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DNA Exonerations in the United States

Fast facts:

- 1989: The first DNA exoneration took place
- 37: States where exonerations have been won
- 20 of 353 people exonerated served time on death row
- 14: Average length of time served by exonerees
- 4,829: Total number of years served
- 26.5: Average age of exonerees at the time of their wrongful conviction
- 42.5: Average age at exoneration
- 38 of 353: 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
- 45%: Involved misapplication of forensic science
- 28%: Involved false confessions
- 51% of the false confessors were 21 years old or younger at the time of arrest

35% 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
- 16%: Involved informants
- 256: DNA exonerees compensated
- 183: DNA exonerations worked on by the Innocence Project
- 152: True suspects and/or perpetrators identified. Those actual perpetrators went on to be convicted of 150 additional violent crimes, including 80 sexual assaults, 35 murders, and 35 other violent crimes while the innocent sat behind bars for their earlier offenses.

Races of the 353 exonerees:

219 African Americans

106 Caucasians

26 Latinos

2 Asian Americans

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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