



Darnai Vaile's Exoneration

On June 4, 2020, two weeks after George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the nine justices of the Washington Supreme Court published an [open letter](#) decrying racism and the systemic injustice it creates.

“The legal community must recognize that we all bear responsibility for this on-going injustice, and that we are capable of taking steps to address it, if only we have the courage and the will,” the nine justices wrote.

The letter was not a court ruling. It didn’t strike down any particular law or create any precedent. But it carried weight, and three years after its release, the letter is finding its way into the exonerations that the Registry researches. We published one of those cases last month.

[Darnai Vaile](#), of Spokane, Washington, was convicted of resisting arrest in 2020. He was exonerated in 2023, after an appellate court ruled that the trial judge improperly excluded evidence showing Vaile cooperating with police during the incident. Vaile is Black. The officers who arrested and charged him are white.

In a companion decision to an order granting Vaile a new trial, then-Chief Judge George Fearing of Division III of the Washington Court of Appeals, referenced the letter, and wrote: “In light of the Washington Supreme Court’s challenge to judges, Darnai Vaile’s claim of discrimination merits this court’s attention ... The treatment of Vaile depicts a far range of racially motivated conduct and fulfills numerous racist tropes.”

We published 16 other exonerations in August.

Getting back online

Separately, our website was down for three days at the end of last month due to wide-

ranging internet problems at the University of Michigan, the site's host. Thankfully, the problems were fixed. During the time the site was down, one journalist asked about our status and wrote, "I depend on you all!" The queries from her and other users during the couple of days the Registry was unavailable are important reminders of the central, timely, and unique role the Registry plays in researching wrongful convictions.



Darnai Vaile (Photo: The Seattle Times)

17 Exonerations Published in August

In 1997, [Jamaka Cottingham](#) was sentenced to 30 years in prison for an armed robbery in Houston, Texas. He was exonerated in 2023 based on evidence that another man admitted committing the crime.

In 1991, [John Loveless](#) was sentenced to 15 years in prison for molesting the son of his ex-wife in Marion County, Oregon. He was exonerated in 2000 based on evidence that the child had been coached to falsely implicate Loveless.

In 1995, [Michael Pardue](#) was sentenced to life in prison after falsely confessing to a murder in Mobile County, Alabama. The conviction was reversed because his confession was involuntary, and the prosecution dismissed the case. We also published a [second exoneration](#) for Pardue, tied to a false confession for a separate murder committed during the same time period.

In 2016, [Neftali Velasquez](#) was convicted of a 2012 murder in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was exonerated in 2023 after a re-examination of his conviction found that prosecutors failed to disclose evidence undermining the credibility of the state's witnesses.

In 1994, [Larry Moses](#) of New Orleans, Louisiana, was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole. He was exonerated in 2023 after the state conceded that it had failed to turn over evidence undermining the credibility of the purported eyewitness to the shootings.

[Dion Miller](#), of Jersey City, New Jersey, was convicted of murder in the killing of an elderly neighbor in 2006. He was exonerated in 2023, after a re-investigation supported Miller's claim that he falsely confessed to the crime.

[Michael Buehner](#), of Cleveland, Ohio, received a sentence of 18 years to life in prison after being convicted of murder in 2002. He received a new trial in 2021, after an appellate court ruled that the state had failed to disclose exculpatory evidence, and he was acquitted at retrial in 2023.

In 1999, [Wayne Burgess Jr.](#), of Pulaski, Tennessee, was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his girlfriend's 16-month old child. He was exonerated in 2023 based on new medical evidence that the child's injury occurred before Burgess was with the child.

[James Nolan III](#) pled guilty to drug possession in Galveston County, Texas, in 2022. He was exonerated in 2023, after lab testing revealed that the material seized from Nolan contained no illegal substances.

[Ricardo Jimenez](#) was convicted in 2007 of a murder that happened in the Bronx, New York, in 1989. He was exonerated in 2023, after a federal judge ruled that the state had failed to disclose evidence undermining the testimony of two witnesses.

In 2005, [Rosa Jimenez](#) was convicted in Austin, Texas of the murder of a toddler and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. She was exonerated in 2023 based on new medical evidence that showed the child's death was accidental.

In 1997, [Louis Robinson](#) was sentenced to 60 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2023 based on evidence that a witness, who was coerced by detectives, falsely identified him.

[Felix Ojeda Flores](#) and [Orlando Carrera](#) were each sentenced to eight years in prison in 2015 for a reported sexual assault in the Bronx, New York. They were exonerated in 2023 based on the prosecution's failure to disclose financial and immigration benefits to the complainant.

In 2015, [Christopher Lyman](#) was convicted of murder in the death of his infant nephew and sentenced to life in prison. He was exonerated in 2023, after experts said the child died of natural causes.

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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