

Other facts:

- 130 DNA exonerees were wrongfully convicted for murders; 40 (31%) of these cases involved eyewitness misidentifications and 81 (62%) involved false confessions [as of July 9, 2018]
- 102 DNA exonerations involved false confessions; the real perp was identified in 76 (75%) of these cases. These 38 real perps went on to commit 48 additional crimes for which they were convicted, including 25 murders, 14 rapes, and 9 other violent crimes [as of July

24, 2018]

- 180 of the DNA exonerees (50%) had the real perpetrator(s) identified in their cases [as of August 22, 2018]
- 137 of the DNA exonerees had the real perpetrator(s) identified through a cold database hit [as of October 19, 2018]

How DNA makes a difference in the criminal justice system

- Since 1989, there have been tens of thousands of cases where prime suspects were identified and pursued—until DNA testing (prior to conviction) proved that they were wrongly accused.
- In more than 25% of cases in a National Institute of Justice study, suspects were excluded once DNA testing was conducted during the criminal investigation (the study, conducted in 1995, included 10,060 cases where testing was performed by FBI labs).
- An Innocence Project review of our closed cases from 2004 – June 2015 revealed that 29% of cases were closed because of lost or destroyed evidence.

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