

Wrongly Imprisoned Man Freed in Texas After 12 Years

Last Edited: Tuesday, 09 Oct 2007, 10:52 PM EDT

Created: Tuesday, 09 Oct 2007, 10:52 PM EDT



Ronald Taylor, right, laughs as he speaks to reporters immediately after leaving jail Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2007 in Houston. Taylor spent 14 years in prison for a rape that DNA evidence later proved he did not commit. Barry Scheck of the Innocence Project stands at left. (AP Photo/Pat Sullivan)

By LIZ AUSTIN PETERSON
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON -- A man who spent a dozen years in prison for a rape he didn't commit was freed Tuesday, the third inmate to be released because of problems with the Houston Police Department's crime lab. Wearing dark clothes and carrying a red mesh gym bag and a paper sack containing his belongings, Ronald Taylor greeted his family with warm embraces outside the Harris County Jail.

"It hasn't really sunk in. I'm just glad to see my family," he said. His plans included eating shrimp, a delicacy he missed in prison, and moving to Atlanta to marry Jeannette Brown, the fiancée who has waited for him since the mid-1990s. But his first stop was City Hall, where Taylor, 47, urged the City Council to prevent other innocent prisoners from rotting behind bars. "They don't have the finances, they don't have nobody to help them," he said. "I think something needs to be done about that." Houston officials have been struggling to fix the crime lab for years. An independent audit in 2002 raised concerns about DNA analysis procedures. In June, a former U.S. Justice Department inspector hired by the city cited hundreds of "serious and pervasive" flaws in forensic cases handled by the lab.

Taylor was convicted of rape in 1995 and sentenced to 60 years in prison. The victim picked him out of a lineup but acknowledged she only caught a glimpse of her attacker's face. During his trial, a crime lab analyst testified that no body fluids were found on the victim's bedsheet. This summer, the Innocence Project paid to have a New Orleans lab retest the bedsheet. Semen that lab found matched the DNA of a man already in prison.

Harris County District Attorney Chuck Rosenthal apologized to Taylor in court Tuesday, and several council members echoed his regret.

Taylor and his mother, Dorothy Henderson, a food-services supervisor at the Walker County Jail

said they didn't blame the criminal justice system for his imprisonment.

"We've just been praying and I just had faith and I knew, I knew within my heart that one day he would get out," Henderson said.

Associated Press writer Juan A. Lozano contributed to this report.