

JARRETT M. ADAMS

Other Wisconsin No Crime Cases



Jarrett Adams

On September 6, 1998, 17-year-old Jarrett M. Adams and two friends, Dimitri Henley and Rovaughn Hill, travelled from Chicago to Whitewater, Wisconsin. They became lost and asked Shawn Demain, a student at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, to use the phone in his dorm room.

While playing video games and talking in the dorm room, two women, freshman students Shawn Stratton and her roommate Heidi Sheets, arrived from a social event at which Stratton had consumed three

beers. The women, who were white, invited Adams, Henley, and Hill, who were black to their dorm room.

On the way, Sheets stopped at a room on the way to talk to a friend. When she finally arrived at her own room, she saw the three men in states of semi-undress and believes that Stratton had been performing oral sex on one of them.

Sheets ran to another room and Stratton followed. After talking with her roommate—never indicating she was the victim of a sexual assault—Stratton returned to her room voluntarily. She then had intercourse with each of the three men. No force was used and when Stratton explicitly did not consent to oral sex with one of the men he backed off. The three men then left under disputed circumstances.

Stratton called her boyfriend and went to his room. She claimed she had been raped by the three, but didn't want to go to a hospital. She did go the next day at which time she claimed she had been anally penetrated as well, though this detail later disappeared from her story. The three men were arrested almost immediately.

They were tried together in Jefferson County Circuit Court but a mistrial was declared because of an improper attempt by the state to amend its charges at the close of the evidence.

Adams and Henley were then tried together with the prosecution relying almost solely on the testimony of Stratton.

Stratton testified that she did not invite the men to her room, but instead, they suddenly appeared behind her when she opened the door to her room. She said the men assaulted her against her will.

The defense called no witnesses, relying on the argument that the state had failed to carry its burden of proof.

Adams and Henley were convicted by an all-white jury in Jefferson County in February 2000. Henley was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Adams received a 28-year term.

Hill was tried separately but after the case ended in a hung jury in February 2001, prosecutors dismissed the charges.

The key difference between the trials was that Hill's attorney called Shawn Demain as a witness. Demain gave testimony that contradicted Stratton's account of the initial encounter between Stratton and the three men. Demain testified that after the alleged assault Stratton and the three men were smoking and socializing together outside and that Stratton was not upset.

Adams' and Henley's state appeals failed. Henley then contacted the Wisconsin Innocence Project about filing a federal petition for a writ habeas corpus. But the legal time period for filing had elapsed.

Because Adams had been sentenced later, he still had a week to file an appeal.

The Wisconsin Innocence Project filed a petition on Adams's behalf alleging there was insufficient evidence to support a conviction and that Adams's trial lawyer had been ineffective for failing to locate and call Demain as a witness.

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin denied the petition, but on June 20, 2006 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit overturned the District Court and vacated Adams' conviction.

The court held there was no possible strategic reason not to call Demain to establish that the episode was consensual. Adams was released on January 28, 2007 and prosecutors dismissed the charges on February 9, 2007.

Henley filed a state petition for new trial on the same grounds. Although Henley had previously sought a new trial and was rejected by the state and federal courts and therefore his legal remedies were exhausted, his lawyers argued that he should be granted a new trial in the interest of justice. The petition was granted by the trial court in February 2008. But

State: Wisconsin

County: Jefferson

Most Serious Crime: Sexual Assault

Additional Convictions:

Reported Crime Date: 1998

Convicted: 2000

Exonerated: 2007

Sentence: 28 years

Race: Black

Sex: Male

Age at the date of crime: 17

Contributing Factors: Perjury or False Accusation, Inadequate Legal Defense

Did DNA evidence contribute to the exoneration?: No

on July 21, 2010 the Supreme Court of Wisconsin reversed this decision, ruling that "Wisconsin circuit courts do not have the inherent authority to order a new trial in the interest of justice when a case is not before the court under a proper procedural mechanism."

On December 17, 2009, the Wisconsin Claims Board rejected Adams' claim for compensation, concluding that "the evidence is not clear and convincing that the claimant was innocent of the crime for which he suffered imprisonment."

In 2015, Adams earned a law degree from Loyola University Chicago School of Law and started a public interest law fellowship with Ann Claire Williams, judge for the Seventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. This is the same court that reversed Adams's conviction. Adams joined the Innocence Project's litigation department as the department's first Post-Conviction Litigation Fellow in July 2016. Prior to joining the Innocence Project, Adams co-founded a non-profit called Life After Justice to advocate for the rights of the wrongfully convicted after release.

- *Maurice Possley*

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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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