

The City of New York has agreed to pay \$6.4 million to a man who spent 23 years in prison for a murder he did not commit. David Ranta was convicted of the 1990 killing in Brooklyn of a Hasidic rabbi who had stepped into his car at dawn just as a jewelry robbery was taking place across the street. The rabbi was shot in the head and his station wagon was used as a getaway car. The Brooklyn District Attorney's Office fought appeals and rejected evidence pointing to another killer for years. However, The District Attorney's Conviction Integrity Unit conducted a year-long investigation after an eyewitness came forward decades after the crime to say that a detective had told him to pick the man with "the big nose" out of a lineup. David Ranta was the only person who fit that description. When investigators approached two other witnesses in the case, they immediately admitted that they had lied. Those two career criminals who implicated Ranta in the crime sought leniency from the prosecution with respect to their own criminal issues.

David Ranta has consistently maintained that a detective manufactured his confession. The detective, Louis Scarcella, claimed Ranta confessed while handcuffed to a bench at Central Booking. Although the allegation about the false confession was never proven, there had been mounting questions about Scarcella's methods over the years which have cast considerable doubt on the alleged confession.

Prosecutors also learned that Scarcella had followed up on an anonymous telephone call attributing the killing to a robber named Joseph Astin. Scarcella questioned Astin's wife and tried to track down a parole officer to collect recent photographs of him. Scarcella dropped that lead when Astin died in a car accident and never submitted paperwork documenting those investigative efforts. Years later, Astin's widow came forward to say her husband was the real killer.

David Ranta is expected to also make a separate wrongful conviction claim against the State of New York. News of the settlement with the City of New York came as the current Brooklyn District Attorney convened a new three-member panel to review dozens of Scarcella's cases. Following Mr. Ranta's release from prison, an investigation by the [New York Times](#) found that Scarcella had used the same witness in several different murder cases and that at least six supposed confessions had included similar phraseology: "You got it right. I was there." Some confessions did not match the evidence in the case.

David Ranta's claim against the City of New York was settled without him having to file a lawsuit. Typically, those who have been wrongfully incarcerated must litigate their claims in court. Civil rights lawsuits, including those seeking damages for wrongful incarceration, often take years to work their way through the court and can be difficult and expensive to pursue.