

THE **INNOCENCE** NETWORK

# STARTING AN INNOCENCE CLUB

---

Updated August 2019

# Table of Contents

- INTRODUCTION .....4**
- WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS .....4**
- CLUB OVERVIEW .....5**
  - FUNCTIONS ..... 5
  - NAME..... 5
- STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED.....5**
  - GATHER A GROUP ..... 5
  - SECURE AN ADVISOR ..... 6
  - BECOME AN OFFICIAL CLUB OF YOUR SCHOOL ..... 6
  - CONTACT YOUR NEAREST NETWORK MEMBER ..... 6
  - RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS TO JOIN YOUR FIRST MEETING ..... 6
  - HOLD YOUR FIRST MEETING ..... 6
  - DECIDE ON YOUR STRUCTURE & ACTIVITIES ..... 6
- CLUB BEST PRACTICES .....7**
  - WRITE AND RATIFY A CLUB CONSTITUTION ..... 7
  - HOLD ELECTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND SET TERM LIMITS..... 7
  - ALWAYS SET AN AGENDA ..... 7
- EDUCATION .....8**
  - Movies and TV Series ..... 8*
  - Podcasts ..... 10*
  - Books..... 12*
  - MORE MEDIA RESOURCES ..... 14
  - DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ..... 14
  - ATTEND THE INNOCENCE NETWORK CONFERENCE ..... 15
  - INVITE A SPEAKER TO ADDRESS YOUR GROUP ..... 15
  - LEARN ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENA THAT CAN LEAD TO WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS ..... 15
  - READ THE WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS BLOG & JOIN THE BLIND INJUSTICE FACEBOOK GROUP ..... 15
- ADVOCACY .....16**
  - PARTICIPATE IN WRONGFUL CONVICTION DAY ..... 16
  - LETTER WRITING & OP-EDS ..... 16
  - HELP IMPROVE LOCAL AND STATE POLICIES THAT CAN PREVENT WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS ..... 16
  - SUPPORT EFFORTS TO COMPENSATE EXONEREES ..... 17
  - SPEAK AT YOUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION OR COMMUNITY GROUP ..... 17
  - HOST AN EVENT..... 17
  - BUILD ALLIANCES ..... 17
  - LOCALIZE THE ISSUES ..... 18
  - MAINTAIN A MAILING LIST..... 18

<b>FUNDRAISING</b> .....	<b>18</b>
HOST A CHARITY NIGHT AT A RESTAURANT .....	19
TABLE AT A SCHOOL EVENT .....	19
RUN IN A RACE ON BEHALF OF YOUR ORGANIZATION .....	19
HOLD A BENEFIT CONCERT .....	19
SELL FOOD OR ITEMS FOR A PROFIT .....	20
COLLECT IN-KIND DONATIONS FROM LOCAL BUSINESSES .....	20
PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL MEDIA FUNDRAISERS .....	20
<b>THANK YOU</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>ADDITIONAL RESOURCES</b> .....	<b>20</b>

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in starting an innocence club at your school. This guide is designed to provide individuals and groups who are thinking of starting a club at their high school or undergraduate institution with steps for getting started and suggestions about activities your club could engage. Student engagement in this area is critical, and we hope to inspire young leaders to join our movement.

The Innocence Network is an affiliation of organizations dedicated to providing pro bono legal and investigative services to individuals seeking to prove innocence of crimes for which they have been convicted, working to redress the causes of wrongful convictions, and supporting the exonerated after they are released. The Network also includes organizations that offer post-exoneration support services to individuals who have been proven innocent. Currently, there are nearly 70 member organizations throughout the United States and abroad. For a full list, please visit the [Network's website](#).

To join the Innocence Network, organizations must meet our [membership criteria](#), which includes having at least one employee, typically an experienced criminal defense attorney, who is paid for at least 20 hours a week for work on the project. Substantial resources are required to do this work, and while we commend their efforts, the Network does not accept student-run organizations as members.

If you are a student at a law school who is interested in encouraging your educational institution to start an innocence organization, please note the first step is securing a faculty member to supervise the project. Please read our [Starting an Innocence Organization Guide](#) and consider if you have the time and capacity to start an organization. It is a lot of work!

If you are a student at a high school or undergraduate institution who is interested in starting an innocence organization, please consider using this guide to form a club instead. While your club would not be eligible for membership in the Innocence Network (because only pro bono legal and/or exoneree support organizations are eligible), your work would still be valuable to us and may inform whether you decide to pursue law school and/or a career in nonprofit work. Your club might also inspire you and others to join the staff of a Network member organization later.

## Wrongful Convictions

Wrongful convictions occur when a person is convicted of a crime they did not commit. Factors that frequently contribute to wrongful convictions are eyewitness misidentification, official misconduct by law enforcement and prosecutors, misapplied forensic science, false confessions, incentivized informant testimony, and ineffective defense counsel. Wrongful convictions also disproportionately affect persons of color, with close to 48% of exonerees being Black.<sup>1</sup>

Wrongful convictions work to undermine community faith in the criminal justice system, and communities are put at risk when actual perpetrators are left free to commit more crimes. When wrongful convictions occur, the original victim of the crime never receives justice and a new, innocent victim is created. Wrongful convictions also expose flaws in our criminal justice system, so it is important

---

<sup>1</sup> *Exonerations by Race and Crime*, National Registry of Exonerations (2019).  
<http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/ExonerationsRaceByCrime.aspx>

that we take steps to prevent and fight wrongful convictions so that the justice system may be improved for everyone.

