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2,754 EXONERATIONS SINCE 1989
MORE THAN 24,690 YEARS LOST

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SCOTT LEWIS

Other Connecticut Exonerations with Misconduct

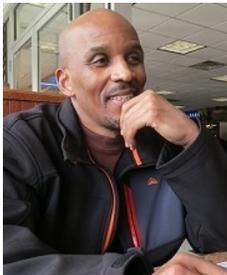


Photo by New Haven Independent

On October 11, 1990, 43-year-old Ricardo Turner and his 23-year-old roommate, Lamont Fields, were shot to death in their apartment in New Haven, Connecticut. Turner, a former New Haven alderman, and Fields were dealing cocaine and police suspected the murders were related to a drug deal gone sour or a turf war.

A month later, an informant told New Haven police that a man named Michael Cardwell had admitted murdering Turner and Fields. However, no evidence could

be found to corroborate the informant's information.

In April 1991, police charged 25-year-old Scott Lewis and 23-year-old Stefon Morant, two alleged drug dealers, with the murders based on a statement from Ovil Ruiz. Police said Ruiz had admitted that he waited in a car while Morant and Lewis went into the apartment. Ruiz then heard gunshots. According to police, Ruiz said Turner and Fields were murdered because Turner had tried to run off with drug money that belonged to Lewis.

Morant went to trial in 1994 in New Haven County Superior Court. The prosecution's case rested primarily on the testimony of Ruiz and Detective Vincent Raucci, who recounted how Ruiz had implicated Morant and Lewis. According to Ruiz, after Morant and Lewis came out, they slapped hands and Lewis said, "Yo, man, I did what I had to do, you know what I am saying?" Morant was convicted and sentenced to 70 years in prison.

Lewis was convicted in May 1995 based primarily on the testimony of Ruiz and Detective Raucci. The defense attempted to introduce evidence that within a month of the shooting, an informant told detectives that another man had confessed that he and his brother had killed Turner and Fields, but the trial judge refused to allow the evidence to be heard.

Lewis denied involvement in the shooting and witnesses said he was at work at a printing company at the time of the killing. The jury convicted him of two counts of first-degree murder and he was sentenced to 120 years in prison.

A year later, Ruiz gave a statement to the FBI as part of a federal investigation of narcotics trafficking. Ruiz said that he had been coerced to testify against Lewis and Morant by Detective Raucci because Raucci secretly was involved in dealing drugs and wanted to eliminate Lewis and Morant as competitors. Lewis and Morant attempted to obtain new trials based on the statement, but their efforts were denied. Detective Raucci denied any involvement in drug trafficking.

Over nearly two decades, Lewis sought to overturn his conviction but without success. He filed a federal petition for a writ of habeas corpus in

State: Connecticut

County: New Haven

Most Serious Crime: Murder

Additional Convictions:

Reported Crime Date: 1990

Convicted: 1995

Exonerated: 2015

Sentence: 120 years

Race/Ethnicity: Black

Sex: Male

Age at the date of reported crime: 25

Contributing Factors: Perjury or False Accusation, Official Misconduct

Did DNA evidence contribute to the exoneration?: No

2003 and a hearing was held 10 years later in the summer of 2013. Among the evidence presented was the testimony of Michael Sweeney, a New Haven police lieutenant who had retired in 1998 and spent a year working as a police officer for the United Nations in Bosnia.

Upon his return, he reached out to the defense attorney for Lewis after reading in a local newspaper that Detective Raucci had resigned from the New Haven police department because of misconduct. The article noted that Raucci had been linked to the New Haven drug trade, charged with larceny following an internal police investigation, arrested for a domestic violence incident, and, after fleeing Connecticut when he was charged in the domestic violence incident, was arrested by the FBI after a four-hour standoff in New Mexico.

Sweeney revealed that he had been present during some of Detective Raucci's interrogation of Ruiz back in 1991. Sweeney said that he interviewed Ruiz alone for more than half an hour and was convinced that Ruiz knew nothing about the crime. Raucci then joined Sweeney and they interviewed Ruiz together and Ruiz insisted he knew nothing.

Sweeney said that Raucci then began giving Ruiz facts about the case. Sweeney said that he told Raucci to leave the interrogation, and in the hallway told him to stop feeding details. Raucci and Sweeney then again confronted Ruiz. Raucci then told Ruiz that he wanted Ruiz to tell him that he was driving the car the night of the murders, and that even though there was a warrant for Ruiz's arrest, he could leave if he cooperated. At that point, Ruiz began to change his statement and Raucci began to give Ruiz additional details. Sweeney took Raucci out in the hall a second time and told him to "knock it off."

At that point, Sweeney became involved in another matter, however, and not long after, Detective Raucci emerged with a statement from Ruiz saying that he had been driving the car that night, that he and Morant and Lewis got two guns, drove to the apartment and while he waited, they went inside and there were gunshots. Afterward, they came out and drove away.

Sweeney told Raucci to step out of the room and then he confronted Ruiz alone, asking if he was telling the truth. Ruiz admitted that he was lying and that all the information came from Raucci. Sweeney then confronted Raucci, who then re-interviewed Ruiz and finally emerged with a statement that Ruiz was now saying that although he wasn't present, he had overheard Lewis and Morant discussing the murders.

Sweeney testified that when he later learned that Lewis and Morant had been charged with the murders, he told a supervisor that Ruiz was a liar and that the case should not be based on his testimony. However, nothing came of the comment.

In December 2013, U.S. District Judge Charles Haight Jr. granted the writ, vacated Lewis's convictions and ordered a new trial. Haight ruled that Lewis's defense lawyer should have been informed of Sweeney's confrontations with Raucci and Sweeney's belief that Ruiz was a liar.

Lewis was released on bond on February 25, 2014 while the New Haven District Attorney's Office appealed the decision. In May 2015, the Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld Haight's ruling.

In June 2015, a judge granted a motion filed on behalf of Morant to reduce his sentence from 70 years to 25 years and Morant was immediately released.

On August 5, the charges against Lewis were dismissed. Lewis filed a federal civil rights suit in August 2016 seeking damages from the city of New Haven. The lawsuit was settled in 2017 for \$9.5 million.

– *Maurice Possley*

Report an error or add more information about this case.

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ABOUT THE REGISTRY

The National Registry of Exonerations is a project of the Newkirk Center for Science & Society at University of California Irvine, the University of Michigan Law School and Michigan State University College of Law. It was founded in 2012 in conjunction with the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University School of Law. The Registry provides detailed information about every known exoneration in the United States since 1989—cases in which a person was wrongly convicted of a crime and later cleared of all the charges based on new evidence of innocence. The Registry also maintains a more limited database of known exonerations prior to 1989.

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