



‘Satanic Panic’ Exonerations

Among the thousands of entries in the Registry, child sex abuse hysteria cases are among the most troubling. These prosecutions began in the mid-1980s, and involved children alleging wide-ranging and often horrific abuse at the hands of the adults entrusted to care for them.

The allegations occurred during an era sometimes referred to as the “Satanic Panic.” During the investigations, skepticism and logic went out the door. Often, the defendants were already poor and marginalized, unable to mount a proper defense against children manipulated by adults.

Then, the cases fell apart. Many victims recanted. Many police and therapists who interviewed the children were found to have used misleading and unreliable methods. There was no evidence of the crimes.

Currently, we have [60 exonerations](#) for these cases in the Registry. The first wrongful convictions occurred in 1984; the last, 1998. Twenty-five years later, exonerations for these convictions are still occurring. [Melvin Quinney Jr.](#)’s case, which we entered last month, was a long time coming. He was convicted in 1991 of taking indecent liberties with his son; the abuse was said to be tied to satanic rituals. Years later, the son recanted. There was no abuse by his father; only the lies of adults who convinced him he had been harmed. “I remember saying, ‘Nothing happened. Nothing happened,’” the son said. “And that wasn’t a good enough answer for them.”



Melvin Quinney, center, with his children. (Photo courtesy of the Innocence Project of Texas)

23 Other Exonerations Published in May

In 2016, [Robert Gold-Smith](#) received a sentence of 30 years in prison in Will County, Illinois, for soliciting a man to kill Gold-Smith's ex-wife. He was granted a new trial after video evidence surfaced that indicated that the solicitation conversation never occurred.

In 1978, [Gerald Hatcher](#) was convicted of armed robbery and sentenced to 90 years in prison in Marion County, Indiana. His conviction was reversed and the charges were dismissed in 1989 based on his attorneys' failure to present evidence of his alibi.

[Albert Brown](#), of Boston, Massachusetts, was convicted of murder and armed robbery in 1987. Brown and his co-defendant, Joseph Pope, were

[Giovante Douglas](#) and [Cartier Hunter](#) were convicted of murder in Oakland, California, in 2016. Douglas was sentenced to 26 years to life in prison, and Hunter was sentenced to life in prison. They were exonerated in 2022 after the witness who identified them admitted she lied and the detective had secretly paid her \$30,000 for testimony. The detective was indicted for perjury.

[Norberto Peets](#) was convicted of attempted murder in the Bronx, New York, in 1996. Peets was exonerated in 2023, based on new medical and DNA evidence supporting his claim that the witnesses to the shooting misidentified him.

In 2015, [Michael Jones](#) was sentenced to three years in prison for

exonerated in 2022, based on the failure of prosecutors to turn over statements that contradicted the testimony of the state's main witness.

[Tony Vaughn Jr.](#) and [Aaron Mathews](#), both from Houston, Texas, pled guilty to drug offenses, Vaughn in 2018, and Mathews in 2013. They were exonerated in 2023 after the officer involved in their arrests was tied to misconduct in other cases.

In 1992, [Emel McDowell](#) was convicted of second-degree murder in Brooklyn, New York. He was exonerated in 2023 after the real shooter confessed to the crime.

[Alphonso Clark](#) was convicted in 2005 of a murder in Inkster, Michigan. He was exonerated in 2023 after the state's key witness recanted his identification of Clark as the gunman.

In 2004, [Erasmus Gutierrez](#) was sentenced to one to two years in prison for an arson fire at a hotel in Peabody, Massachusetts. He was exonerated in 2023 based on evidence showing the fire was an accident and that he was coerced to false confess to setting the fire.

In 1992, [Anthony Hall](#) received a sentence of 50 years in prison for a murder in Baltimore, Maryland. He was exonerated in 2023 after his legal team at the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project discovered the prosecution had failed to disclose witness statements pointing to someone else or affirmatively saying Hall was not involved.

possession of heroin in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2022 based on evidence that he was among dozens of people who were framed by two Chicago police officers, both of whom were subsequently convicted and sentenced to prison.

[Patrick Brown](#), of New Orleans, Louisiana, was convicted of rape in 1994. He was exonerated in 2023 after a reinvestigation showed that the victim had been saying for years that Brown was not the man who raped her.

In 2016, [Elgin Jordan](#) was sentenced to eight years in prison for selling heroin in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2019 based on evidence that he was among dozens of people who were framed by Chicago police officers, two of whom were subsequently convicted and sentenced to prison.

In 2012, [Billy Faircloth](#) was convicted of assault in Austin, Texas, and sentenced to 60 years in prison. He was exonerated in 2023 based on evidence that the prosecution failed to disclose exculpatory evidence and a DNA analyst had given false testimony about the results of DNA testing.

In 2013, [Dwayne Hill](#) and [Ricky Fountain](#) were each sentenced to 26 years in prison for attempted murder in Chicago, Illinois. They were exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that police coerced the victim and another witness to falsely identify them. In addition, a witness said Hill was miles away at the time of the shooting.

In 1991, [Isaac Wright Jr.](#) received a sentence of life in prison after he was convicted of running a drug ring in New Jersey. He was granted a new trial, and the case was dismissed in 1997 based on the failure of the prosecutor to disclose a deal with a co-defendant and evidence that police falsified a search warrant and lied to cover it up.

[Anthony Reid](#) and [Kevin Bowman](#) were convicted in 1990 of a murder in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They were exonerated in 2023 after discovering previously concealed evidence that undermined the testimony of the police officers who investigated the murder.

[Clifton Caldwell](#) was convicted of aggravated rape in 2002. He was exonerated in 2023, after the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that prosecutors had failed to turn over evidence undermining the credibility of a jailhouse informant who testified that Caldwell had confessed.

In 2017, [Robert Ware](#) was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison for assaulting a fellow prisoner in the Woodford County, Illinois jail. He was granted a new trial and acquitted in 2021 based on evidence he acted in self-defense. He was granted a certificate of innocence in 2022 and awarded \$90,000.

With your support, the National Registry of Exonerations can protect the innocent by preventing false convictions.

We find the stories. We painstakingly search for every false conviction in the United States that is overturned and meets our criteria for exoneration. We gather the information, study the cases, and code the data, fueling the most comprehensive public database of exonerations that exists.

We tell the stories. One by one, we write and share the human stories behind each individual exoneration. We bear witness to these incredible injustices to ensure that they are remembered.

And we count the stories. Thousands of exonerees. Tens of thousands of years lost to wrongful incarceration. Untold costs paid by our communities. This independent collection of data allows us to understand how false convictions occur and prevent them from happening in the future.

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