## Innocence Club Overview

### Functions

Your club should look to partner with your local innocence organization if possible. To find the organization nearest you, please visit <https://innocencenetwork.org/members/>. Your club can participate in some or all of the following activities:

- Education: educating yourselves about wrongful convictions
- Advocacy: raising awareness by conducting outreach to your community to influence legislation and public policy
- Fundraising: in coordination with your local organization, raising money to support their work

Your club should gain student activity or club status through your school and comply with any necessary requirements they might set. Additionally, clubs should secure a school faculty or staff member as an advisor. Consider the leadership and membership structure that works best for you. You may consider having four officers, including a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary, if necessary, to adhere to your school's policies and procedures.

### Naming Your Club

The name "Innocence Project" is a federally-registered trademark owned by the Innocence Project, Inc. The Innocence Project, Inc. grants use of the trademark, through a license agreement, to those members of the Innocence Network which seek to use the term "Innocence Project" as part of its legal name, or otherwise use the mark. In order to use the "Innocence Project" name or trademark, organizations must apply to and be accepted in the Network and sign the license agreement. Because your club will not meet the requirements to use the trademark, you will not be able to use the name "Innocence Project" in your club's name. We suggest calling yourselves an innocence club. For instance, you could be "{Insert School Name} Innocence Club" or "{Insert School Name} Wrongful Conviction Club." It is important to remember that your activities may reflect on the Innocence Network.

Please note that the Innocence Network is not a legal entity, and all of its members are independent from one another. The Innocence Project, Inc., a New York not-for-profit corporation based in New York City, is a founding member of the Network, serves as the headquarters of the Network, and owns and enforces rights in the "Innocence Project" trademark.

## Steps for Getting Started

### Gather a group

Gather a group of at least three individuals, ideally with diverse perspectives and an interest in the criminal justice system. Share this guide with them and secure their support in helping you launch your innocence club.

## Secure an advisor

Enlist a faculty or staff member to be your advisor. You should approach someone who cares about the mission and has time to devote to the club and ensuring its success. Work with your advisor to find out your school's procedures for creating an official club and what requirements you must meet.

## Become an official club of your school

This is critical for being able to access resources your school might have available, such as meeting rooms, funding, and permission to hold events on campus. Your school might require you to create club leadership position descriptions and a constitution.

## Contact your nearest Innocence Network member

After you've secured the support of an advisor and your school, contact your nearest Network member organization. If there is not a Network member in your state, follow the organization that accepts cases in your state by clicking on "Areas Served" and then your state at <https://innocencenetwork.org/members/>. Visit their website to learn about their work, follow their social media accounts, and sign up for their email newsletters if their website lists that as an option. Please note that most Network member organizations are very small; the average staff size of a Network member organization is four people. If the organization nearest you has limited resources and a small budget (as many do), they may not have the capacity to work extensively with your club. Please do not let that discourage you (there are plenty of suggestions of activities your club can do in this guide that do not depend on their collaboration), but please note that you will not be able to use any organization's logo in your materials without their permission. Your fundraising activities (discussed later) will be all the more valuable to them.

## Recruit participants to join your first meeting

Schedule and secure a location for your first meeting and recruit your friends and classmates to join you. Promote your group by putting up posters around your school. Get your first meeting listed on your school's event calendar, if possible. Spread the word through social media and/or email. Can you include it in your school's newspaper? Will teachers/professors let you make a brief announcement during an appropriate time? Consider all the opportunities for promotion your school has available to you.

## Hold your first meeting

At your first meeting, you might want to have everyone introduce themselves and share what inspired them to be interested in joining and what they are hoping to get out of the club. Motivate others to join by sharing why you wanted to start the club -- what has you fired up and why you're inspired to take action. Introduce attendees to the work and how your involvement can make a difference. Be sure to collect the contact information of everyone who attends through a sign-up sheet so you can follow up with them.

## Decide on your structure & activities

Decide on the leadership structure of your club. Will you elect officers? How many officers will you have? Who will set the agenda for each meeting? Be sure the roles you decide on are well defined so that key tasks get done. It can be helpful to create descriptions of the tasks associated with each role so officers are clear on their tasks. Examples of some officers you might want to have are a president, vice president, treasurer (particularly if you plan to fundraise and/or your school offers you some funding

you will need to manage), and a secretary (having someone to take notes, oversee email updates and reminders as well as meeting logistics can be helpful).

Set your goals and determine your activities for the year. How often will you meet? When? Where? How will you communicate with each other? A listserv or Facebook group can be helpful. You might consider dividing into committees to handle the different buckets of work. For instance, a communications committee can oversee conducting outreach internally to your school and externally to your community. You might want to create a Facebook page and/or other social media channels where you can share information about your club and events. Social media can be helpful to build visibility and publicize events. Supporters can find out what you're doing and how they can get involved. It could be a good way to entice more members, too!

