

Glenn Ford



Thirty years after he was wrongfully convicted by an all-white jury in Shreveport, Louisiana, Glenn Ford was freed from the death row at Angola, Louisiana State Penitentiary on March 11, 2014 after Judge Ramona Emanuel ordered him to be "unconditionally released." He is the 144th death row inmate since 1973 to be cleared of all charges, and the 10th in Louisiana.

Mr. Ford was charged with the November 5, 1983, murder of Isadore Rozeman, an elderly white man. Mr. Ford had done yard work for Mr. Rozeman, and after the murder, he gave police information about two men who were suspects in the killing. The girlfriend of one of those suspects later implicated Mr. Ford in the murder and he was indicted for first-degree murder along with the other two men.

The court selected lawyers for Mr. Ford from an alphabetical list from the local bar association. Lead counsel was an oil and gas lawyer who had never tried a case to a jury; co-counsel had been out of law school less than two years and was working at an insurance defense firm on slip-and-fall cases - she'd never tried a case, either, and had no experience in criminal law.

The girlfriend who was the State's main witness against Mr. Ford admitted at trial that police had helped her make up her story; she stated she "lied about all of it." Without useful testimony from her, the State's case came to rely on three forensic experts.

One of the State's "expert" witnesses testified about the victim's time of death but had not even examined the victim's body. Mr. Ford's lawyers failed to hire any experts to rebut the prosecution's case because they believed they would have to pay for the experts themselves.

Black, Mr. Ford was tried and sentenced to death by an all-white jury. The charges against the other two men were dismissed soon after. The Louisiana Supreme Court unanimously affirmed Mr. Ford's conviction and death sentence even though it was troubled by "serious questions" about the adequacy of the State's evidence.

In state postconviction proceedings, new lawyers presented evidence that the State suppressed information that corroborated Mr. Ford's story that he was not present at or involved in the murder, including information from an informant, a suppressed police report related to the time of the crime, and evidence of the murder weapon, which implicated the true perpetrator – one of the other two men originally charged with Mr. Ford. Three expert witnesses also presented evidence that undermined the State's "expert" trial testimony, but the trial court denied relief, and the Louisiana Supreme Court affirmed.

In 2012, Mr. Ford filed a petition in federal court. In 2013, prosecutors told defense counsel that a confidential informant stated that one of the other men charged in the crime had admitted to him that he - not Mr. Ford - shot and killed Mr. Rozeman. Last week, both the State and Mr. Ford's lawyers filed motions to vacate his conviction and sentence. The prosecutors wrote in their motion: "[I]f the information had been within the knowledge of the State, Glenn Ford might not even have been arrested or indicted for this offense," though they did not identify the information.

On March 10, 2014, the same judge who had denied him postconviction relief in 2009 ordered Mr. Ford's release. His attorneys picked him up at Angola prison on Tuesday afternoon. As he left prison, Mr. Ford was asked what he felt he had lost. "Thirty years of my life, if not all of it," he replied. "I can't go back and do anything I should have been doing when I was 35, 38, 40, stuff like that."

Mr. Ford was Louisiana's longest-serving death row prisoner and one of the longest-serving death row prisoners in the United States.

Profile taken from the Equal Justice Initiative.

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