

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“Caught: the man who raped me 16 years ago,” The Times (London) February 21, 2005.

Paul Capener, has been sentenced to 150 years in prison after being convicted of rapes across Britain and the US. DNA evidence and similarities between the cases linked Capener to the crimes.

“Sex attack guilty plea The Daily Telegraph (Sydney, Australia) February 19, 2005.

Daniel Colbrook, 33, has pleaded guilty to two charges of sexual assault after DNA linked him to the attacks. Colbrook was in jail on an unrelated charge.

“Arrest Made in '87 San Diego Slaying; DNA Evidence Links a Man Serving Time for Another Crime to the Stabbing Death of an African American Newspaper Publisher,” Los Angeles Times February 18, 2005.

Ray Clayton, a 39-year-old man serving a third strike prison term for a burglary attempt, has been arrested in connection to a 20 year old murder of an African American newspaper publisher. Stanley was connected to the crime through DNA evidence left at the crime scene.

“Man Gets 25 Years in Slaying of Woman,” The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon) February 18, 2005.

11 years after the murder of 25-year-old Susan Hasler, Andre Tignor, 35, has pleaded guilty to the murder. Tignor’s DNA was entered into the state’s DNA databases in 2000, after he was charged with drunk driving, and matched DNA evidence left at the 1994 murder scene.

Controversies Concerning DNA Databanks and Laboratories

“Glitch Delayed Link to Suspect's DNA; Computer Problems Prevented Id from October Sample,” Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO) February 21, 2005.

Through an apparent glitch in the state and federal DNA databases, investigators failed to link convicted child molester Brent J. Brents to a recent string of rapes. Brents’ DNA was already in the state database after sexually assaulting 2 children in 1988, but was not linked to the recent rapes because of a number of factors, among them the Denver crime lab’s backlog.

“State might overhaul crime labs; Legislators look at oversight panel, regional facilities,” The Houston Chronicle February 20, 2005.

State legislators are looking to create a legislative response to the Houston Police Departments ongoing crime lab scandals. Legislators are demanding action after revelations that results of DNA evidence tested at the HPD's crime lab were found to be incorrect in a second case. Lawmakers say that there may be a state wide overhaul of the state crime labs.

“Lawyers **Battle over DNA Bank,**” The Toronto Star February 18 2005.

A panel of three judges from Ontario's Court of Appeals will be reexamining a shooting in 1982 that killed two men and paralyzed a third. The case is being revisited in a debate over who should be included in Canada's DNA databank. In legislation that was passed in June 2000, the National DNA repository is allowed to include DNA collected from certain categories of offenders. The legislation included retroactive provisions that would include DNA from offenders of multiple murders, but was not aimed at taking DNA from 1 time offenders; instead it hoped to target the collection of DNA from serial killers and predators.

“Status Report,” The Denver Post February 24, 2005.

The Colorado State Senate has rejected an amendment to allow DNA evidence to be discussed in proceedings in criminal cases before the case goes to trial. The amendment to state senate bill 138 would allow courts to evaluate DNA in rape cases before a trial, thus preventing innocent people from being held in prison until the start of a criminal trial.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“Police Briefs,” The Atlanta Journal-Constitution February 24, 2005.

In the 2004 murder of a truck driver, it might be another year before charges are brought against the accused Alabama man. The delay, according to the D.A., is a result of a backlog in DNA testing at the state's crime labs.

“Washington, D.C.” Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL) February 24, 2005.

In a government study released Wednesday, the shortage of trained employees and old facilities has led to a backlog of thousands of criminal cases around the country.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“Convicted rapist seeks new hearing,” Chicago Tribune February 19, 2005.

Bennie Starks, 44, a man convicted of raping a 69-year-old woman in 1986, is seeking retesting of DNA evidence from the rape. March 7 is the date set for a possible evidentiary hearing.

“Law Students Show Inmate is Innocent; Lodi man free after 10 years for rape he didn't commit,” The San Francisco Chronicle February 19, 2005.

Peter J. Rose, a 37-year-old Lodi man, was declared innocent after spending 10 years behind bars for allegedly raping a 13-year-old girl. Rose was freed based on DNA evidence that was tracked down by Golden Gate University's Innocence Project.

DNA Science and Technology

“Reputed Mafia deaths face DNA scrutiny ‘Science . . . has made for a whole new ballgame,’” USA Today, February 22, 2005.

Crime labs across the country are hoping to solve old mafia murders by using new DNA forensics to identify old decomposed bodies. The FBI has begun obtaining DNA from reputed mobsters in the search for potential suspects in crimes dating back to the 1970's.

“Kinds of DNA to Be Cited in Trial; Judge rules that both types are admissible evidence in Samantha Runnion murder case. One has never been used in a California court,” Los Angeles Times February 18, 2005.

In the kidnapping and murder case of a 5-year-old Samantha Runnion, two different types of DNA evidence are allowed to be presented in court. Mitochondrial and YSTR DNA will be allowed to be presented in the murder trial of Alejandro Avila, 29. This will be the first case in California to use YSTR DNA testing in court.

“Effort to Id Sept. 11 Remains Ends,” The Boston Globe February 24, 2005.

New York City's medical examiners office has announced that it has exhausted efforts to identify the remains of victims of the World Trade Center. Nearly 10,000 pieces of remains have been preserved in hopes that some day advances in DNA technology will enable scientists to extract DNA from those samples.