Keep in mind when planning your year that [Wrongful Conviction Day](#) (see page 16) is October 2<sup>nd</sup> and that the Network Conference (see page 15) is typically in March or April. Visit <https://innocencenetwork.org/networkconference/> to find out more information. If you decide to attend, you can register as a student at a discounted rate.

## **Club Best Practices**

Below we've provided some recommendations for your innocence club.

### **Write and ratify a club constitution**

In your constitution, include articles on your club's statement of purpose, how your club's leadership will be structured, whether you'll have committees and what their roles will be, and on rules for general membership.

### **Hold elections for leadership positions and set term limits**

It is important that your club members feel that club leadership is held accountable to them, and that ultimately, everyone's voices matter in the decisions the club makes. Furthermore, whether elections are held annually or after each semester, new leadership can allow for fresh and diverse perspectives on the direction of the club.

### **Always set an agenda**

To hold productive meetings, club leadership should have a set agenda for each meeting, laying out and prioritizing what will be discussed and for how long as well as what needs to be decided. An agenda holds meeting attendees accountable and works to keep the club on track.

## Education

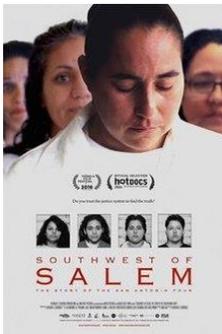
As an innocence club, one of your primary functions is to educate and raise awareness in your community about wrongful convictions and actual innocence. You can do this by organizing movie screenings and book clubs, facilitating discussions about the wrongful conviction media you consume, and connecting your club members to content so that they can learn more. Below you will find lists of books, movies, and podcasts that tell stories of wrongful convictions and actual innocence.

### Movies and TV Series

#### [When They See Us \(2019\)](#)

Ava DuVernay's Netflix mini-series chronicles the wrongful convictions of [Yusef Salaam](#), [Antron McCray](#), [Kevin Richardson](#), [Raymond Santana](#), and [Korey Wise](#) for the rape and murder of a jogger in Central Park (dubbed by the media "the Central Park Five"). It exposes the human cost of wrongful imprisonment and sheds light on the horror and pain endured by the young Black men, their loved ones, and their communities.

*Stream on Netflix. Four episodes total. Running time: 64-88 minutes per episode.*



#### [Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four \(2016\)](#)

Four friends, [Elizabeth Ramirez](#), [Kristie Mayhugh](#), [Cassandra Rivera](#) and [Anna Vasquez](#), who came to be known as the "San Antonio Four," were wrongfully convicted in 1994 of raping Ms. Ramirez's seven and nine-year-old nieces. These convictions were driven by homophobia and the evidence used in courtroom testimony was later found to be faulty. One of the victims also admitted that she was forced by family members to deliver false testimony and later recanted her testimony.

*Stream on Amazon Prime. Running time: 90 minutes.*

#### [Making a Murderer \(2015\)](#)

This Netflix documentary series examines the case of [Steven Avery](#), a man who was wrongfully convicted of rape in 1985 based on a mistaken eyewitness identification. After it was discovered that DNA found at the scene did not match Mr. Avery, he was exonerated in 2003. However, shortly after, in 2005, Mr. Avery was convicted of a murder and sentenced to life in prison.

*Stream on Netflix. Two seasons, 20 episodes total. Running time: 47-77 minutes per episode.*





### **[Amanda Knox \(2016\)](#)**

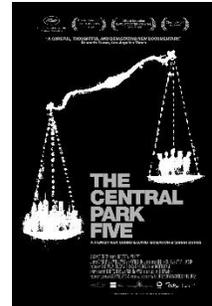
This Netflix production looks at the widely publicized conviction of Amanda Knox, an American foreign exchange student in Italy, who was wrongly convicted, along with her then-boyfriend, of killing her roommate in what prosecutors claimed was a sex act gone wrong. Ms. Knox tells the story of her conviction and subsequent vilification by media around the world.

*Stream on Netflix. Running time: 92 minutes.*

### **[The Central Park Five \(2012\)](#)**

In this documentary, filmmakers Ken Burns, Sarah Burns and David McMahon examine the Central Park Jogger Case, exposing the injustices carried out by law enforcement, prosecutors and the media in the convictions of five Black teenagers-- [Yusef Salaam](#), [Antron McCray](#), [Kevin Richardson](#), [Raymond Santana](#), and [Korey Wise](#)-- for a rape and murder they did not commit.

*Free on Amazon Prime. Running time: 119 minutes.*



### **[David and Me \(2014\)](#)**

Filmmakers Ray Klonsky and Marc Lamy examine the case of [David McCallum](#), a man who was coerced into confessing to a murder he did not commit when he was 16. Mr. McCallum's conviction was plagued with false accusations, misconduct by law enforcement, and a district attorney unwilling to reconsider the case.

