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THE NATIONAL REGISTRY
OF EXONERATIONS

45 Exonerations Posted in February



A group of Watts exonerees with their attorneys and families at the Leighton Criminal Courthouse in 2017. (Matt Masterson/Chicago Tonight)

February was a busy month at the Registry. We posted 45 exonerations. Thirty-three of these exonerations are from Chicago, Illinois, and tied to the misconduct of former police Officer Ronald Watts and other corrupt officers who falsely arrested dozens of defendants in and around the Ida B. Wells public-housing community on the city's south side. You can also read more about the [Watts-related cases](#) on our Groups Registry.

For senior researcher Maurice Possley, who spent much of his career as an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune, this is familiar territory. He began researching and entering Watts cases in the Registry in 2016. Six years later, he's still at it. The 132 exonerations tied to the Watts scandal that Possley has entered into the Registry are a stark reminder of the breadth of injustice and the indifference of some police and prosecutors.

While few of the Watts defendants received lengthy prison sentences for their convictions, this doesn't minimize the harm they suffered. Individually, most have received little attention. Collectively, they are a deep reminder of the shape and scope of wrongful

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We also published five cases of Illinois exonerees convicted of aggravated possession of a weapon who received certificates of innocence in 2020 after their convictions were vacated based on a court ruling that declared the aggravated possession law unconstitutional. They are: [Deandre Barron](#), [Thadeius Goods](#), [Commodore Jackson](#), [Donovan Johnson](#), and [Kenrod Jones](#).

These are the other seven exonerations we published in February:

[Jacquez Brown](#), of York, Pennsylvania, was convicted of murder in 2013 in a shooting that happened when he was 15 years old. Brown was acquitted at a retrial in 2022 after an appellate court threw out his initial conviction because his attorney failed to present evidence supporting Brown's claim of self-defense.

In 1985, [Rodolfo Taylor](#) was sentenced to 18 to 36 years in prison for three gas station robberies on Long Island, New York. He was exonerated in 2022 based on the prosecution's failure to disclose that the eyewitnesses initially identified someone else or said they could not identify the robber.

[Vincent Simmons](#), of Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana, served 44 years in prison for attempted rape. He was exonerated in 2022, after a judge ruled Simmons's trial attorney had not been given medical records and witness statements that undercut the identification of Simmons and other testimony.

[Ivano Correia](#) was sentenced in 2014 to 20 years in prison for a home invasion in Brockton, Massachusetts. He was exonerated in 2021 based on evidence that undermined the testimony of the only eyewitness.

[Merardo Garza Jr.](#) was convicted of the rape of his 8-year-old daughter in 2008. He was exonerated in 2021 after the victim recanted her testimony and said it was a sister who had molested her.

In 1984, [Willie Stokes](#) was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was exonerated in January 2022 based on police and prosecutorial misconduct that occurred in his case.

In 1999, [Abdul Rasheed](#) was convicted of three separate robberies at restaurants in Durham, North Carolina. He was exonerated of one of those robberies in 2021, after evidence in his case was unlawfully destroyed and a witness recanted her testimony.

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