

RESOURCE GUIDE

How Jailhouse Informants Rig the Justice System



MacArthur
Foundation

70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story



JAILHOUSE MIS-INFORMANTS

Irrefutable evidence is one of the hardest things to obtain given the complexity of crimes, the misinformation provided by various testimonies, and the limitations of an already stressed criminal justice system. To work around such measures, investigators and prosecutors will leverage jailhouse informants to gain leverage and win cases. These methods can be questionable and can lead to wrongful convictions. Jailhouse informants are incarcerated persons who may testify against another inmate in exchange for reduced time, a dropped charge, or material perks and privileges. Their testimonies can often be unreliable and the practice of obtaining them can be viewed as unjust and an example of a rigged system. Prosecutors try to decide on the credibility of the informants by analyzing whether the jailhouse informant could have gathered the information from another source and whether the informant has a motive to make it up— the prospect of striking a favorable deal. [The Innocence Project states](#), "Unregulated jailhouse informant testimony sends innocent people to prison—and even to death row — while costing taxpayers millions, and failing to bring justice to victims of crime."

Greg Taylor has first-hand experience with these flawed methods. In 1991 Greg Taylor was an innocent inmate in Wake County Jail in North Carolina, being held as the primary suspect for the murder of a 26-year-old woman. Greg insisted he was innocent and has shared his recount of the experience in the documentary [In Pursuit of Justice](#). A fellow inmate by the name of Earnest Andrews would later testify that Greg Taylor admitted to committing the crime while they were in jail together. When a prosecutor decides to bring a jail informant to the stand, they're lending their credibility to the informant, which can reasonably influence a jury's perception of the testimony, leading to wrongful convictions of innocent people. The book, [Jailhouse Informants: Psychological and Legal Perspectives](#), by psychologists Jeffrey Neuschatz and Jonathan Golding, shows that juries find informant testimony convincing across the board. Even when they know the informant is getting benefits for their cooperation. Greg Taylor would be convicted of murder and later [exonerated](#).

Overall, the impacts of jailhouse informants are hard to understand due to the lack of records kept by prosecutors and government officials. What is known is that there are many instances of foul play by sheriffs and deputies who coordinate with prosecutors to plant informants in cells with high-profile defendants to try and elicit convicting statements. Organizations like The Innocence Project, along with states such as Connecticut, [Maryland](#), Minnesota, and Oklahoma are trying to change the culture of using jailhouse informants with proper regulations, record-keeping, and transparency in place for both prosecutors and defenders.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How can our communities put more pressure on state legislatures to address the unjust practices of using jailhouse informants to wrongfully convict innocent people?

JONATHAN GOLDING, AN EXPERT IN JAILHOUSE INFORMANTS, IS PICTURED OUTSIDE HIS CLASSROOM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY. PHOTO CREDIT: LEANDRO LOZADA



PEOPLE DOING THE WORK

Innocence Project

The Innocence Project works to free the innocent, prevent wrongful convictions, and create fair, compassionate, and equitable systems of justice for everyone

The National Registry Of Exonerations

The mission of the National Registry of Exonerations is to provide comprehensive information on exonerations of innocent criminal defendants in order to prevent future false convictions by learning from past errors.

Injustice Watch

Injustice Watch is a nonpartisan, nonprofit journalism organization that conducts in-depth research exposing institutional failures that obstruct justice and equality.

Law Center for Wrongful Convictions

The Center on Wrongful Convictions is dedicated to identifying and rectifying wrongful convictions and other serious miscarriages of justice.

The North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

The Commission is charged with providing an independent and balanced truth-seeking forum for credible post-conviction claims of innocence in North Carolina.

North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence

The Center oversees Innocence Projects® at North Carolina law schools and provides legal services to indigent, unrepresented North Carolina and South Carolina inmates claiming factual innocence.

LEARN MORE



Jailhouse Informants

by Neuschatz

The Snitch System

by Law Center on Wrongful Convictions



In Pursuit of Justice

Greg Taylor



JEFFREY NEUSCHATZ IS A PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE (UAH). JEFFREY HAS BEEN TEACHING FOR 20 YEARS. PHOTO CREDIT: NICK THOMPSON

70 Million Team

Episode Reporter: Rhana Natour

Editor: Monica Lopez and Juleyka Lantigua

Host: Mitzi Miller

Sound Designer: Erica Huang

Photo Editor: Michelle Baker

Staff Writer and Designer: Kori Doran

Lead Fact Checker: Haylee Millikan

Lead Producer: Pamela Kirkland

Episode Photographers: Bud Clark, Leandro Lozada and Nick Thompson

Creator/Executive Producer: Juleyka Lantigua



million
ONE JAIL AT A TIME.
story



lwcstudios.com

70MillionPod.com

@70MillionPod  

Hello@70MillionPod.com

MacArthur
Foundation

70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

