

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1**  
Innocent Until Proven Guilty?.....4

**CHAPTER 2**  
False Accusations.....8

**CHAPTER 3**  
Witness Misidentification..... 12

**CHAPTER 4**  
Misconduct ..... 18

**CHAPTER 5**  
False Confessions.....24

**CHAPTER 6**  
DNA Evidence .....30

**CHAPTER 7**  
Fingerprints and Blood Spatter ..... 34

**CHAPTER 8**  
Other Forensics.....38

**CHAPTER 9**  
DNA Gone Bad ..... 44

**CHAPTER 10**  
Justice After Death.....50

**GLOSSARY** ..... 56



# CHAPTER 1

## INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY?

Police stop a 14-year-old boy. “Come with us,” they say. He is taken to the police station. The officers put the teen in a room. It is small and hot.

“Why did you rob the store?” police ask. The boy is confused. “I didn’t!” Over and over, officers ask the same questions. It takes hours.

“We have a **witness**,” the police say. “But I didn’t do anything!” the 14-year-old cries. They tell him to confess. He is frustrated. “I just want to go home,” the boy begs.

Finally, he makes up a **confession**. The boy thinks this will be easier. Maybe they will let him go home now. Instead he is in even more trouble.



Wrongful **convictions** happen. Innocent people go to jail. There are many reasons for this. Some people make false confessions. They feel scared. Police might promise a good deal. It may be for less jail time. This can be misleading and confusing.

**Forensics** can be used incorrectly. Witnesses can also identify the wrong person by mistake.

Other times, criminals lie about a person or an event. These lies can get them less jail time. Sometimes defense lawyers cannot spend much time on cases. They may not be prepared in court.







## THE INNOCENCE PROJECT

The Innocence Project helps to free innocent people. It began in 1992. The first project was in New York City. There are now branches across the United States. They are in other countries too.

The project focuses on DNA from crime scenes. Innocence Project experts do DNA tests. They compare their results to the DNA of a convicted person. If there is no match, the person can be proven innocent. This method has freed more than 360 people.

Adults can be wrongly convicted. But it happens to young people more often. Teens may not know their legal rights. A child can also be easily influenced. Young people are three times more likely than adults to make a false confession.

No one knows how big the problem is. More than 2,400 innocent people have been freed in the past 30 years. Each person lost part of their lives. Many other innocent people are never freed.

# CHAPTER 2

## FALSE ACCUSATIONS

Informants are those who tell on others. Sometimes the stories are lies. A lie can put someone behind bars. Around half of wrongful convictions that sent people to death row had informants.

Fred Mitchell was arrested for robbery. This was in 1972. He then said two men had committed a murder. They were Richard Dan Phillips and Richard Palombo. Mitchell's statement helped him. He was given less jail time. But it was a lie.

Palombo and Phillips went to prison for life. Palombo did the right thing in 2010. He said he helped Mitchell with the murder. But Phillips had nothing to do with it.

Phillips was freed. He had spent 45 years in prison. It is the longest time a person has spent in jail before being **exonerated**.

RICHARD DAN PHILLIPS





Rocky and Jessica Fugett were teenagers. The brother and sister were charged with murder. They said that other kids from school helped them. One had an **alibi** and was released. Another classmate was not so lucky.

Robert Davis was innocent. But the police questioned him for five hours. The teen just wanted to go home. Finally, Davis asked a question. “What can I say I did to get me out of this?” Police told him he could confess.

All three teens went to prison. Later, both Fugetts said they lied. Davis was released. The teen had spent 13 years in prison.



RICKY JACKSON



The background of the page is a close-up, high-contrast image of bright orange and yellow flames, suggesting a fire. The flames are dynamic and fill the entire frame.

## UP IN FLAMES

In 1995, a fire started in Kristine Bunch's home. It was nighttime. People were sleeping. Bunch tried to reach her son's room. But she could not get to it. Once outside, the mother broke the bedroom window. Her son was already dead.

Investigators thought the fire was set on purpose. It looked like kerosene from their stove was used. Bunch was convicted. Later, people learned more about fires. Accidental fires can look like purposeful fires. Kerosene from Bunch's stove had spilled out. It happened during the fire, not before. The woman was innocent.

Sometimes a child lies. The child may not know what they are doing. They may also be afraid. Eddie Vernon was 12 years old. This was in 1975. He said Ricky Jackson shot a man. Jackson was 18. The lie got him convicted.

Years later, Vernon said he had lied. There had been a rumor that Jackson did it. The child wanted to be part of something exciting. Vernon had tried to take it back. The police told him it was too late. They would arrest his parents if the boy did not **testify**. After Vernon finally told the truth, Jackson was released. By then, Jackson had been in prison for 39 years.

# GLOSSARY

**ALIBI**

a claim or piece of evidence that shows a person was not at the scene of a crime when the crime took place

**APPEAL**

to formally request that a court review a case again

**BALLISTICS**

the study of bullets that have been fired from a gun

**CONFESSION**

a statement that someone makes when admitting to a crime

**CONTAMINATION**

something that is dirty or impure

**CONVICTION**

the act of proving someone's guilt in court

**DEPORT**

to force a person to leave a country because the person is not a citizen

**EVIDENCE**

proof that something is real

**EXONERATE**

to prove that a person is not guilty of a crime

**FORENSICS**

scientific methods used to solve a crime

**GENEALOGY**

the study of the history of a family