

The **National Registry of Exonerations** just announced that 2013 was a record-breaking year for exonerations in the United States. At least 87 people were exonerated and granted their freedom in connection with crimes they did not commit, the highest number since researchers began keeping track of exonerations more than 20 years ago. A number of these individuals spent decades in prison before their release.

In the past, most exonerations resulted from DNA evidence. Now, more exonerations are occurring after authorities recognize that a number of convictions resulted from faulty identifications and also coerced or false confessions. The Registry's report noted that law enforcement agencies and prosecutors have been showing a greater willingness to investigate themselves. Only one-fifth of the 2013 exonerations relied on newly tested DNA. More than 30 percent occurred because law enforcement agencies re-opened long-closed cases or handed over their records to others who wanted to investigate. In large district attorneys' offices, such as New York, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles, "conviction integrity units" have been started with the sole function of reviewing old cases and ensuring that the agency prosecuted and convicted the right person.