*Stream on Netflix. Running time: 69 minutes.*

### **[Crown Heights \(2017\)](#)**

This movie tells the true story of [Colin Warner](#), an immigrant from Trinidad in Brooklyn who was wrongfully convicted of murder and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison. Mr. Warner's childhood friend, Carl King, sets out to prove Mr. Warner's innocence.

*Stream on Amazon Prime. Running time: 94 minutes.*





### [West of Memphis \(2012\)](#)

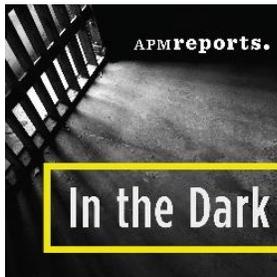
This documentary is part of a trilogy that looks at the case of the West Memphis Three in which three teenagers, Jessie Misskelley, Damien Echols and Jason Baldwin, were wrongfully convicted of the murders of three eight-year-old children in 1993. The documentary focuses on Terry Hobbs, stepfather to one of the victims, whose DNA was found at the scene of the crime and who lacked an alibi. The documentary reveals the evidence against Mr. Hobbs and that law enforcement failed to ever question him at the time of the murders. *Stream on Amazon Prime. Running time: 147 minutes.*

## Podcasts

### [Mass Exoneration](#)

Hear from former prisoners in Massachusetts who have been wrongfully convicted, their lawyers, and their loved ones. This podcast is created in collaboration with the [New England Innocence Project](#).

*Listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and Google Play Music. Running time: about 60 minutes per episode.*



### [In The Dark, Season 2](#)

Podcast host Madeleine Baran tells the story of Curtis Flowers, a Black man in Mississippi who was tried six times and ultimately convicted of murdering four people. Mr. Flowers has maintained his innocence since his conviction in 1996, and evidence used by District Attorney Doug Evans is found to be circumstantial at best. Taking his appeal to the Supreme Court, Mr. Flowers' case reveals racial bias in the jury selection for each of his trials, and more broadly, in the prosecutor's past.

*Listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Stitcher. 13 episodes total. Running time: 40-67 minutes per episode.*

**The Moth, Michael VonAllmen**

In 1983, [Michael VonAllmen](#) was wrongfully convicted of beating, raping and robbing a 22-year-old woman in Kentucky due to a mistaken eyewitness identification and misconduct by law enforcement officials. He was paroled in 1994 and sixteen years later, the [Kentucky Innocence Project](#) found the true perpetrator, a man who looked like Mr. VonAllmen and had been found guilty of a similar crime in the area before. In 2010, Mr. VonAllmen was exonerated and now works to advocate for an end to the death penalty.

Listen to VonAllmen's story [here](#). Running time: 15 minutes.



**The Moth, Rickie Johnson**

In 1983, [Rickie Johnson](#) was wrongfully convicted of raping a 22-year-old woman in Louisiana and sentenced to life without parole, on the basis of a mistaken eyewitness identification. He was exonerated in 2008, after serving 25 years, with the help of the [Innocence Project](#) and the use of post-conviction DNA testing.

Listen to Mr. Johnson's story [here](#). Running time: 5 minutes.

**Undisclosed, Season One: The State v. Adnan Syed**

This podcast, hosted by Susan Simpson, Rabia Chaudry, and Colin Miller, investigates wrongful convictions while finding new evidence that never made it to court. The first season examines the case of Adnan Syed, a man who was convicted of murdering his girlfriend in 1999 when he was a high school student in Maryland. Mr. Syed was sentenced to life plus 30 years in prison. The podcast looks at evidence that points to his innocence.

Listen [here](#), on Spotify, and Stitcher. Nine episodes total. Running time: about 60 minutes per episode.

**UNDISCLOSED**



**Breakdown, Season Four: "Murder Below the Gnat Line"**

This podcast, hosted by Bill Rankin of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, tells the story of [Georgia Innocence Project](#) client Devonian Inman. Mr. Inman was convicted of shooting a woman in a robbery in 1998. 20 years after his conviction, testimonies that pointed to his guilt have been recanted and DNA tests have identified a different suspect.

Listen on [the AJC website](#), Stitcher, Spotify, and iTunes. Six episodes total. Running time: about 40 minutes per episode.

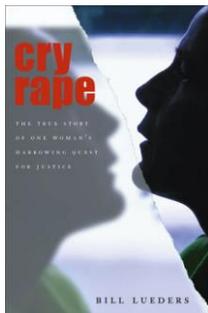
### [Actual Innocence](#)

This podcast, now discontinued, was started by social worker Brooke Gittings to bring awareness to the widespread prevalence of wrongful convictions. In each episode, Ms. Gittings interviews a person who has experienced the injustices of wrongful conviction.

