



THE NATIONAL REGISTRY
OF EXONERATIONS

The Toledo Exonerations

Last month, we published the cases of four men—[Lorenzo Vasquez](#), [Ismael Vasquez](#), [Louis Costilla, Jr.](#), and [Joseph Rickard](#)—who were exonerated in January for a 1992 murder in Toledo, Ohio. Their co-defendant, [Eric Misch](#), had been exonerated in late 2024. They were teenagers and young adults at the time of the crime.

We have numerous cases in the Registry where a group of young defendants was wrongfully convicted of a brutal crime. The list includes the [Beatrice Six](#) from Nebraska, and the [Exonerated Five](#), (a sixth defendant was exonerated in 2022) who were exonerated in 2002 after being convicted of an attack in New York's Central Park.

The Toledo defendants don't have a moniker. The cases received little national attention but unfolded in a manner that is consistent with many of these exonerations.

In this instance, there was an exceptionally vicious attack. The investigation ran cold. The police received a tip, which led them to Misch, who was 16 years old. He gave a statement, which he quickly recanted, but this became the foundation of the state's case, which portrayed the murder as a racially motivated attack. (The victim was Black, and the defendants were white or Hispanic.)

A re-investigation, spearheaded by the Wrongful Conviction Project at the Ohio Office of the Public Defender, cast the crime in a different light—as an attack rooted in a family disagreement and exposed police failure to disclose evidence of an alternative suspect.

By the time of their exonerations, only one of the defendants was still in prison. Collectively, they served 132 years in prison, an average of 26 years per defendant. It's a staggering toll. For the Toledo defendants. For all of us.



From left, Eric Misch, Lorenzo Vasquez, Louis Costilla Jr., and Joseph Rickard, four of the five Toledo exonerees.

We also published 13 other exonerations in January.

In 1989, Robert Melock was sentenced to death for the murder of his grandmother in Waukegan, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2024 based on withheld evidence that showed a jailhouse informant had falsely testified that Melock admitted to the crime, as well as evidence that the lead detective had a history of obtaining false confessions.

In 1994, Don Johnson pled guilty to assaulting a woman who said he had raped her in Worcester, Massachusetts, and was sentenced to 1 year in prison. He was exonerated in 2022 after DNA testing excluded him as the source of semen in the rape kit.

In 2018, Chris Graham was sentenced to 18 months in prison after he was convicted of illegal possession of a firearm in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was exonerated in 2021 based on evidence that two police officers had falsely testified that Graham had a gun and had assaulted one of the officers.

In 1983, Jeffrey Koonce was convicted of an armed robbery in Mount Vernon, New York. He was paroled in 1992 and exonerated in 2024 after a re-investigation of his case found that the police used a flawed photo array to link Koonce to the crime.

In 2012, Jatorick Lewis pled guilty to possession of ecstasy in Houston, Texas and was sentenced to probation. His probation was later revoked, and he was sentenced to six years in prison. He was exonerated in 2024 based on the discovery of a 2012 laboratory test that had been negative for any illegal substance.

Michael Grant, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was convicted of attempted murder and carjacking

in 2008. After the state conceded it had failed to disclose exculpatory evidence, Grant received a new trial in 2023 and was acquitted at retrial in October 2024.

Angel Contreras pled guilty to a drug violation in Camden, New Jersey, in 2006. He was exonerated in 2010, after at least one of the officers involved in his arrest was charged with wide-ranging misconduct.

In 2010, Cedric Warren and Domonique Moore were convicted of two counts of murder in Kansas City, Kansas. They were exonerated in 2024, after a judge ruled that the state had failed to disclose evidence about the mental health of the only eyewitness to the crimes.

Alexy Martinez-Mercado pled guilty to the sexual assault of a minor in New Britain, Connecticut, in 2016. He was exonerated in 2023, after DNA testing associated the genetic material on the victim's clothing with another man.

We also published three exonerations tied to the misconduct of Gerald Goines, a former narcotics officer in Houston, Texas. Gene Walker pled guilty to drug possession and tampering with evidence in 2017. He was exonerated in 2024. Joseph Posey pled guilty to a drug offense in 2013. He was exonerated in 2024. And, Dorothy Mable pled guilty to a drug offense in 2013. She was exonerated in 2024.

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.

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