

Ronald gene taylor and the innocence project



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In Houston, Texas, during the early morning hours on May 28, 1993, a woman awoke to an unknown man holding her at knifepoint. When she struggled against him, he threatened to kill her if she screamed. He then forcefully unclothed and raped her, and then fled the scene (" *Ronald* "). After the suspect fled, the victim contacted police and about an hour later, they looked over the crime scene, noting that the suspect entered through an exposed screened window, which the screen was removed. A wet spot on her bed was found and collected as evidence in her case (" *Ronald* "). The victim later told police that she couldn't clearly see the attacker's face due to lack of light, though she thought the attacker was African-American, at most 30 years old and had an afro and mustache, she also later described him as around 6 feet tall and had a rounded, bumpy face (" *Ronald* ").

Ronald became a suspect in the case purely due to him living close to the victim and was soon called to a lineup, which was recorded and sent to the victim, where she identified Ronald as the attacker (" *Ronald* "). After Ronald was arrested, lawyers representing him called for DNA testing, but was denied when the *Houston Police Department Crime Lab* apparently couldn't find any evidence on the previously collected bedsheet; this was a false statement (*Michigan*). Around 2 years later, Ronald was indicted on aggravated sexual assault charges and went before a jury trial (" *Ronald* "). As there was no evidence linking him to the crime, the prosecution relied purely on the victim's account. Another suspect, known as " *Chili Charlie* ", within the same lineup that Ronald was in, was also mentioned, but prosecutors stated that they have cleared him as a suspect. On May 2, 1995,

just shy of two years after the alleged crime, Ronald Gene Taylor was convicted and sentenced to 60 years behind bars ("*Ronald*").

In 2006, the *Innocence Project* picked up Ronald's case and retrieved the evidence from the original crime scene. When they tested it at ReliaGene Technologies' DNA Lab the following year, they determined that there was indeed semen that was discovered on the victim's bedsheets. The DNA profile matched another man other than Ronald, matching with a man named Roosevelt Carroll, who was known as "*Chilli-Chetter*", strikingly similar nickname to the "*Chili Charlie*" mentioned in Ronald's original trial. 12 years later, due to DNA evidence proving Ronald Taylor's innocence, he was released from prison on October 9, 2007 and was exonerated the following January when all charges were dropped ("*Ronald*"). When he was released in 2007, though he had been found innocent from DNA evidence, Ronald was *still* required to register as a sex offender and held the same limited rights as a convicted felon until an application for pardon was issued ("*Sutherland*"). In 2008, Ronald Gene Taylor was officially pardoned by Governor Rick Perry after 15 years of attempting to prove his innocence for a crime he never had any relation to and was awarded over \$1. 1 million in compensation (*Michigan*). Ronald, up until his death in 2018, was married and owned a lawn care business in Atlanta ("*Sutherland*"). Shortly after Ronald was freed from prison, he headed to Houston City Hall urge that an ordeal such as his wouldn't happen again, stating "*I think there is a lot of people who have the same problem I had,... something needs to be done.*" (*Khanna*). Two other people were also falsely accused (and later exonerated) due to inaccurate evidence presented by the HPD crime lab, being George

Rodriguez and Josiah Sutton; he is now the third person to be exonerated due to false evidence from this lab alone.

In May 2009, Governor Rick Perry signed the *Tim Cole Act*, which further increased compensation for those who were wrongly convicted of crime they have never committed, up to \$80, 000 per year of false imprisonment, up from \$50, 000 of the old legislation, and provides payment for up to 120 credit hours of college tuition (*Smith*). This law, introduced by representative Rafael Anchía, was signed into law on May 27, with Governor Perry stating, “ *While we cannot give back the time lost to those wrongfully convicted... this new law is a significant step for justice by increasing compensation for the innocent,* ”. This law is named after Tim Cole, who was wrongfully convicted of rape in 1985 and died in prison, he was exonerated in 2009 due to DNA evidence (*Smith*). Ronald Gene Taylor was honored in House Bill 969, which was passed earlier this year on May 17, which commemorated 10 years on the Tim Cole Act being signed in law and recognized the actions of the *Innocence Project of Texas* (*Texas State Legislature*) .

Cases such as these often arise due to faulty evidence, poor eyewitness accounts and poor executions of forensic science. Sadly, cases similar to Taylor’s are numerous, with nearly 2, 500 unique cases of false imprisonment present in the United States (*Michigan*). Many states, including Texas, have introduced legislation aiming to reduce the effects that false imprisonment has had on those recently released, through financial compensation, this compensation usually is fairly substantial, often approaching or even surpassing \$1 million in restitution. In Ronald’s case, he

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received \$1.14 million from the state, with half of it paid out as a lump sum, and the rest of it paid in annual payments of \$5,600 (*Michigan*). After Ronald was released from the Harris County Jail, his first order of business was to head to the Houston City Hall to plead to the city, that ordeals, such as his, should never happen again. He then rejoiced with his mother, Dorothy, and had a meal with her (*Khanna*). He then reunified with his then soon to be wife Jeanette, as they planned to move to Atlanta and rebuild his life. Once in Atlanta, Ronald found a job at a restaurant and later left and started up his own lawn care business, which he worked until his death last year (" *Pardon* "). In September of 2018, Ronald Gene Taylor passed away at the age of 58, having been survived by his wife, Jeanette and their three children. He has been just one of many cases where the wrong individual ended up in prison, though groups, such as the *Innocence Project* , have made it their goal as an organization to make sure that those who don't deserve to be in prison, to reclaim their innocence and be a free man once more. Luckily, this was the case for Ronald, who was freed and started a family of his own. As long as the Innocence Project continues to assist in exonerating the innocent, maybe this flaw in our criminal justice system can be eliminated once and for all. As Ronald said in an interview not long after he was freed, " *It's hard to get restarted... Little things...are hard when you have to say you are a convicted felon. Now, I am officially a free man, I am so relieved*" (" *Pardon* ") .

Works Cited

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