

The Story of Anthony Ray Hinton

A Terrible Mistake

Anthony Ray Hinton was a young man from Alabama who was arrested in 1985 for two murders that he did not commit. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a group of lawyers who help people treated unfairly in the justice system, believed strongly in his innocence. Still, he was sent to death row, where people wait to be executed, and he stayed there for almost 30 years

The Crimes

In 1985, two restaurant managers in Birmingham, Alabama, were robbed and shot. There were no eyewitnesses and no fingerprints found. Police were under pressure to solve the crimes, and months later, when a third restaurant was robbed and the manager survived, that man picked Anthony Ray Hinton out of a photo lineup.

The police searched Anthony's mother's house and found her old gun. Two state experts said the bullets from all three crimes came from that gun, even though their notes did not prove that. That was the only evidence linking Anthony to the crimes.

The Trial and the Mistakes

Anthony Hinton had no history of violence and had a strong alibi. On the night of one of the robberies, he was at work in a warehouse, miles away. His boss and coworkers said they saw him at work the entire night, but the court did not accept their testimony.

Anthony also took a lie detector test that showed he was telling the truth, but the judge refused to let the jury hear about it.

The biggest problem came from his lawyer. His lawyer believed that he could only spend \$1,000 to hire an expert to study the gun evidence. Because of this, he hired someone who was not qualified and could not even use the right tools. The lawyer did not realize he could have asked for more money to get a real expert. Without a good expert to defend him, the jury believed the state's experts, and Anthony was sentenced to death.

Racism and Unfair Treatment

Race played a big role in Anthony's case. Some police officers assumed that the killer must be a Black man before they had any suspects. One officer even said that the person who did it probably "lived with his mom or aunt," which described Anthony.

The prosecutor, who was in charge of proving the case, had a history of excluding Black people from juries and was known for racist comments. He said he could tell Anthony was "evil" just by looking at him. These unfair and biased actions helped send an innocent man to death row.

Proving His Innocence

Years later, EJI took Anthony's case and asked top gun experts from across the country to re-test the bullets. All three experts agreed: the bullets did not match Anthony's mother's gun. This meant there was no real evidence that Anthony was involved in the crimes.

Even though EJI presented this new evidence to Alabama courts, judges refused to reopen the case for many years. It wasn't until 2014 that the United States Supreme Court ruled that Anthony's lawyer had not done his job properly. The Court said his lawyer had made "an inexcusable mistake of law" by not asking for enough money to hire a qualified expert.

In 2015, after nearly 30 years in prison, Anthony Ray Hinton was finally released. All charges were dropped because the evidence proved he was innocent.