*Listen to past episodes on Spotify, Stitcher, and Apple Podcasts. Running time: about 50 minutes per episode.*



### Books

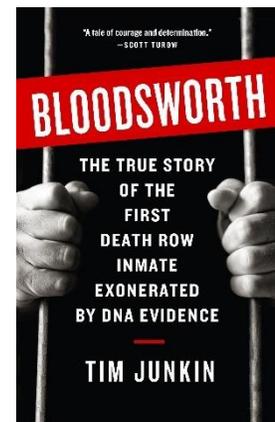


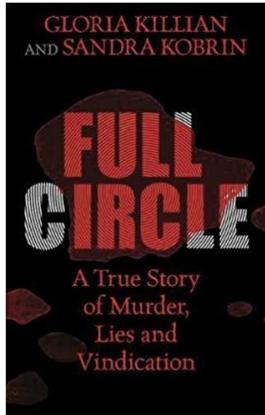
#### ***Cry Rape: The True Story of One Woman's Harrowing Quest for Justice, by Bill Leuders (2006)***

In 1997, a visually impaired woman named Patty was raped by an intruder in her home in Wisconsin. When law enforcement could not find evidence of the rape, Patty was forced to recant, and the district attorney filed charges against her for falsely reporting a crime. The charges were eventually dropped, but Patty continued to demand justice, filing complaints, and a federal lawsuit against the police.

#### ***Bloodsworth: The True Story of the First Death Row Inmate Exonerated by DNA Evidence, by Tim Junkin (2004)***

In 1984, [Kirk Bloodsworth](#) was wrongfully convicted of the rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl in Maryland and sentenced to death. Maintaining his innocence, Mr. Bloodsworth was able to convince a new lawyer to petition for the then-innovative DNA testing. In 1993, Mr. Bloodsworth became the first death row inmate in America to be exonerated by DNA evidence. He was subsequently pardoned by the governor of Maryland and has since gone on to advocate against capital punishment.



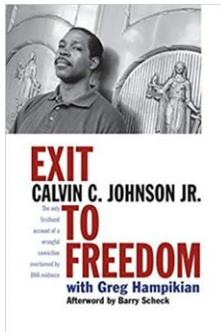
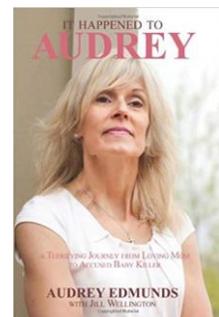


***Full Circle: A True Story of Murder, Lies, and Vindication, by Gloria Killian (2012)***

In 1986, [Gloria Killian](#) was wrongfully convicted of first-degree murder, attempted murder, robbery, burglary and conspiracy to commit robbery after two men entered the home of an elderly couple in Rosemont, California and fatally shot the husband. The only evidence against Ms. Killian was the testimony of one of the perpetrators, who testified in exchange for a shorter sentence. Ten years later, massive exculpatory evidence, hidden documents, prosecutorial misconduct and perjury was uncovered in Ms. Killian's case. Ms. Killian was finally exonerated in 2002.

***It Happened to Audrey, by Audrey Edmunds (2012)***

In 1996, [Audrey Edmunds](#) was wrongfully convicted of murdering an infant in her care. The faulty science of shaken baby syndrome (SBS), which had been widely popularized by media at the time, was used to convict Ms. Edmunds, claiming that shaking a baby resulted in fatal brain damage and immediate unresponsiveness. When the [Wisconsin Innocence Project](#) took her case in 2003, medical research had discredited SBS, and experts testified that shaking alone would not cause that level of brain damage. In 2008, Ms. Edmunds was exonerated.

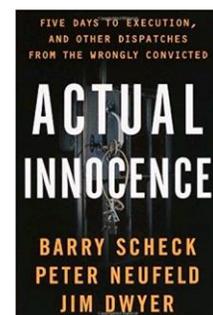


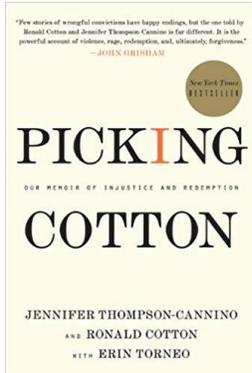
***Exit to Freedom, by Calvin C. Johnson, Jr. and Greg Hampikian (2003)***

In 1983, [Calvin C. Johnson, Jr.](#) was wrongfully convicted of raping a woman in Georgia after eyewitness misidentification and forensic testimony at his trial actively misled the jury. Mr. Johnson was sentenced to life in prison and spent 16 years incarcerated before he was freed in 1999. With the help of the [Innocence Project](#), DNA testing was conducted and conclusively showed his innocence.

***Actual Innocence: Five Days to Execution, and Other Dispatches from the Wrongly Convicted, by Barry Scheck, Peter Neufeld and Jim Dwyer (2000)***

Mr. Scheck, Neufeld, and Dwyer tell the stories of ten wrongfully convicted men, and how careless police work, corrupt prosecutors, jailhouse snitches, mistaken eyewitnesses, and other all-too-common flaws of the trial system caused their imprisonment. The authors also discuss what it takes to exonerate these men and set them free.



