

# Innocents Database Was Started 20 Years Ago, On February 1, 1997

By Hans Sherrer

The first entries were made in the [Innocents Database](#) on February 1, 1997. Today, twenty years later, it is the only database in the world that strives to include every identifiable exoneration in the United States, as well as internationally. The database is accessible from [Justice Denied's homepage](#).

The Innocents Database began as an idea to compile into a useful form the information about wrongful conviction cases included in the *Stanford Law Review* article, "Miscarriages of Justice in Potentially Capital Cases," by Hugo Adam Bedau and Michael L. Radelet (1987).[n.1]

More than eight thousand cases have been added to the database over the past twenty years from sources that include court records, magazine articles, newspaper stories, and books.

The database originally had 61 columns of possible data for each record. It has expanded to 232 columns so that as many unique aspects as possible can be tracked for each case. The database currently has millions of bytes of data.

The Innocents Database was first made available online sorted by name, and then also sorted by location and date of exoneration. In 2015 the accessibility and usefulness of the database to the public and researchers was enhanced when a sortable and searchable version [of the database](#) was made available online. In seconds information in the database can be sorted on any combination of over 100 columns to cull the specific data a user wants to know. Want to know how many people were exonerated in California in 2011 who falsely confessed? No problem. Want to know how many women were exonerated nationally in 2009. You can have the answer in seconds.

The [Innocents Database](#) includes 8,165 cases: 5,243 from the U.S., and 2,922 from 116 other countries. The database includes 4,325 U.S. cases from 2017 to 1989, when the first DNA exoneration occurred. The database includes:

- 592 innocent people sentenced to death.
- 1,020 innocent people sentenced to life in prison.
- 2,166 innocent people convicted of a homicide related crime.
- 1,067 innocent people convicted of a sexual assault related crime.
- 785 innocent people were convicted after a false confession by him or herself or a co-defendant.
- 3,041 innocent people were convicted of a crime that never occurred.
- 225 innocent people were posthumously exonerated by a court or a pardon.

- 74 innocent people were convicted of a crime when they were in another city, state or country from where the crime occurred.
- 1,851 innocent people had 1 or more co-defendants. The most innocent co-defendants in any one case was 29, and 20 cases had 10 or more co-defendants.
- 12% of wrongly convicted persons are women.
- The average for all exonerated persons is 7-1/8 years imprisonment before their release.
- 31 is the average age when a person is wrongly imprisoned.
- Cases of innocent people convicted in 117 countries are in the database.
- 5,242 cases involve a person convicted in the United States.
- 2,922 cases involve a person convicted in a country other than the U.S.

There are cases from more than one-third of the 3,142 counties and independent cities in the U.S. [Click here to see a map](#) showing all counties in the U.S. with a known wrongful conviction and the number of cases.

[Click here to go to the Innocents Database homepage.](#)

Note 1. The case information in "Miscarriages of Justice in Potentially Capital Cases" was included in the 1992 book, *In Spite of Innocence: Erroneous Convictions in Capital Cases*, by Radelet, Bedau, and Constance E. Putnam (Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1992).



## Dookhan Editorial from p. 5

ton lab inadvertently noticed her slip-up of failing to provide initials in the evidence log book when she took out evidence without authorization in June 2011. If not for Dookhan's careless oversight, it is possible that to this day no one would be the wiser that she was engaging in her dirty work of framing ungodly numbers of innocent people.

Dookhan was the front person ... the "fall guy" for the consequences of what occurred during the eight years that scads of professional people believed on blind faith that she was a miracle worker at performing scientific tests for the Hinton Lab. She couldn't have done what she did without:

\* The active assistance of her lab superiors and co-workers who didn't seriously question how she was able to perform tests at a superhuman rate;

\* The support of prosecutors delighted that she reliably provided the evidence they needed to convict defendants;

\* The lack of curiosity by a single judge about how a lone lab technician could provide evidence to convict an average of *11 people every court day* for year after year after year; and,

\* The failure of a lawyer for a single one of the 21,587 exonerated defendants to question Dookhan's qualifications -- not even enough curiosity to do something as simple as checking her educational background and professional training to qualify as the expert who provided the evidence upon which their client's conviction was based. If only one defendant's lawyer had been competent enough to check Dookhan's background shortly after she was hired in 2003, her dishonesty would have been exposed and she would have been unceremoniously fired by the Hinton lab before she had the opportunity to reek havoc on the life of tens of thousands of people.

Dookhan was only able to do what she did because people in the Hinton lab, the seven prosecutors offices, the judges in the seven counties, and the public defenders and retained lawyers for the defendants, cooperated with her scam by effectively looking the other way in their assumption she was a super woman chemist -- and not a fraud.

Annie Dookhan took full advantage of the legal system's bureaucratic structure. The type of disinterested uncurious drones involved in the legal system's bureaucracy remains unchanged by the Dookhan scandal. It was an embarrassing episode that was a speed bump in business as usual.

The most important takeaway from Dookhan's eight-year rampage is there is very little to prevent innocent people from being preyed on by an unscrupulous person in a position of authority in any layer of the legal system.