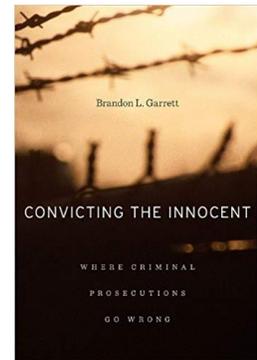


### ***Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption*, by Jennifer Thompson-Cannino, Ronald Cotton, and Erin Torneo (2010)**

In 1985, [Ronald Cotton](#) was convicted of two counts of rape and burglary on the basis of an eyewitness identification. After DNA from the scene was found to not match Mr. Cotton, he was exonerated in 1995. Jennifer Thompson, one of the victims who had identified Mr. Cotton as the perpetrator at the time, has since gone on to speak out against relying solely on eyewitness identification to convict. In this book, Mr. Cotton and Ms. Thompson tell their stories of pain, injustice, and forgiveness, and how they've since formed a friendship that has changed their lives.

### ***Convicting the Innocent: Where Criminal Prosecutions Go Wrong*, by Brandon L. Garrett (2012)**

In this textbook on wrongful convictions, author Brandon L. Garrett uses information gathered from trial transcripts, and interviews with lawyers, prosecutors, and court reporters on 250 cases of actual innocence. Mr. Garrett examines who these innocent people were, and what common practices, such as eyewitness identification procedures or coerced confessions, led to their convictions.



## **More Media Resources**

**Visit these websites for more movies, podcasts and books on wrongful convictions and actual innocence cases:**

- Bluhm Legal Clinic Center on Wrongful Convictions, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law: <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/wrongfulconvictions/resources/>
- Innocence Project of Minnesota: <https://www.ipmn.org/books-and-movies-about-wrongful-conviction/>
- The Innocence Project: <https://www.innocenceproject.org/edwin-grimsley-wrongful-conviction-knowledge/> & <https://www.innocenceproject.org/wrongful-conviction-media/>
- North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence: <https://www.nccai.org/resources/>

## **Discussion Questions**

As an innocence club, it is important to actively engage your community with this media, using it as a framework to facilitate discussions on wrongful convictions. As a discussion facilitator, be mindful of your discussion space. The stories told involve heavy topics, including violent crimes. Your space may be one of discomfort for some, as you grapple with issues such as racial bias and sexual assault, and that's okay. Your discussions should remain civil. Encourage people to speak for themselves, using their own experiences rather than generalizations or assumptions about others. The questions below are a good starting point for these important dialogues. Having a discussion can help you process what you watched, read, or listened to.

1. In the wrongful conviction story that was presented, what moved you the most? Why?
2. Thinking about the ways those who were wrongfully convicted were treated by law enforcement and the court system, where do you see room for reform? Consider interrogation tactics, prosecutorial conduct, jury selection, eyewitness testimony, etc.
3. How did poverty and/or race factor into this wrongful conviction?
4. What are the long-term consequences for those who have been convicted of a crime?
5. What do you think needs to be done to support exonerees upon release? Is financial compensation enough?

## **Attend the Innocence Network Conference**

The Innocence Network Conference is an annual event bringing together members of the innocence movement, including attorneys, exonerated individuals and their families, staff from Network member organizations, the media, and other advocates, for two days of powerful plenary and breakout sessions. Please visit <https://innocencenetwork.org/networkconference/> for information about the next conference. If registration is not yet available, you can save the date and sign up to be notified when registration opens on our website. If you decide to attend, you can register as a student for a discounted rate.

## **Invite a speaker to address your group**

The Innocence Project has a Speakers' Bureau that is comprised of former Innocence Project clients and staff members who are effective public speakers with unique expertise and insight into this work. Click [here](https://www.innocenceproject.org/speakers-bureau/) to learn more about the Speakers' Bureau and submit a request form to invite speaker to address your group: <https://www.innocenceproject.org/speakers-bureau/>. Please note that exoneree speakers require an honorarium for appearances, in addition to per diem and any necessary travel expenses.

## **Learn about the psychological phenomena that can lead to wrongful convictions**

Created by the Ohio Innocence Project and the Innocence Project, and co-sponsored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Innocence Network, this video series serves to educate us about the psychological phenomena that can impede criminal investigations and prosecutions and lead to wrongful convictions. The seven videos feature leading experts discussing how to recognize psychological phenomena including confirmation bias, memory malleability, eyewitness misidentification, false confessions, lie detection and demeanor evidence, tunnel vision, and implicit bias. The experts in the videos also highlight some of the safeguards that can be utilized to address these issues and prevent wrongful convictions. For online access to the videos and more information, click [here](#).

## **Read the Wrongful Convictions Blog & join the Blind Injustice Facebook Group**

Edited by Mark Godsey, director of the Ohio Innocence Project, the Wrongful Convictions Blog provides updates on news on wrongful convictions. Click [here](#) to check it out. Mark Godsey also manages a public Facebook group, called [Blind Injustice](#), where articles concerning wrongful convictions and other relevant topics are shared.

## Advocacy

Your club can participate in the important work of advocating for the fight to overturn existing wrongful convictions and prevent future ones. Some suggestions are below.

### Participate in Wrongful Conviction Day

Wrongful Conviction Day, held each year on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, is an international day to raise awareness of the causes and remedies of wrongful conviction and to recognize the tremendous personal, social, and emotional costs of wrongful conviction for innocent people and their families. Visit <http://www.iwcd.org> to learn how you can get involved.

### Letter writing & op-eds

Consider writing a letter on behalf of a case and/or piece of legislation that matters to you. Contact your local Network member organization to find out what might be helpful to them. Examples could include advocating on behalf of a clemency request, sending letters of support to a client, or sending a letter to your state government on behalf of a policy change. Some tips for writing your letters:

- Research the address and salutation for the person to whom you are writing.
- Keep your tone respectful and polite.
- Write clearly and concisely.
- If writing to a decision maker, first consult with the organization spearheading the policy or legal effort and stick to the facts: do not include judgement, feelings or political leanings and be constructive, focusing on a solution.
- Always remain mindful of the potential impact of your letter. Be sure to consult with the organization before asking people to write letters to a client they're representing or before taking part in a policy/legislative effort to be sure your messaging is impactful and doesn't unintentionally undercut a larger strategy.
- Refrain from sending out identical sample letters. It is more impactful to send individualized, personal letters that demonstrate genuine interest.

Consider writing an editorial for your school's newspaper or an opinion piece for your local newspaper.

### Help improve local and state policies that can prevent wrongful convictions

Click [here](#) to learn how your state is doing, and what reforms might be needed.

You can sign up to be notified of actions to help win legislative reforms nationwide. Click this link from the Innocence Project to stay informed: <https://www.innocenceproject.org/pledge/>. You can help amplify any state specific campaigns by sharing them on your social media pages.

District attorney elections are important opportunities to impact criminal justice reform in your community. Many people are not aware of the power a prosecutor's office holds; click [here](#) to learn more about it. Whether you are of voting age or not, find out who your district attorney is and what they stand for. Be sure to vote when you're eligible, and encourage others to do the same.

## Support efforts to compensate exonerees

It is important that once exonerated, those who have spent time behind bars wrongfully convicted are monetarily compensated by their state and given the resources and support they need to reenter society. Exonerees require financial support for basic needs such as food, clothing, and transportation. They need secure and affordable housing, medical care, and counseling services, as well as access to education, job training, and legal services so that they may expunge their criminal records and receive public benefits.

Look into whether [your state](#) has compensation laws in place, and what kinds of support systems, if any, your state has for exonerees. If your state does not offer compensation, or has a weak statute, amplify the need for compensation reform on your social media pages by sharing dedicated Facebook pages or tweets related to active campaigns advocating for state compensation for exonerees.

## Speak at your religious institution or community group

Consider approaching local religious leaders to see if your church, synagogue, imam, meeting house, etc., would be interested in sponsoring or hosting an event to help educate the public about wrongful convictions. Similarly, approach the leaders of other community groups in which you and the other members of your club are involved to see if they would be interested in giving you an opportunity to educate them about wrongful convictions and the impactful work you and your local organization are doing.

## Host an event

One of the things you may do as an innocence club is host a school-wide event to bring public awareness to the problem of wrongful convictions. Consider screening a film about wrongful convictions, and invite local Network member staff and/or exonerees to speak.

First, decide as a club what kind of event you want it to be. Is it going to be a movie screening (see list of media above)? Are you going to invite a speaker or organize a panel on wrongful convictions? Will it be a podcast listening party?

After deciding what your event will entail, figure out the logistics. Where and when will the event occur? Confirm with your school's administration that the location and time you've selected is approved for the purpose of the event. Will you serve food or refreshments? How are you going to advertise and get the word out about the event? Set a goal for how many people you would like in attendance and lay out a plan for how you may realistically reach that number. At the event, will you want to set up a station where you can collect donations for your local innocence organization? Make sure you give yourself, your school, any guest speakers and your attendees enough notice to ensure the event runs smoothly.

Following the event, debrief as a club about how you think it went and what you think your community was able to get out of it.

## Build alliances

Consider meeting and working with groups that similarly support criminal justice reform, as well as with groups that may not advocate for criminal justice reform as their main mission but would be willing to support innocence causes. Examples of entities you could ally with are civil rights organizations, religious groups, racial justice groups, women's rights groups, LGBTQIA+ rights groups, and immigrant rights groups. Forming alliances provides opportunities to lift each other up and support one another in

advocacy, reform, awareness and fundraising efforts, as well as illuminate the intersectional nature of these issues.

## Localize the issues

Stay on top of your local and state news, and if possible, conduct your advocacy such that it touches upon stories of persons impacted by wrongful conviction in your community. Advocating for broader issues like criminal justice reform using localized, individual stories helps people engage and encourages them to care about the cause.

## Maintain a mailing list

Collect emails of those interested in the club and its work. Grow your club base by putting out sign-up sheets when you table or host an event. Regularly send out a newsletter publicizing club meetings, efforts, and events. You can also use your mailing list as an opportunity to share information on wrongful convictions and raise awareness of any actual innocence cases or policy reform efforts in your area.

## Fundraising

Most Network member organizations have very small budgets and rely on donated funds to conduct their work. Every dollar helps; your club can have a significant impact on an organization by fundraising on their behalf. Members of the Innocence Network represent multiple different organizational structures. In the Innocence Network, the three most common organizational models are:

- Nonprofit organizations: stand-alone organizations that are independently incorporated with a 501(c)(3) designation, have a governing board, and conduct their own fundraising. Some nonprofit innocence efforts have partnerships with law schools.
- Law-school based organizations: legal clinics or other structures housed within law schools (or occasionally non-law educational institutions) which often utilize the work of students under the supervision of a faculty member. These entities are not independently incorporated and may or may not conduct their own fundraising.
- Unit in a public defender office: discreet units or divisions that are housed within a larger public defender's office that spend at least 80% of their time on innocence cases. These units do not typically fundraise and are not usually able to accept donations.

There are many other forms or structures that an innocence organization can take. A fourth, less common model is a discreet pro bono unit within a corporate law firm dedicated only to innocence cases. Not all organizations in the Network have a mechanism for accepting donations. Typically, projects that are based in a public defender's office are unable to accept donations. Visit the website of the organization you are thinking of raising money to support and see if they have a donation link. That is a good indication whether they can accept donations. Know where you are going to send the money before embarking on your fundraising campaign. Many exonerees have crowdfunding pages you can also consider supporting.

Some suggestions for ways you can fundraise for innocence organizations are below. Keep in mind that funds raised for a specific purpose must be used for that purpose, and that all money raised in the name of the organization must benefit the organization. If an individual wants a tax deduction, encourage the individual to make the donation out directly to the organization.

### **Host a charity night at a restaurant**

Ask a local restaurant to agree to donate a percentage of their profits from a certain night or a portion of the profits received from a specialty item, such as \$1 from every burrito purchased on a particular evening, to your local organization. Promote your charity night to ensure a large turnout! You can also plan a fundraiser with a participating chain restaurant, where customers who mention your cause at checkout will have a percentage of their purchases donated to the cause. Examples of chain restaurants that participate in such fundraising programs are Chipotle, Potbelly Sandwich Shop, IHOP, Five Guys, and Burger King. Visit their websites to learn more.

### **Table at a school event**

Set up a table at a school event to promote the work your local organization does. Collect donations for the organization at the table or provide tablets or laptops that individuals can use to donate online right from your table. Pass out flyers that have the link individuals could use to donate later.

### **Run in a race on behalf of your organization**

Club members can sign up for runs and walkathons and start their own crowdfunding campaigns on behalf of their local innocence organization. Ask club members to tell their friends and family about the organization and why supporting their work is important. Club members can spread the word on their social media channels and collect pledges online and in-person. This form of peer-to-peer fundraising will have the added benefit of naturally raising awareness about wrongful convictions as each club member asks for support.

To collect donations from pledges, club members can use [Mightycause](#), an online fundraising platform. Mightycause works under a “keep-it-all” model, so no matter whether your fundraising goal is reached or not, all the donated funds will go to the intended organization. It is easy to create an account on Mightycause using your email, Facebook or Google account. Once you’ve created an account, you can click “Start a Fundraiser” and begin! Mightycause has all nonprofits logged with the IRS in its system, so all you have to do is search for and select the organization you want to fundraise for. While nonprofits usually pay a 4% platform fee, Mightycause has waived these fees for all Innocence Network member organizations so that they receive all of what you fundraise. Once club members have created their fundraising pages on Mightycause, they can easily share the link on all their social media accounts.

### **Hold a benefit concert**

Reach out to your school’s community of musicians, actors, dancers, and performers. Organize a benefit concert at your school and ask interested students to perform. Explain that the revenue generated from ticket sales will be donated to an innocence organization. At the concert, tell your audience where the proceeds will be going and about the important work the organization is doing and how they can get involved.

## Sell food or items for a profit

Host a bake sale or luncheon on behalf of your local innocence organization and raise funds through selling baked goods or meals at a profit. Other ideas including selling T-shirts or hosting an ice cream social. Money raised from the sales can be donated to the organization of your choice.

## Collect in-kind donations from local businesses

Ask local businesses to donate items they typically sell or a giftcard to their business. This could be a great way for them to access new customers, who may not have previously been aware of them. You could then use the donated items as part of a silent auction at any of your events.

## Participate in social media fundraisers

Ask club members to fundraise on Facebook or on other social media platforms, asking followers to donate. In their posts, club members can explain why they believe it is important to support innocence organizations. Club members' birthdays can be a good time to create a fundraiser to share with their friends.

To start a fundraiser on Facebook, click "Fundraisers" in the left menu of your News Feed, click "Raise Money," click "Nonprofit," select the organization, choose a cover photo and fill in the fundraiser details, and then click "Create."

## Thank you

Thank you so much for your interest in forming an innocence club at your school. We hope you find this guide to be helpful and that it serves as valuable resource for you as you get started. Thank you for helping to support the work of the Innocence Network! Please see below for some links to additional resources that may be useful to your club.

## Additional Resources

- **The National Registry of Exonerations:** <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>
- **The Exoneration Project:** <http://www.exonerationproject.org/category/resources/>
- **Witness to Innocence:** <https://www.witnesstoinnocence.org/innocence>
- **The Innocence Project:** <https://www.innocenceproject.org/#causes>
- **Death Penalty Information Center:** <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/>
- **The Arson Research Project:** <http://thearsonproject.org/>
- **National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers:** <https://www.nacdl.org/>